Security for the future: In search of a new vision

An invitation

We all want to feel safe and secure in our beds at night, but the news is dominated by tension, conflict and violence across the world. At home, financial worries and concerns about our changing society are widespread. Internationally, the horrifying violence in the Middle East and beyond is a source of great alarm, while global perils, such as climate change, are deepening a common sense of uncertainty about the future.

Research suggests that levels of anxiety in the UK have increased, particularly among young people,[2] and that we believe the world has become a more frightening place.[3] Is a less anxious, less insecure world possible? What does 'security' really mean? What roles might citizens and governments play to achieve it? These are among the most pressing questions of our time.

As a group of people who share experience of working with conflict and building peace,[4] we are increasingly concerned that the world's governments have yet to grasp the emerging challenges to our common security. We would like to begin a public conversation about this in the UK, asking how best to build long-term security for people in this society and worldwide. We hope people from all backgrounds and communities will join this discussion, sharing their own ideas in hope of a safer world for our generation and those to come.

To spur on this conversation, we have set out below some initial reflections of our own. These thoughts are not a complete response to the very difficult questions we are trying to answer. We intend them as one contribution among many possible others; perhaps some ideas could be developed further, others left behind. Given the scale of the security challenges that the world as a whole faces, we think that only a wide-ranging, public conversation is capable of finding, in time, the new way forward that is so clearly needed.

'Security': what we mean

The word 'security' comes from the Latin *se* and *cura*, meaning 'free from care or anxiety'. One definition used by the United Nations is freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity.[5] This suggests societies in which we, our children, and their children have access to decent work, food, health care and education, a safe place to call home, and communities of people who help each other in times of need.

It is a simple vision and perhaps most people would share it, but opinions differ sharply on how to realise it. Should security, like some say of charity, begin at home? Or is a safer society only possible if the world as a whole becomes more just and less violent? Is providing for our security entirely the government's job, or do we also share the responsibility as citizens? Are our freedom and dignity most jeopardised by groups with extremist worldviews, or by economic and political systems that lead to social injustice, economic exclusion, and ecological destruction? And does security depend mainly on maintaining powerful military forces, or do we lean too heavily on these; could they be part of the problem?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, most experts agree that risks to our wellbeing are likely to intensify worldwide in the coming years. Industrialised societies with consumer economies are dangerously altering the global climate, damaging the earth's ecology, and rapidly depleting vital natural resources. Governments have been unable or unwilling to tackle these problems, which are now disrupting societies across the world. We are seeing more plainly than ever that the planet cannot support the indefinite growth of our global economy, and that this is aggravating tensions within and between countries. If climate change persists unchecked, and the resulting conflicts are not handled fairly, they are likely to collapse into violence. Alternatively, our ecological crisis presents an unprecedented incentive to renew our global institutions and foster cooperation between peoples, creating a worldwide sense of humanity as a global community.

Our common desire for security faces another severe challenge: the widening cleft between the world's 'have-mores' and 'have-nots'. The world's richest 85 people now hold the same collective wealth as the poorest half of humanity.[6] The global market's tendency to concentrate wealth among the already-rich has widened inequality since 1990;[7] the 2.7 billion people who subsist in poverty have been left behind.[8] In 2001 the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed out that a safer world is only a vain hope when conditions are hostile to justice and wellbeing. 'We cannot be secure amidst starvation,… we cannot build peace without alleviating poverty, and… we cannot build freedom on foundations of injustice,' he said.[9]

The old ways are not working

If governments do as they have done before, they will try to control a worsening situation by force of arms. Our impulse to protect ourselves by force is understandable but can be counter-productive; a heavily militarised world makes everyone's place in

it more precarious. The world now spends over £1,000 billion on the military every year,[10] all in the name of 'defence', but repeatedly we are seeing that this huge diversion of resources makes war more likely and the world more dangerous. Military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya have manifestly not brought peace or justice to those countries, but have plunged their people into renewed insecurity and fear while enabling paramilitary groups to run amok.[11] These extremely costly military projects have left many feeling deeply resentful of the UK and US and strengthened the hand of those who wish harm on Western countries.

Our political class has yet to adapt to the emerging realities of the new century. Its focus on militarised responses to conflict has diverted precious attention and resources away from the long-term drivers of insecurity, such as climate change, economic injustice, dwindling natural resources and mounting military spending.[12] The government's security strategy envisages that most future threats can be seen off by large armed forces, configured not for territorial defence, but to project power abroad and hunt down enemies in any part of the globe.[13] The strategy says 'we face no major state threat at present and no existential threat to our security, freedom or prosperity',[14] but the UK is still the sixth-largest military spender in the world[15] and has prosecuted wars in three countries since the turn of the 21st century.[16] Even after these wars, and during the real hardships of austerity economics, the government ploughs eye-watering sums into the military; the budget for 2014 is £38 billion.[17]

At home, the state has responded to a more insecure world by taking sweeping new powers over the citizen, such as intrusive mass-surveillance of the public,[18] and employing an inappropriately loose definition of 'terrorism' to justify them.[19] Counter-terrorism strategies presume that our security and our freedom are in tension with one another, but neither goal is well served by treating all citizens as potential suspects, or prescribing a narrow notion of 'Britishness' against which minority groups are expected to prove their worth. In particular, Muslim communities deemed at risk of 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' have to bear intense scrutiny and suspicion,[20] which is deepening a sense of alienation and mistrust.[21] Compounding this pressure is the failure by political leaders to acknowledge the radicalising impact of UK military intervention in the Muslim world, despite evidence of this provided by their intelligence agencies.[22]

As global action becomes increasingly important in an age of global problems, we have to ask where the power to act lies. Who makes the decisions, how, and in whose interests? What global decision-making institutions do we have, and which do we need? For decades, the United Nations has been undermined by the world's most powerful states. Its Security Council has shown itself repeatedly ineffective, dominated as it is by the veto powers of the Five Permanent Members. Too often, these states have used their position on the Council to put their own interests before those of the world. It ought to concern us all that power is increasingly concentrated in institutions that are far from the democratic reach of ordinary citizens, such as the G20, International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organisation. These institutions are dominated by the powerful, yet affect the security of billions of people who have little or no say in how decisions are made. At the same time, some unscrupulous corporations

are now so powerful that they are able to act with impunity in ways deeply harmful to communities, societies, and the planet.

With the challenges we face, it is perhaps tempting to blame particular communities, or indeed the government, or perhaps the world's superpowers, for the worsening security prospects of future generations, but a 'blame game' will not take us far. We need to look forward, acknowledging the past but consciously determining a different kind of future. The challenges are severe, but a better future is not beyond our wit or our means; the creative, intellectual, and practical resources available to humanity throw open the horizon of what is possible. With common problems putting our common security at risk, we believe it is time for a common approach to solving them.

A fresh approach

First, a shift is urgently needed in the way we imagine that security is achieved. Rather than hoping for quick fixes for each new risk that comes along, a long-term approach would focus foremost on tackling the causes of insecurity through greater social, economic and ecological responsibility. Rather than conceiving of security as mainly military defence by the state, we can envisage it as an ongoing task that involves us all in responsibilities that are local, national and global. And rather than projecting power to control and dominate the global environment, security will depend increasingly on how well power is used to cooperate with others – and not just with the powerful – for the sake of our common interests.

We expect that some will think this approach naïve and unviable, but we are not proposing a utopia, just a different direction of travel. For example, we would like to see a national security strategy that is based on a more positive identification of the conditions required for us all – as members of a common society – to be able to live well together. We need to ask not only what kind of country is more secure, but what kind of society we want to live in. Security cannot be grafted onto a divided and unequal people, with some hoarding wealth while others are left to eat from food banks. Nor can security take root without the human rights and civil liberties that have taken centuries to establish. Instead, security flourishes among healthy, trusting communities, depending as much on the ordinary, everyday attitudes of citizens, such as the kindness of neighbours and the supportiveness of communities, as on the policies of states and international organisations.

Looking beyond our shores, we would like to see a national strategy that moves progressively away from the present focus, in which the UK aims to control the international environment in its own interests.[23] A new strategy could look first for common interests with others. It could seek collective decisions with other governments and international organisations, accountable to citizens and in solidarity with those most in need. It could acknowledge its share in the current failures of our international institutions, and work diligently for their reform and revitalisation. We believe that this change in direction is both desirable and feasible. The unrealistic outlook is the one still favoured by governments like our own

which, by vying for global power and relying heavily on armed force, have done so much to aggravate our global security crisis.

Given this, our future security also depends on asking tough questions about the harmful effects of our political and economic systems, insofar as they encourage competition and reward the already-powerful while marginalising cooperation and power-sharing for common benefit. This means challenging politically influential individuals, groups, corporations and others when they wield power in their own interest at the expense of the world around them. Indeed, a positive change in our country's approach to security would depend in turn on a shift in how economic and political power is shared and used.

One measure of the approach we are outlining here is the extent to which we strive to treat ourselves, our fellow human beings, and the planet on which we depend with respect and care. This is an 'ecological' approach to security, because it invests faith in the possibility of building sufficiently healthy relationships at every level of our societies worldwide. It is distinct from a 'militarist' approach, in which the state reacts to 'threats' as they emerge, gravitating towards armed force.

A practical framework

How might this alternative approach be put into practice? There is already plenty of thinking and many practical examples upon which to draw. One method is provided by the 'Human Security' framework. This focuses on citizens' experiences of insecurity and places their welfare and wellbeing at the heart of how decisions are made. Rather than expecting that security begins and ends with fending off external threats, 'human security' is said to be achieved when individuals in their families and communities are able to bring their freedoms and rights to fruition.[24] The framework identifies seven spheres of importance to the security of citizens:

- Economic security – an assured basic income, usually from work.

- Food security – physical and economic access to nutritious, sustainably-produced food.

- Health security – protection from and treatment of disease.

- Ecological security – protection from natural threats and care for natural ecology.

- Physical security – protection from physical violence, from any source.

- Community security – healthy relationships within and between communities.

- Political security – guaranteed human rights, fundamental freedoms, political participation.[25]

In practice, building human security entails strengthening the social, political, economic and ecological systems that keep people and communities safe, working with the local realities of each situation. It has been pioneered to good effect in some deeply disrupted communities around the world. In Bangladesh and Kosovo, for example, a similar approach has helped to build trust, identify common priorities for security, and tackle issues of conflict within and between neighbourhoods.[26] Projects like these, which involve communities directly, have

successfully supported citizens and authorities to discuss together how best to achieve security for all. The approach is not perfect, but it has typically helped to reduce violence, relieve fears, and build the conditions of security for the long term. What could the world achieve if a share of the resources now devoted to military security were used instead for a 'human security' approach, applied on a national, even international, scale? Some governments are now tentatively exploring the potential of this. For example, Canada and Japan have incorporated parts of the human security framework into their foreign policies.[27]

Could an approach of this kind be adopted in the UK? How does our society fare against the human security criteria? What might we preserve, and what would need to change? A human security strategy might help us to understand better the sources of insecurity facing people in the UK, just as it has in other countries. This could lead to new policies for local, national and international action to meet our security needs more effectively than the traditional focus on military capabilities and coercive interventions overseas. Such an approach could be developed through meaningful public consultations, taking account of how our own experiences of security and insecurity are influenced by our gender, race, age, religion, geography and socio-economic background. It could also seek to understand how these security challenges are linked to wider global challenges, while exploring collaborative approaches to meeting these.

New research indicates that the public's perceptions of security and insecurity already appear to be closer to a 'human security' framework than to the government's National Security Strategy.[28] For example, the government's emphasis on counter-terrorism appears to be less prominent in the public imagination than concerns about financial security in an austerity economy, personal security in urban neighbourhoods, and community security in a climate of suspicion targeted at minority groups.[29] The public may be ahead of the government in recognising the roots of insecurity in the nature of our national and global society.

A new way of being a nation

Perhaps because Great Britain was once head of an empire, patriotic pride in our nation as a world power and major military force appears to be embedded in our national culture and identity. But history has moved on; the UK's global status based on military might belongs to a bygone era, and to old thinking. In the wake of the Scottish referendum, expected adjustments to the UK's constitutional make-up bring a new opportunity to re-imagine the security outlook of our evolving society.

Up to now, successive governments have sought to preserve the UK's global position by forging a close strategic alliance with the United States, but this has meant aligning policy with that of another state, which has markedly curbed our independence of thought and action. This was evident when the government, opposed by its public, followed the US into the ill-judged wars that wracked Afghanistan and Iraq. If the UK needs a new vision for security, it also needs the political freedom to act on it,

which is not possible while it remains beholden to a superpower.

Successive governments have not been alone in promoting the old notion that a worthy nation is a powerful one, and a powerful one, worthy. The leaders of the arms industry, who profit from war, peddle the same line, as do those who believe that the UK would be a spent force if it could not project military power worldwide.[30] But how should the worth of a nation mainly be measured? By the strength of its army, navy or air force, or by something else, such as how humane its society, or what it contributes to justice, peace and ecological responsibility? Just as a positive shift in our security outlook depends on a fundamental reappraisal of how power should be used, we think it also depends on reimagining what could make us genuinely proud of our country in tomorrow's world. Looking forward, we could take pride in what we aspire to become, rather than what we have been, and leave some of our imperial attachments behind.

Our better future lies not in rugged individualism and the survival of the strongest, but in recognising our common interdependence, using power to achieve goals equitably through cooperation. To this end, with our support as the people it represents, our government could play an important – perhaps even world-changing – role in building a more secure future. This means first finding a new way of being a nation in the world. In particular, if our national identity as a 'warrior nation' has become a security blanket to us, then now may be a good time to let it go, and begin the transition away from the weapons and strategies we have relied on for so long.

Initial steps could be modest: an end to subsidies for the arms trade; research into converting the arms industry to socially useful production; a reduction in defence spending to the European average; a decision not to renew the Trident nuclear weapons system; a policy of no military intervention in other countries without a United Nations mandate; and a comprehensive review of legislation and policies on mass surveillance. At the same time, the UK could work more effectively with others to help transform emerging conflicts long before they turn violent. This would entail greater investment in state and civic capacities for diplomacy, peacebuilding, and civilian peacekeeping. In addition, if the greatest causes of insecurity now include climate change, economic inequality, and loss of natural resources, then a new security strategy must also respond far more vigorously to these challenges than has so far been the case.

These are just a few options among many that would help the UK to move towards a more creative, thoughtful, progressive role in the world, working with others to reverse the underlying causes of injustice and violence. But this can only become reality if a thorough public debate about security begins to usher in substantial changes in thinking. This is why we would like to start a conversation about these ideas and others, exploring the extent to which current policies address contemporary security needs, and testing the resonance of the thinking outlined here.

Conclusion and invitation

A measure of vulnerability will always be with us. It is not recklessness, but honest common sense, to accept that no model of security, certainly not the prevailing one, can guarantee safety. But is it at least possible to believe that the world could gradually become more just and less violent, such that we come to trust one another more with our vulnerabilities? Or are we doomed to endless war? These are genuinely open questions – no-one can know the answer with certainty – but our security could well come to depend on which future we choose to believe in.

Here, we have suggested how governments and citizens might begin to turn around our worsening security situation through local, national, and global action. Even so, in preparing these ideas, we are still left with more questions than answers. One thing is clear: the worsening violence in Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Syria and Ukraine, among many other places, testifies in each case to the disastrous consequences of expecting overbearing superpowers and invasive military interventions to control the security of the world. Another way forward is needed and it is time to discuss what it might be.

We can do worse than start from the basis that we share a common humanity with fundamentally the same needs, desires, aspirations, hopes and fears, and we all live as part of a planetary ecology that is straining under our weight. It follows that long-term security can only come from social, political and economic arrangements that are fairer and more ecologically responsible than those we currently have.

Certainly, we would not be human if greater insecurity did not provoke fear, and we would be naïve to ignore such physical threats as there may be. But fear is a poor foundation for security, and a strategy focused on tackling threats but not their underlying causes is like a course of treatment for symptoms alone. Much will depend on how well the world's citizens and governments are able to foster confidence and trust between people, built through strong relationships and respectful, searching conversations.

We would like to begin some of these conversations now, and we hope you will join us to share your views, helping to refresh the public debate about these pressing questions.

Signed:

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Further contact options will be arranged soon.

Notes and references

[1] Text prepared by a group of people with experience of peacebuilding 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. Note: The views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent those of the Ammerdown Centre or its Board of Trustees.

[2] Collishaw *et al*. (2010) 'Trends in adolescent emotional problems in England: a comparison of two national cohorts twenty years apart' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 51(8), pp. 885–894. See also Kate Walter et al. (2012) 'Recent Trends in the Incidence of Anxiety Diagnoses and Symptoms in Primary Care' *PLoS ONE* 7(8).

[3] Ed Halliwell (2009) 'In the face of fear: How fear and anxiety affect our health and society, and what we can do about it' [report] (London: Mental Health Foundation), p. 21. A companion report published five years later, in 2014, found that perceived levels of anxiety in society had increased since the first report: Mental Health Foundation (2014) 'Living with Anxiety: Understanding the role and impact of anxiety in our lives' [report] (London: Mental Health Foundation), pp. 27–28.

[4] Please refer to list at end of document.

[5] United Nations General Assembly (2005) 'Resolution adopted by the General Assembly: 60/1. 2005 World Summit Outcome', paragraph 143.

[6] Ricardo Fuentes-Nieva and Nick Galasso (2014) 'Working for the few: Political capture and economic inequality' [briefing paper] (Oxfam: Oxford) online at <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp-working-for-few-political-capture-economic-inequality-200114-en.pdf> – accessed 17 September 2014.

[7] United Nations Development Programme (2013) 'Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries' [report] (New York: UNDP), p. 3.

[8] Poverty as measured by an income of less than $2.50 per day. United Nations Development Programme (2014) 'Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience' [report] (New York: UNDP), p. 19.

[9] Cited in Rob McRae and Don Hubert (eds.) (2001) *Human Security and the New Diplomacy: Protecting People, Promoting Peace* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), p. ix.

[10] Sam Perlo-Freeman and Carina Solmirano (2014) 'SIPRI Fact Sheet: Trends in world military expenditure, 2013' (Stockholm: SIPRI).

[11] See, for example, Adrian Johnson (2014) *Wars in Peace: British Military Operations since 1991* (London: Royal United Services Institute).

[12] H M Government (2010) 'Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review' (London: The Stationery Office); H M Government (2010) 'A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy' (London: The Stationery Office). In these documents, climate change and global poverty are mentioned near the end of the list of security concerns; the creeping militarisation of the globe is not mentioned.

[13] H M Government (2010) 'Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review' (London: The Stationery Office); H M Government (2010) 'A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy' (London: The Stationery Office). Most of the measures announced in the current and previous governments' National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review documents are military in nature, of which all planned developments intend to enhance the capacity for projecting power worldwide. There will

be new aircraft carriers 'to deploy air power from anywhere in the world without the need for friendly air bases on land', and new helicopters to support amphibious landings.   New submarines will 'operate in secret across the world's oceans, fire Tomahawk cruise missiles at targets on land, detect and attack other submarines and ships to keep the sea lanes open'.   The 'reach and endurance' of new fighter jets and drones will be extended, and new heavy-lift aircraft will 'fly our forces wherever they are needed in the world'. Following the lead of the United States, the UK will also expand its special forces for secret operations abroad. H M Government. (2010) 'Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty' op cit. pp. 4–6.

[14] H M Government (2010) 'A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy' (London: The Stationery Office), p. 15.

[15] Sam Perlo-Freeman and Carina Solmirano (2014) op cit.

[16] Afghanistan: 2001–2014; Iraq: 2003–2009; Libya: 2011.

[17] H M Treasury (2014) 'Budget 2014' (London: The Stationery Office), p. 5 (Chart 1).

[18] For example, see Jemima Kiss (2014) 'Academics: UK "Drip" data law changes are "serious expansion of surveillance"' *The Guardian*, 14 July 2014.

[19] David Anderson QC (2014) 'UK Independent Reviewer Of Terrorism Legislation Criticises Too-Broad Definition Of Terrorism' [press release] online at Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, <https://terrorismlegislationreviewer.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/22-July-2014-PRESS-RELEASE.pdf> – accessed 2 September 2014.

[20] For example, see YouGov (2011) '9/11: Ten years on' [opinion poll results] online at <http://cdn.yougov.com/today_uk_import/yg-archives-yougov-911tenyearson-090911.pdf> – accessed 12 August 2014. This poll found that 15% of British adults believed that 'a large proportion of British Muslims … are prepared to condone or even carry out acts of terrorism'. See also Arun Kundnani (2014) *The Muslims are coming: Islamophobia, extremism, and the domestic war on terror* (London: Verso); and Jahangir Mohammed and Adnan Siddiqui (2013) 'The Prevent Strategy: A cradle to grave police-state' [report] (London: CAGE).

[21] For example, see Tufyal Choudhury (2012) 'Impact of counter-terrorism on communities: UK background report', online at <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/UK_paper_SF_FINAL.pdf> – accessed 1 September 2014. For documented rise in Islamophobic violence since the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich in May 2013, see Tell Mama (2014) [home page] online at http://tellmamauk.org – accessed 16 August 2014. See also YouGov (2011) op cit.

[22] For example, see oral evidence provided by Baroness Manningham-Buller, (Director-General, Security Service 2002–2007) to the Iraq Inquiry [transcript], 20 July 2010, p. 19, online at <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/48331/201007 20am-manningham-buller.pdf> – accessed 2 September 2014. See also Tania Steere and Ian Drury (2014) '£30billion – the cost of our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: Interventions branded "strategic failures" by respected think-tank', *Daily Mail*, 28 May.

[23] The strategy states that, in order 'to reduce the likelihood of risks affecting the UK or our interests overseas', the state will apply 'all our instruments of power and influence to shape the global environment…'. H M Government (2010) 'A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy' (London: The Stationery Office), p. 22.

[24] For example, see United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (n.d.) 'Human Security Approach' online at <http://www.unocha.org/humansecurity/human-security-unit/human-security-approach> – accessed 9 August 2014.

[25] Ibid. We have made changes to some of the points in this list.

[26] Saferworld (2013) 'Community-based approaches to safety and security: Lessons from Kosovo, Nepal and Bangladesh' (London: Saferworld).

[27] Eric Remacle (2008) 'Approaches to Human Security: Japan, Canada and Europe in Comparative Perspective' online at <http://dev.ulb.ac.be/sciencespo/dossiers_membres/remacle-eric/fichiers/remacle-eric-publication75.pdf> – accessed 9 August 2014.

[28] For example, see Daniel Stevens and Nick Vaughan-Williams (2014) 'Repoliticising the Subject of Threat and (In)Security: The Disruptive Potential of Non-Elite Knowledge' (forthcoming).

[29] Ibid.

[30] For example, see Telegraph View (2014) 'Britain's freedom depends on military strength'. *The Telegraph*, 16 January 2014.