

## **Written evidence submitted by the Veterans for Peace UK (INR0067)**

### **Introduction to Veterans for Peace UK**

Veterans for Peace UK (VFP UK) was founded in London in 2011.

Veterans For Peace UK is a voluntary and politically independent ex-services organisation of men and women who have served in conflicts from World War 2 through to Afghanistan.

As a result of our collective experiences we firmly believe that “War is not the solution to the problems we face in the 21st century”.

We are not a pacifist organisation; we accept the inherent right of self-defence in response to an armed attack.

We work to influence the foreign and defence policy of the UK, for the larger purpose of world peace.

### **Summary**

Given that many of the institutions, legal frameworks and skills necessary to increase international understanding and facilitate global co-operation are already in place, our submission focuses on some foreign policy areas where we believe that more effective use could be made of these existing tools. It is vital to strengthen such resources if we are to achieve peaceful co-existence. The starting point for this Review must be a careful re-evaluation of what is needed to provide genuine and sustainable security.

*The following are our responses to some of the questions listed in your call for evidence.*

### **THE PROCESS OF THE INTEGRATED REVIEW**

#### **The efficacy of the Review's process**

1. ‘What is Security?’ At present there is no established or agreed answer across government departments and policy makers. What does the state want to ‘secure’? From what, from whom and who for? Once these questions are answered we can then determine how we use our resources: human, industrial, technological, financial, to achieve a secure future and incorporate them into developing FCO priorities.
2. State security currently supersedes human security; the security of each individual to liberty, health, wellbeing and a stable existence free of abuse. The current primary focus of security is on risks and threats concerning ‘enemies’. Conflict then becomes inevitable with an upward spiral of increasingly sophisticated weaponry and combat techniques rather than the pursuit of a stable world based on cooperation and support. We cannot change our approach overnight but we can strategically plan for a change from Armed Forces to Peace and Security Forces and to global cooperation.

3. The Review should seek to re-evaluate our influence and role in the world and how other countries see us. Do we achieve our objectives through an aggressive expensive and ineffective military posture or project our influence through diplomacy, conflict resolution and cooperation? We need to understand why many communities think Britain is a threat to them, and what that threat means?
4. The Review should challenge all assumptions made in previous Reviews about what security actually is. Our current policies oblige FCO to focus on conventional perceptions of 'threat and risk' at the expense of development and global cooperation which can offer overwhelmingly better value than reliance of military force.

## **STRATEGY IN UK FOREIGN POLICY**

### **The priorities for UK foreign policy strategy**

*We focus on four areas of concern:*

- *Security as human and planetary wellbeing and how it can be achieved*
- *Ethical foreign policy and support for the UN*
- *Effective control of the arms trade*
- *Nuclear disarmament*

### **What is Security?**

5. It is generally accepted that the first duty of government is to ensure the security of its people. But what is real human security? The Prime Minister, in his announcement of the Integrated Review 2020, expressed the need to 'address the risks and threats we face'. And the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee rightly comments in his introduction to this inquiry, 'COVID-19 ... underscores the need for collaboration across borders.' How we shape our foreign policy depends to a great extent on how we define 'security'.
6. We believe that 'security' should be understood in holistic terms of human and planetary wellbeing. In order to feel safe and secure, people everywhere need the basics of adequate income, food and clean water, housing, health care, education, plus leisure time for rest and relaxation, all underpinned by justice, equality of opportunity, and the rule of law. A comprehensive, visionary set of rights and freedoms was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and supplemented in the UK by the Human Rights Act.
7. These human requirements depend in turn on planetary wellbeing. Only a year ago, the worldwide focus was on the climate crisis and the need for drastic change in human behaviour to prevent the planet from becoming uninhabitable. The global focus may have moved to the present COVID-19 pandemic but the threat of climate

catastrophe has not disappeared. Both of these crises contribute to another aspect of the threatened apocalypse: the Head of the World Food Programme warns that we are now on the brink of a food pandemic with the prospect of multiple famines of 'biblical proportions'.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic will gravely exacerbate global poverty. Oxfam estimates that 500 million more people will be thrown into acute need by the virus and the shutdown. The world will never be peaceful while extremes of poverty and inequality are allowed to exist.
9. Following their meeting in London in November 2019, NATO leaders in their final statement said, 'We work to increase the security of all'. Yet nowhere in that statement was there any reference to the climate crisis – surely the biggest threat of all at that time (pre-COVID-19).
10. Examples of other threats are those posed by cyberwarfare, terrorism, CBW and above all the use, whether by accident or design, of nuclear weapons.

#### **How can Security be achieved?**

11. Security needs to be sustainable. To build true security in the world is to work internationally to remove the causes of conflict and instability, be they climate chaos with resulting competition for scarce resources and ensuing mass migration, or the various other forms of injustice or manipulation and domination. Failure to understand and treat such problems at source results in violent social explosions. Marginalised and repressed communities will rebel; elites will be vulnerable. The endless build-up of weaponry and perimeter-denial technology may appear to provide short-term advantage but does little for long-term peace and justice.
12. Security for one country at the expense of others is a failed enterprise, morally bankrupt and likely to trigger yet another round of resentment and violence.
13. Military conflict is not only a humanitarian catastrophe causing unfathomable suffering, it is also an environmental catastrophe, with the inbuilt implications for future suffering and political instability which that entails. War and its preparations contribute significantly to climate change. Scientists for Global Responsibility UK estimates that 6% of global greenhouse gas emissions result from military-related activity. This figure covers the whole cycle: extraction of raw materials and manufacture of equipment and weaponry; trials and training with massive fuel use; maintenance of vast numbers of bases and buildings worldwide; use of fuels and explosives in warfare and resulting fires; extensive rebuilding of devastated infrastructure. Yet there is no obligation on countries to count these military-related emissions or include them in climate change reduction targets. If we are serious about planetary security, this is an area which must be examined.

## **Ethical foreign policy and support for the UN**

- 14.** To achieve true sustainable security and a peaceful world, a culture of ethical decision-making in foreign policy matters is needed. Britain still has enviable influence in the world – this should not be squandered but could be enhanced by increased integrity in leadership. The establishment of a Minister for Peace and International Co-operation within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would put these priorities at the centre of policy making.
- 15.** In ‘strengthening old relationships and building new ones’, the UK should evaluate relationships and alliances carefully, avoiding dubious relationships based on power, profit and manipulation. In recent decades the UK government has allied itself with such dictators as Pinochet, Saddam Hussein, the Assads, Mubarak and the Saudi rulers. By favouring alliances with states which uphold human rights, we could instead set an example to be proud of.
- 16.** Our government should foster widespread support for the principles of the UN and be guided in all foreign policy matters by the UN Charter and the rule of international law. In this way it can truly be ‘a problem-solving and burden-sharing nation’ with a positive influence for good in the world.
- 17.** Article 51 of the Charter states that member states can only use force when exercising their right to self-defence and “until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security”. Otherwise, Article 2 (4) states that all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force. It should be borne in mind that the use of force as a genuine last resort is rarely likely to be necessary if strenuous efforts at diplomacy are pursued, and if ethical policies have already been followed ‘upstream’.
- 18.** As one of only five countries with a permanent seat on the Security Council (the P5), the UK should use its special responsibility to promote necessary reforms, thus helping to build a strong, credible and effective UN: essential if we are to build a safer, fairer and more sustainable world.
- 19.** The P5, along with the 10 other elected member countries of the Security Council can, for instance, vote to authorise the use of force. This democratic system, however, is frequently neutralised by the fact that any permanent member can individually veto any majority decision, thus ensuring that the hegemony of the permanent members continues. The UK should take the lead in removing the veto – this would enormously enhance the credibility of the UN in the eyes of the world.
- 20.** Urgent support is needed for the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals: the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice.

**21.** Awareness of the value and benefits of the UN is unfortunately extremely low amongst the general population and within schools. Measures should be taken to remedy this. We are unlikely to behave as global citizens if we do not know what the global organisation is and what its rules are. UN Day (24 October) should be celebrated as a public holiday.

#### **Effective control of the arms trade.**

**22.** An examination of the criteria for the licensing of arms exports appears to bear out the frequently heard claim that the UK has the most robust arms controls in the world. However, it is abundantly clear that the government's own rules are not adhered to. How else could sales be allowed to countries on the FCO's own list of countries of concern where human rights are massively violated?

**23.** As this committee will know, the Parliamentary Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) is a coming-together of the Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Development and International Trade Select Committees, with each having an interest in arms exports as part of their scrutiny responsibilities. The CAEC should be ensuring that the government abides by the law but the committee is ineffective. Two recent former members of CAEC have stated that the government is breaking UK arms export law and parliament is doing nothing to stop it. Whilst arms manufacture and exports remain a major export earning industry these conflicts of interest will exist to the detriment of the reputation of this country. Many would describe these practices as plainly immoral.

**24.** Government must consider the violence of those military campaigns in which UK arms suppliers and military advisers are embedded and of the devastating effects on civilians. For example, the compounded experiences of many children caught up in the violence has given rise to a new medical condition called **Human Devastation Syndrome** which describes the level of PTSD severity suffered by the children of Syria and other states such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

**25.** The commonly held view regarding "defence" in government and foreign affairs was illustrated by the statement made by Gavin Williamson, former Defence Secretary, in December 2018: *"The UK could build new military bases around the world after Brexit – this is our moment to be that true global player once more – looking into new opportunities for the armed forces – our biggest moment as a nation since the second world war"*

**26.** Hence we recommend the introduction of the so called "Robin Cook Act" in which decisions on arms sales, military budgets and military activity are removed to an independent panel of legal experts who care only about compliance with international law, to be interviewed and appointed not by ministers, but by the

cross-party Commons Committees on Arms Export Controls, and – like the Bank of England – required to explain publicly their decisions every month.

**27.** These changes would entail diversification by arms manufacturers to alternative production. The speed at which re-training and re-tooling can be achieved has been vividly demonstrated during the current Covid-19 crisis in which arms companies produced ventilators at two weeks' notice and hospitals were built in three weeks. The potential for new manufacturing in the health and green industries was ably demonstrated by Lucas Aerospace workers but wilfully ignored by management in the 1970s. However, it is now being recognised that investment in these and other new peaceful industries is overwhelmingly better value, in terms of well-being for everyone, than militarism. The New Lucas Plan project illustrates the potential in this area.

### **Nuclear disarmament**

**28.** We would urge the Prime Minister to reconsider his commitment to retain the nuclear deterrent. In 1968 the UK signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, thereby committing ourselves to nuclear disarmament – a legal duty confirmed by the International Court of Justice in 1996. Now, more than fifty years later, not only do we still have these hideous weapons, we are in the process of acquiring a new system, in clear contravention of that treaty.

**29.** To take just one legal instrument, the 1977 Protocol to the Geneva Conventions prohibits both attacks on civilians and also methods of warfare which may be anticipated to cause severe damage to the environment. Nuclear weapons are unable to discriminate between military and civilian targets, so the incineration of millions of people at the touch of a button would be a war crime, as would the accompanying environmental devastation. How can these genocidal weapons be anything but immoral? Isn't the mere possession, with its implicit threat of use, immoral too? As long as nuclear weapons are in existence, there is always the danger they will be used, whether intentionally or accidentally.

**30.** Are these weapons affordable? The UK is at present spending £6 million every day maintaining our current nuclear weapons, and the lifetime cost of the new system will be around £200 billion. By contrast, according to The Guardian 28 March report, advice on protective gear for NHS staff in a pandemic was rejected three years ago owing to the cost of stockpiling. Life-enhancing health, education and welfare budgets have all been drastically cut over several years: how can there be any justification for such vast sums being wasted on what even an increasing number of top military figures describe as 'militarily useless'?

**31.** If we really need nuclear weapons for our security, every other country in the world could put forward the same justification for developing their own systems, arguing rightly that we in Britain have failed to keep our side of the NPT bargain. Will the world really be a safer place when every country possesses its own nuclear arsenal?

And what use are they in the face of the real threats we face: climate crisis, pandemics, terrorism, cyber attacks?

- 32.** Sometimes though, there is progress: on 7 July 2017, the UN voted overwhelmingly in favour of the multilateral Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) which will enter into force when 50 nations have signed and ratified it, probably in 2021. The 2017 Treaty followed a decade of successful lobbying by non-nuclear weapon states concerned about the humanitarian impact of these genocidal weapons, and increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress being made by nuclear-armed states on their international obligations to disarm. Already 81 states have signed and 36 have ratified. The UK did not even participate in the negotiation of the Treaty, does not intend ever to join, and voted against the UN General Assembly resolution in 2016 that established the mandate for nations to negotiate the treaty. The TPNW does not work in opposition to the NPT but complements it. We urge the UK to sign the Treaty: this country can choose to take an ethical stance or eventually be isolated and stigmatised as a violator of international law.

### **The relationship of the FCO with the other UK Government Departments in foreign-policy strategy**

- 33.** It should be questioned why only FCO, MOD, Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office are fully involved in the Integrated Defence Review? This implies a very narrow focus on security.
- 34.** It is essential to have a wide range of Departments involved in the Review. The Home Office, DfID, and Departments of Environment, Health, Justice, DEFRA, Education, BEIS should also be feeding into FCO strategies and priorities for foreign policy decision making.
- 35.** DfID, in particular, has a specific understanding through working to support countries in their development. Its promotion of good governance is invaluable to understanding how conflicts are generated and the need to put an end to social injustices, disenfranchisements, lack of inclusion, isolation and poverty.

### **UK allies, and how they shape or contribute to the FCO's strategy**

- 36.** It is essential to consult and have ongoing frank and transparent relationships with a global range of stakeholders. Our security rests on having cooperative relationships between all nations and political parties and regimes and not through building a militaristic defensive response. We need to build trust through understanding and acceptance of difference. To achieve this we need to understand how other countries and peoples view the UK and their approach to foreign policy.
- 37.** The network of Commonwealth Nations represents a set of key allies that need to be continually consulted with whom equal relationships should be fostered. Many face

a multitude of challenges and disadvantages, often brought about through 'western' trade and other policies. We have unique connections with them which can foster and deepen democratic processes, understanding of humanitarian needs and development aspirations. All these processes lead to a more secure and stable world and therefore also benefit the UK.

38. Consultation and ongoing transparent and honest relationships with the UN and regional bodies such as the African Union will also be essential far into the future.
39. Similarly, consultation and ongoing transparent and honest relationships are essential to develop with states and peoples who are or have been involved in armed conflicts with the UK, in order to understand the different impacts British decisions have had and ways such decisions can be taken differently.

### **Recommendations for Action by the Government**

1. Re-evaluation of the full meaning of 'sustainable security' (Paragraphs 1,2, 5,6,7,9,11,12)
2. Include carbon emissions from all military activity in reports to future UNFCCC Climate Change conferences. (Paragraph 13)
3. Appoint a Minister for Peace and International Co-operation within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Paragraph 14)
4. Be guided in all foreign policy matters by the UN Charter and the rule of international law (Paragraphs 16,17)
5. Action to promote UN reform including removal of the right of veto of the 5 permanent members of the Security Council (Paragraphs 18,19)
6. Action to raise public awareness of the ideals of the UN (Paragraph 21)
7. Full integration into government policy of the Sustainable Development Goals (Paragraph 20)
8. Introduction of an independent panel of legal experts to make decisions on arms sales, military budgets and military activity in accordance with international law (Paragraph 26)
9. Encourage arms manufacturers to diversify into alternative production, research and retraining to support the Green economy (paragraph 27)
10. Action towards eliminating nuclear weapons from the UK by taking immediate steps to fulfil our obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and by signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) (Paragraphs 28,32).

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