FIGHTING THE WRONG BATTLES

HOW OBSESSION WITH MILITARY POWER DIVERTS RESOURCES FROM THE CLIMATE CRISIS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first duty of government, it is often said, is to provide for the security of its people. But what is security? For whom, and from what? UK governments typically view security through a military lens; but the real threats affecting the security of people in the UK and worldwide, most urgently the climate crisis, are not susceptible to military force, and indeed military interventions by the UK and its allies this century have had an overwhelmingly disastrous impact on peace and security.

The central role of the military in the government's understanding of security is reflected in budgetary allocations. There is thus a widespread consensus on maintaining military spending at a minimum of 2% of GDP, the NATO target, with many politicians calling for far higher levels. Meanwhile, the climate crisis, the most urgent threat to human security worldwide, receives far less funding.

Military security or sustainable security

This report argues for a shift of focus both in understanding of security and in resources away from military security and towards a concept of sustainable security that prioritises the security of people over that of states and addresses the underlying causes of conflict and insecurity. In particular, the climate crisis needs to be treated as the urgent, devastating and present threat to human security that it is, with resources allocated accordingly.

Arguments for higher military spending typically start from the premise that the world is an ever more dangerous place. While this contains an element of truth, such arguments are based on a narrow and fundamentally flawed understanding of security centred on military power. The conclusion that what is needed is greater military force from the west is fallacious. Indeed, it has often been the actions of the UK and its allies that have made the world more dangerous, as in Iraq.

Non-military security challenges are minimised or ignored. Climate change, for example, is barely mentioned in the Government's most recent Strategic Defence and Security Review. When mentioned, they are often framed in terms of the impact on national security, and approached with 'hard' security responses, such as militarised borders to deal with mass migration. Meanwhile, ambitions for the UK to retain or regain status as a 'great military

power', able to project military force around the world, are presented as essential requirements for security, on a par with ensuring the survival and sovereignty of the nation.

What the UK spends and why

The UK's military spending reflects these global power ambitions, although limited by fiscal constraints. The UK currently spends 1.8% of GDP on the military, according to the most consistent measure of spending from the Ministry of Defence (MOD). However, figures reported to NATO are higher, at around 2.1% of GDP, as they also include additional Treasury spending on military and civilian pensions and other items. The gap between the two measures has grown in recent years as the UK government has sought to meet NATO's target of 2% of GDP. UK military spending fell significantly following the end of the Cold War, but increased over the 2000s with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since 2010, spending has fallen again due to the government's austerity measures, although the MOD received smaller cuts than most departments. Military spending has levelled out and begun to increase again since around 2015, although it remains below the 2010 peak. The current government has promised continuing increases, and many voices within Parliament and the Conservative Party have called for spending to increase to much higher levels, as much as 3% or even 4% of GDP.

UK military policy, and in turn spending and equipment procurement, assume that the UK must be prepared to engage in major overseas military interventions, of as many as 50,000 troops. It is therefore not simply a strategy of 'defence', of the UK or its close allies, but of aggressive militarism, showing a willingness to repeat interventions of the type of the Iraq war.

NATO's 2% target

At present, all major UK political parties support the NATO minimum target of 2% of GDP for military spending. This target was adopted by NATO as a recommendation in 2006, but was strengthened to a political commitment in 2014 following Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. The target can be criticised as arbitrary, being unrelated to threats, and would require unfeasibly large increases in military spending in some of the lower-spending NATO members such as Germany and Canada. It is also based on a model of burden sharing that ignores measures such as contribution of troops to peacekeeping missions, and that treats all military spending by members with global roles and ambitions – the USA, UK, and France – as if it were part of collective NATO defence. Moreover, it is founded on a NATO strategy based, like that of the UK, on aggressive military intervention around the world. NATO members already collectively account for more than half the world's military spending, and for all members to meet the 2% target would require an additional $116 billion a year. In the face of other pressing global challenges, the claim that this is an essential priority for such a powerful military alliance is implausible.

An alternative approach

The UK government has committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, as part of efforts to tackle the climate crisis, but has not set out policy means to achieve this. The government's Committee on Climate Change (CCC) reported in 2019 that the government has only adopted one out of 25

recommended emission reduction measures, and is on course to miss its 4th and 5th carbon budgets during the 2020s. The CCC estimates that achieving net zero by 2050 requires an annual resource cost to the economy of 1-2% of GDP per year. Similarly, a report by a coalition of NGOs in autumn 2019 recommended increasing annual spending on "climate and nature" from £17 billion a year to £42 billion, just under 2% of GDP.

It is striking that the maximum spending estimate for achieving the UK's climate change targets is around the same level as what the government considers to be the bare minimum requirement for military spending; that the government fails to devote even half this sum to addressing the climate crisis represents a gross distortion of priorities, reflecting in turn a fundamentally flawed understanding of security. Indeed, the government is seeking to expand the UK's military footprint in the Gulf, and even as far afield as the South China Sea. No evidence is presented as to the concrete benefits of this for peace, security, or the well-being of people in the UK or elsewhere. In contrast, the very real and current threat posed by the climate crisis is painfully clear.

A fundamental reassessment is needed both in our understanding of security, and in the resulting allocation of resources, from military security towards a vision of sustainable security that is holistic, people-centred, interdependent, and focused on the root causes of insecurity, especially the climate crisis. To make this paradigm shift requires jettisoning the persistent delusion that the UK can bring peace to the world through a global military presence involving massively expensive weapons systems and major military interventions.

1 INTRODUCTION – NATIONAL SECURITY, HUMAN SECURITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The first duty of government, it is often said, is to provide for the security of its people. But what is security? For whom, and from what? Traditionally, governments have thought about security first and foremost as concerning national security: a strong military primarily, and secondarily other aspects of "hard" security: counter-terrorism, border control, and policing. But the security of people depends primarily on different things: a secure home, a secure supply of food and other necessities, security from disease and natural and human-made disasters, and security from state repression and armed violence.

These contrasting (though not necessarily mutually exclusive) views of "national" versus "human" security have been discussed for a long time. Now the climate crisis has given a new urgency to fundamentally rethinking security, as the heating planet is already having a devastating impact on millions and poses the primary existential threat to the security of people and nations throughout the world. Any understanding of this "first duty" of government that does not place the climate crisis front and centre is sorely wanting. The other major existential threat to human existence, that of nuclear weapons, is one that the current Government is committed to maintaining in perpetuity.

Yet, up to now, the UK government has continued to devote vastly more resources to the military and other aspects of traditional hard security than to tackling the climate crisis. Moreover, government thinking about security is still stuck in this militaristic mode of thinking. Indeed, calls for much higher levels of military spending by the UK and the rest of Europe are widespread, to a large extent backed up by a wide consensus among mainstream commentators on military affairs and security policy. Such calls have gained much more political traction since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent military intervention in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine.

Within the UK, support for meeting NATO's target of 2% of GDP as a minimum level for military spending – an arbitrary figure unconnected to actual security threats – is supported by a cross-party consensus, and indeed has been superseded by a bidding war among politicians. A 2018 House of Commons Defence Committee report called for an increase to 3%, while in May 2019, then Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt went even further, calling

for a doubling of UK military spending. While this has yet to translate into long-term policy decisions, the trend in UK military spending is now clearly upwards, after several years of austerity-driven cuts and several more of relatively flat spending.

While politicians compete with one another over how much they will raise the military budget, the growing climate change catastrophe is given lip service and theoretical targets for carbon reduction, but little actual funding or concrete measures to achieve these targets. The Government's own Committee for Climate Change has warned that the UK is on course to miss its intermediate emissions reduction targets and that the Government's policy measures have hitherto been severely inadequate. Such calls, echoed on the streets by the mass protests of climate strikers, have been met with little more than warm words from the UK government and those of other major western nations.

Military spending and spending on efforts to combat climate change, like all areas of government spending, compete with each other for resources; but we argue in this report that the link between the two – eagerness for high military spending contrasted with half-measures on climate change – goes deeper than budgetary calculations. Rather, it reflects the very way in which "security" is understood and discussed not just by the Government and politicians, but in the mainstream security policy community more broadly: namely, an understanding of security in primarily military terms, centring the security and power of the nation state in relation to others.

This report argues that such a militaristic approach to security has utterly failed to address the problems it has sought to tackle, more often making them worse as in the disastrous invasion of Iraq. Continuing this approach through higher military spending to boost the UK's "global presence" will, at best, waste scarce resources on measures that will do nothing to make the people of the UK and the world more secure, and at worst risk drawing the UK into further damaging conflict.

Instead, we argue for a shift of focus both in understanding of security and in resources away from military security and towards a concept of "sustainable security" that views the question holistically, prioritises the security of people over that of states and addresses the underlying causes of conflict and insecurity. In particular, the climate crisis needs to be treated as the urgent, devastating and present threat to human security that it is, with resources

Any understanding of this "first duty" of government that does not place the climate crisis front and centre is sorely wanting.

allocated accordingly. Hand in hand with efforts to halt climate change must be those to promote climate *justice*, confronting the gross and rising political and economic inequalities worldwide, which the climate crisis exacerbates.

Section 2 assesses the case for greater militarisation and draws out some of the key fallacies of the thinking behind it, questioning some of the key assumptions of militaristic thinking. Section 3 looks more closely at what the UK actually spends on the military, and at what this money is spent on and why. Section 4 looks at the NATO 2% target, discussing its origins, the new urgency given to it since the Ukraine crisis and various critiques and justifications offered for this target. Section 5 considers how UK military spending and security strategy match up, or fail to, compares military spending with spending on broader "sustainable security" objectives (in particular climate change), and asks how an alternative approach could be developed that moves away from militaristic thinking and addresses more fully the key security challenges facing the UK and the world. Appendix A looks at the different ways in which military expenditure is defined and measured and explains the different sets of figures for UK military spending put out by the UK government itself.

AN EVER MORE DANGEROUS WORLD – UNPICKING THE MILITARISTIC ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND GOVERNMENT SECURITY THINKING

Arguments for higher military spending typically start from the premise that the world is an ever more dangerous and unpredictable place, with a diverse range of perils cited, from direct military threats following Russia's actions in Ukraine, through terrorism, cyber-warfare, and information warfare (with Russia also the lead antagonist in the last two), to mass migration and climate change. All of these, whether the threats are military or otherwise, are presented as reasons why UK and western security are threatened as never before, and why the Government response must include a stronger and better-resourced armed forces at its heart.

Such arguments often sound quite plausible on the surface, and contain elements of truth. But we argue that they are based on a narrow and fundamentally flawed understanding of security that puts military power at the centre and either ignores non-military security challenges or attempts to mould them to fit a militarised or hard-security framework so that military force can be presented as the solution despite long experience of this approach's failures. Non-military solutions to international conflict and insecurity are likewise ignored or minimised.

There is some truth to the notion that "the world is a more dangerous and uncertain place." From the end of the Cold War and up to around 2010, the number of armed conflicts worldwide had been generally decreasing and, in spite of numerous ongoing and horrific wars including those in Iraq and Afghanistan, so was the death toll from conflicts.[1] However, this trend has tragically reversed, mostly due to the horrific responses to the Arab Uprisings, while great power tensions, though still not on the level of the Cold War, have increased.

But to draw from this the conclusion that what is needed is greater military force from the west is fallacious. Indeed, it has often been the actions of the UK and its allies that have made the world more dangerous, creating or exacerbating threats precisely by making military force the central pillar of western security and the solution to external problems. The catastrophic, and arguably illegal, Iraq war played a major role in destabilising the Middle East, leading to a long-running insurgency and the rise of Daesh. In their turn, the presence of Daesh and ongoing conflict in Iraq contributed to the escalation of the Syrian uprising into all-out war and a theatre of proxy conflict for both

1 According to data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project, the number of armed conflicts and incidents of one-sided violence against civilians in 2010 stood at 81, the lowest since this data became available in 1989. The number of "state-based" conflicts, where at least one party to the conflict is a state, stood at 31, the lowest since 1975. See https://ucdp.uu.se/.

regional and external powers (chiefly the US and Russia). The war in Libya further exacerbated this, leading to the collapse of the Libyan state and the spread of arms from Libya across North Africa, the Sahel, and the Middle East.[2] The UK and the US are the prime armers of the brutal Saudi-Emirati war in Yemen, and have also supported – politically and through arms sales – the repressive response by many regimes in the region to uprisings. For example, UK-made armoured vehicles were used by Saudi Arabia in crushing the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain.

It would be far too simplistic to blame all the Middle East's ills on the West, ignoring the roles of Russia, Iran, and the other regimes and armed actors within the Middle East itself, but what does need to be emphasised is that western military action has been a large part of the problem, not the solution. Yet advocates of higher military spending want us to prepare for more of the same to tackle the very problems militarism has caused.

Beyond the Middle East, arguably, NATO expansion and NATO military intervention in Kosovo played an important role in antagonising and humiliating Russia, and made it feel like it was the one that was threatened and surrounded by vastly superior military power, wielded by countries more than willing to use it to impose their will. This is not to downplay the ugly and dangerous nature of the the Putin regime's militaristic nationalism, but western commentators often talk as if such dark forces have arisen in a vacuum, when in fact Russian and western militarism have fed each other in a mutually reinforcing cycle.

Moreover, the martial mindset underpinning "The world is an every more dangerous place," as it launches a thousand military[3] policy speeches and op-eds, obscures sources of danger that do not arise from armed human actors, state or non-state. The world has certainly become more dangerous as a result of climate change, and these dangers are encountered on a daily basis by the victims of floods and hurricanes the world over. Such climate disasters, along with conflict, gross and rising inequality, and corruption, have also created massive insecurity for millions of people around the world, who are then compelled to face further extreme danger when they flee these situations, greatly exacerbated by the efforts of western countries to close their doors to migrants. But those who use this phrase rarely have such dangers in mind, for which military power (air sea rescue aside) has no response.

The first duty of government…

… is to provide for the security of its people. This line is repeated *ad nauseum* in military and security policy documents, and as a justification for high military spending. The first line of the Government's December 2018 *Modernising Defence Programme* report[4] reads "The first responsibility of government is defending our country and ensuring the security of our people at home and overseas."

However, the assumption, spoken or unspoken, is usually that this security is to be seen primarily in military terms: defending the country and its people from military attack or coercion on the country's territory itself, or looking after what are seen as its "core interests" (however precisely or loosely designated these may be).

Such an outlook centres on the security of the state or the nation, seen as a monolithic actor with its own clearly defined interests and goals, rather than

2 UN Panel of Experts on Libya Report, 15 Feb. 2013, https://bit.ly/2snmB1r

3 CAAT generally avoids the use of terms such as "defence", "defence policy", "defence spending", etc., except when referring to named roles, institutions, and documents, e.g. Ministry of Defence, Minister of Defence, Defence White Paper, etc., as we consider the term a euphemism that downplays the often aggressive nature of armed force, whether by the UK or other nations. This report therefore uses the term "military policy" to refer to what is usually referred to as "defence policy": government policy relating to the deployment and use of armed force, and planning and analysis, resourcing, and organisation for the same.

4 UK Ministry of Defence, "Mobilising, Modernising, and Transforming Defence: a report on the Modernising Defence Programme", 18 Dec. 2018, https://bit.ly/2OSJb9w. The MDP was the result of the Defence component being taken out of a broader *National Security Capabilities Review*. It is a rather threadbare document, with few new policy statements, which manages to occupy 11 of its 28-pages with blank pages or inspiring pictures of weapons systems, while the remaining 17 are generous in their use of white-space and print size.

on the security of the country's people. But the threats and security concerns facing a country's people are diverse, varying enormously according to race, class, gender, and a host of other factors. Most are not related to military confrontation with foreign powers or armed groups. When we shift the focus of security thinking from state security to *human security*, this also allows for an understanding of the security of people across the world as far more interdependent, not confined to a unitary state operating in a Hobbesian world of interstate power relations.

From a human security perspective, the "first duty of government" would encompass, for example, the security of the tenants of Grenfell Tower and other tower blocks from fire. Most importantly, in the present day, the first duty of government should be to secure the people of the UK and the world from the devastating impact of the climate crisis – something that is barely mentioned in the Government's most recent *Strategic Defence and Security Review* (SDSR), from 2015.[5]

5 HM Government, "National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015", Nov. 2015, https://bit.ly/2OrrJdB.

To be sure, the SDSR mentions a range of non-military security threats, such as pandemics, cyber-security, and others, as well as a range of tools for combating them. But the centrality of the armed forces as the primary means of guaranteeing UK security is assumed without question. Moreover, this leads to a conflation of military and non-military threats, whereby issues such as climate change, if mentioned, are framed in terms of the impact on military security. Likewise, mass migration, a result of war, poverty and marginalisation worldwide, is framed as a "threat" to be countered by military or quasi-military means. Against many of the dangers often cited, such as cyber threats and information warfare, traditional military power is redundant. Others, in particular climate change, require completely different responses and solutions outside the domain of "hard security" (security based on coercive means, including the military, policing, especially armed policing, hard border controls, etc.).

Why is the military assumed to be so central, even if other approaches are acknowledged? In part, perhaps, because the military has been seen as the main response to *existential* threats to the nation: invasion, all-out war, obliteration by weapons of mass destruction, or the threat thereof. The type of threat that was posed by Nazi Germany, and presumed to be posed by the Soviet Union – but which is not a present threat, even in the eyes of government security policy assumptions.[6]

6 The 2015 SDSR ranks the possibility of a military attack on the UK, overseas territories, or bases, as a "Tier 3" threat, based on a combination of likelihood and impact. Given that this would constitute a very high impact threat, the assessment of likelihood is clearly very low.

There is also a substantial element of inertia in this dynamic, and an accompanying groupthink: because the military receives and always has received the most resources of any security tool, it is unquestioningly assumed that this must always be so, and that the military must therefore be the most important such tool.

A final key reason is that military power is still widely seen, especially within the security and foreign policy establishment, as the fundamental measure of a country's status in the world. To be a "great power" that "punches above its weight" in the world is assumed to be coterminous with being a great military power. This can be seen in, for example, ministerial speeches. Take Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace's address at the 2019 DSEI arms fair, which opened: "… if you're going to take home one message from the UK, it is this: we are global. We are alive to the global threats. And we have the world-class industrial base and the game-changing capability to deal with the danger." It concluded, "I hope you leave with the message that UK defence is on the

up, that our defence industrial base remains the spine of our nation, allowing our forces to be the tip of our spear for Global Britain."[7] Thus, to be "global" is understood in terms of possessing global military capability.

The Royal Navy's HMS Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier

Source: Royal Navy, accessed 2020-01-13
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Behind these factors that promote a militaristic view of security, one cannot ignore the powerful role of the actors with most to gain from it – namely, the arms industry, whose close relationship with government is a major component of the "groupthink" that ensures the continued predominance of established security thinking. Because the arms industry is treated as being of central strategic importance (itself as a result of militaristic thinking), it is given privileged access to the corridors of power: ministers and senior government officials are constantly meeting with senior arms industry figures; there is a revolving door between government and the arms industry;[8] arms companies are represented on key government policy forums and advisory bodies;[9] and arms industry personnel are frequently seconded to the MOD and the Department for International Trade (DIT).[10] Outside of government, the industry is an important source of funding for some think tanks covering military and security affairs. (Which is not to impugn the often excellent research and analysis carried out by many people at such organisations). Thus, the industry is in a strong position to shape the debate around military spending and policy.

Bait and switch

Military defence is presented as of central importance to counter existential threats to the UK's very continuation as an independent, democratic nation (despite the current absence of such threats). But, in a kind of "bait and switch" manoeuvre, these threats, and the presumed need for strong military forces to defend against them are then conflated with a range of other possible military missions and tasks, which are then accorded the status of absolute, essential aspects of security. These include:

- Military interventions against terrorist groups such as Daesh, as seen in the current bombing campaigns in Syria and Iraq. That Daesh and similar groups pose a real threat, first to the peoples of the Middle East but also to the world beyond, including the UK, is clear, but what is not questioned is whether the military campaign reduces this threat (or indeed, increases it) or whether it could be reduced by other means at less cost and with less negative consequences in terms of civilians killed and infrastructure destroyed. That we must be able to bomb groups such as Daesh is treated as an essential on a par with defending the nation from invasion.
- "Humanitarian" interventions, or more generally military interventions aimed at preventing, halting, managing, and/or reversing a situation of armed violence in another country, which usually does not *directly*

7 UK Government, Defence Secretary keynote speech at DSEI 2019, 11 Sep. 2019, https://bit.ly/34qUWup.

8 CAAT, Political Influence browser, https://www.caat.org.uk/resources/influence.

9 CAAT , "Who calls the shots: how government-corporate collusion drives arms exports", Feb. 2005, https://bit.ly/37Kyizu.

10 According to information provided in 2017 in response to a Freedom of Information Request by Friends of the Earth, half of secondees to the DIT came from the arms industry. Rob Evans, "UK trade department draws half its secondees from arms industry", *The Guardian*, 8 Oct. 2017, https://bit.ly/2OOQsaH.

threaten UK security, although it may have indirect consequences (such as migration flows). Again, the ability to conduct a military response to an armed conflict in the Middle East or Africa is treated as a security essential, without questioning a) whether military intervention will do more harm than good, or b) whether any good that could be achieved by military intervention could be better obtained by other means.

- "Power projection" in a broader sense: the ability to display UK military power far from our national territory. For example, in the South China Sea, the UK conducted a "freedom of navigation" operation in September 2018, sailing close to the disputed Paracel Islands, claimed by China.[11]
- Related to this, UK status as a major military power is often emphasised as a key goal of military spending, and is treated *as if it were of equal importance* to defence against existential threats. Advocates for higher military spending talk about the UK "punching above its weight" as a military power, and "maintaining Britain's place on the world stage" or similar, as an absolute good. What exactly the UK practically gains from this in terms of prosperity or security is never spelt out. Arguably, some of the UK's most expensive military systems, in particular, nuclear weapons and the new Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers, are primarily about maintaining this status and/or the power projection goal mentioned above.

11 "British navy's HMS Albion warned over South China Sea 'provocation'", *BBC News*, 6 Sep. 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45433153.

Ignoring human security

One way advocates of military power make their case is to militarise problems that are not primarily military – for example cybersecurity and migration, or even climate change. (It will create conflict, therefore a potential military response is needed). Most significantly, climate change is not treated as the central, existential emergency that it is. Measures to tackle it receive far less resources than the Defence budget, and far less than is required to achieve the Government's own climate goals. (See Section 5). Advocates of military power seem to regard it as essential that the UK should be able to send warships to the South China Sea, but merely desirable that we should be able to reduce our CO_2 emissions to net zero by 2050.

So military policy and spending are discussed with the assumption that

- the world is dangerous, and becoming more so
- the military is the most important tool for responding to threats
- almost all threats can be seen through a military lens
- threats that cannot be seen through a military lens are less significant
- the ability to provide a military response to any situation deemed important is essential
- conversely, there is no greater national failure than to be unable to respond militarily to any given situation.

Hence, the argument can always be made that the current level of spending is "not enough". There will always be potential military missions that we would be able to conduct, or conduct more effectively, if only there were more resources. There is always a potential worst-case scenario against which we need a better "insurance policy" than what our present military forces afford us.

A global role?

This does not mean that those arguing for higher military spending always get what they want, or even most of what they want. Indeed, currently, supporters

of a powerful UK military role globally are profoundly discontented, as current levels of spending do not meet the ambitions – shared by the Government – for the UK to be able to meaningfully project global power and to effectively engage in large-scale overseas military interventions.

Cuts to military spending as a result of austerity have significantly reduced all this, something loudly decried by advocates of militarism despite the partial protection of the MOD budget from cuts compared to most other departments (see Section 3). Although these cuts have now come to an end, the small planned increases do not thus far constitute a significant reversal.

But even under fiscal austerity, the basic framing of the case for more military spending is never seriously challenged in mainstream political debate, so limits to it are always seen as regrettable, and probably temporary necessities. Indeed, UK military spending is starting to rise at a greater pace now (see Section 3), and voices have been growing stronger within the present Government to increase military spending well beyond the 2% NATO target, as part of a post-Brexit agenda of renewing the UK's status as a global military power.[12]

12 e.g. Gavin Williamson, "Defence in Global Britain", speech delivered at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 11 Feb. 2019, https://bit.ly/2Onvoc6.

The alternative to this militaristic approach is to abandon dreams of "great power" status – or rather, of great *military* power status – and with it, the sort of extravagant big-ticket arms procurement that has little to do with our real security needs. In its place should be a reorientation of both thinking and resources towards "sustainable security". Such a view of security would be holistic and people-centred, recognising that our security in the UK and the west is interdependent with that of people elsewhere in the world, and focussing on insecurity's root causes: climate catastrophe, growing inequality and marginalisation, corruption and state fragility, violent conflict, and the great power competition that sustains an over-militarised world. The solutions to these problems are overwhelmingly civilian in nature, requiring a redirection of efforts and resources to non-military activities. These issues will be explored further in Section 5. First, we turn to an examination of how much the UK actually spends on the military, what the money is spent on and the policy goals behind this spending, before broadening the scope to look at the international debate on NATO's military spending and its target of a minimum of 2% of GDP for all member states.

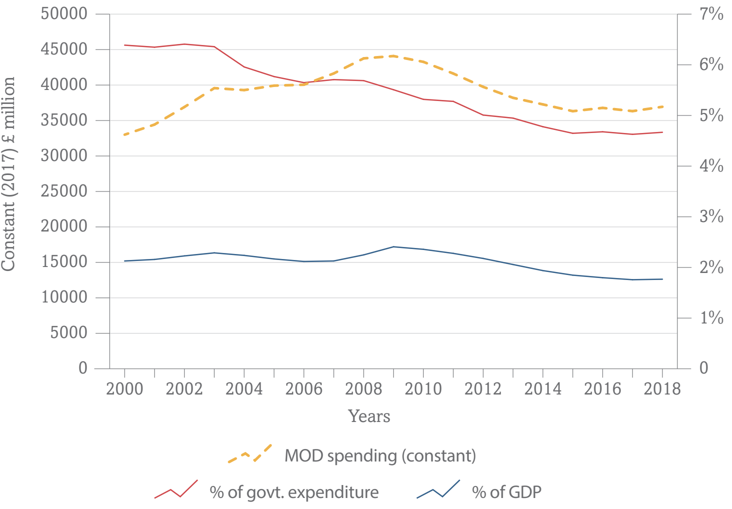
Such a view of security would be holistic and people-centred, recognising that our security is interdependent with that of people elsewhere in the world, and focusing on insecurity's root causes: climate catastrophe, growing inequality and marginalisation, corruption and state fragility, violent conflict, and the great power competition that sustains an over-militarised world.

WHAT DOES THE UK ACTUALLY SPEND ON THE MILITARY, HOW, AND WHY?

In the financial year 2018–19, UK military spending is estimated at £37.8 billion, based on the Ministry of Defence's Net Cash Requirement (NCR) figure.[13] This amounts to around 1.8% of UK GDP. This is substantially less than the £45.3 billion reported to NATO, or 2.1% of GDP, as the latter includes numerous items of military spending not included in the MOD budget, as a way of meeting NATO's 2% of GDP target (see Section 4). The different ways of measuring military spending, including the growing discrepancy between MOD expenditure figures and those reported to NATO, are discussed in Appendix A. The rest of this section uses the MOD NCR data as the most consistent measure over time.

Figure 1 below shows UK military spending from 2000 – 2018, in 2017 inflation-adjusted pounds (left-hand scale), and as percentages of GDP and of total public expenditure, central and local (right-hand scale).

Figure 1: UK military spending from 2000 – 2018. MOD cash spending, constant prices (lefthand scale), and as % of GDP and government spending (righthand scale)[13].



At the start of the period shown, UK military spending was close to its lowest point following significant cuts after the end of the Cold War. The level of spending (using the more consistent MOD measure) then increased by around

13 Ministry of Defence, "Defence Departmental Resources 2019", 10 Oct. 2019, https://bit.ly/33pI2eX. These form part of the UK Defence Statistics, and are classed as National Statistics, and are thus certified by the Office for National Statistics as meeting certain standards of reliability.

a third in real terms between 2000 and 2009, from around £33 billion to around £44 billion. This was due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as increases in regular spending on both personnel and equipment. Since the peak in 2009, however, spending declined as part of overall Government austerity measures, reaching a plateau of a little over £36 billion in 2015, since which time it has increased somewhat as the Government gave increased priority to the military following the war in Ukraine in 2014.

The share of military spending in GDP increased gradually from around 2.1% in 2000 to around 2.4% in 2010, before falling to around 1.8% during 2016 – 2018. As a share of government expenditure, military spending fell steadily from 6.4% in the early years of the 2000s to a little under 5% since 2014/15. The falls during the 2000s were due to general increases in government spending under the Labour government, which outpaced the increases in military spending. Since 2010, almost all government spending has been falling due to austerity measures. The MOD was partially protected, receiving much smaller cuts than most government departments (7% over 4 years compared to around 20% for most other departments, from 2010 – 2014); however, the big spending departments of Health and Education were mostly exempted from cuts, as was the Department for International Development, as the UK maintained a commitment to spending 0.7% of GDP on Official Development Assistance (ODA).[14] Thus, the MOD share of total spending continued to fall. The levelling off in the past few years is again a result of the increased priority given to the military since 2014.

However, there are signs of renewed increases in military spending in 2018/19, first with an additional £800 million announced in March 2018 (compared with previous budget plans), of which £600 million was to cover cost increases in the Dreadnought (Trident successor) nuclear weapons submarines programme. Then in the October 2018 budget, the MOD received an extra £200 million for 2018/19, and £800 million for 2019/20, compared with previous plans. MOD spending in 2018/19 amounted to £37.8 billion in 2018/19, a 1.4% real increase compared with 2017/18.[15] The budget for 2019/20 is now £40.2 billion, which would be a 4.5% increase in real terms.[16] The Government Spending Review in 2019 announced a further 2.6% real-terms increase in military spending and statements by Prime Minister Johnson during and after the Conservative Party leadership election campaign have indicated strong support for higher military spending. Certainly under the present Government, the trend for the next few years appears to be clearly upwards.[17]

What is the money spent on?

There are various ways in which military spending can be classified. The United Nations, which requests all members to fill in an annual questionnaire detailing their military spending, with a somewhat patchy rate of response, divides it into several major categories:[18]

- Personnel (salaries, benefits, and associated costs, for military and civilian personnel)
- Operations and maintenance (running costs, utilities, fuel, food and clothing, ammunition consumed, travel, services, etc.)
- Procurement (spending on military and other equipment)
- Research and development
- Construction
- Military Aid
- Other.

14 Official Development Assistance (ODA) is overseas aid meeting an agreed definition by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) Development Assistance Committee. It includes humanitarian and development aid, but excludes, for example, most military aid. In the UK, most ODA comes from the Department for International Development (DFID), but some comes from other departments. See UK Government Policy Paper, "Official Development Assistance", 23 Nov. 2015, https://bit.ly/2q1jnzW.

15 Ministry of Defence, "Defence Departmental Resources 2019", 10 Oct. 2019, https://bit.ly/33pI2eX.

16 UK Government, Main Supply Estimates 2019/20, 9 May 2019, https://bit.ly/35xkhmO.

17 UK Government, Spending Round 2019, 4 Sep. 2019, https://bit.ly/33pHeXt.

18 UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, Report on Military Expenditures, https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/milex/.

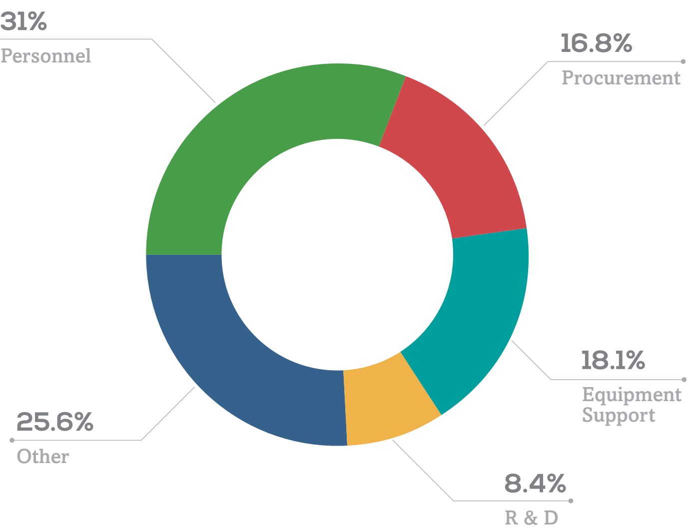
NATO reports members' spending as "personnel", "equipment", "infrastructure" (similar to construction) and "other" (of which the major part is operations and maintenance).[19]

Expenditure can also be classified according to service or organisation, i.e. army, navy, air force, other forces, central command and administration, etc., and these categories are also given in the UN reporting matrix.

The UK's own budgetary reporting, through the Government's main supply estimates and the UK defence statistics,[20] does not correspond exactly to either of these, so that for example it is hard to give figures precisely for either operations and maintenance or infrastructure. However, personnel spending is clearly identified, as is equipment expenditure, broken down into three main sub-categories: capital expenditure on equipment (i.e. procurement, of military and non-military/dual use equipment), equipment support (i.e. maintenance, repair, and overhaul, often included in operations and maintenance in other classifications) and R&D.

Figure 2 below shows the average share of these categories in UK military spending over the period 2013/14 to 2017/18.[21] A little under a third of total spending goes on personnel, a share that has declined slightly in recent years. This figure excludes the additional spending on military pensions, so is a slight underestimate. Around 43%, or an average of nearly £16 billion a year, is for equipment expenditure, with procurement spending and equipment support accounting for roughly equal shares of this, and R&D spending about half of this. Most of this is spent on the arms industry, broadly defined, although some equipment support spending is carried out in house by the MOD. The equipment share has been roughly stable in recent years, although the procurement share has declined slightly, while the equipment support and R&D shares have increased slightly. In general, the shares for different elements of military spending have not changed dramatically.

Figure 2: Share of UK military spending over the period 2013/14 to 2017/18[20, 21].



Overall, the MOD spends around £19 billion a year with UK industry and commerce, including the arms industry, but also civilian industries such as construction, utilities, transportation, telecommunications and financial services.[22] It is not possible to isolate the proportion of this that is spent with the arms industry, broadly defined. This is because the single largest category of industry, accounting for almost a quarter of the annual spend, is the broad

19 NATO, Information on Defence Expenditures, https://bit.ly/2sl5eOF.

20 Ministry of Defence, "Defence Departmental Resources 2019", 10 Oct. 2019, https://bit.ly/33pI2eX; and UK Government, Main Supply Estimates 2019/20, 9 May 2019, https://bit.ly/35xkhmO.

21 Figures are expressed as a share of gross MOD expenditure, that is before MOD income is deducted. The 'Other' category covers everything not covered by the personnel or equipment figures, including operational/running cost expenditure not related to equipment support, capital spending on infrastructure, and miscellaneous items such as the MOD contribution to the cross-departmental Conflict, Security & Stability Fund, and transfers to various defence-related bodies outside the MOD, including various committees, military hospitals, and military cemeteries.

22 MOD regional expenditure with UK industry and supported employment, https://bit.ly/2Oo7lKf.

catch-all category known as "Technical and Financial Services, Business Activities, Education, Health, and other Service activities," which includes some clearly civilian services, but also likely very specific military technical services associated with research and development, maintenance, repair and overhaul, and other technical services. Computer services, amounting to over £1 billion a year, is another area that might include some generic civilian services (e.g. IT services for the MOD administration), as well as the support of operational military IT infrastructures.

The Government has much longer-term plans for equipment expenditure than other areas of military spending, with a ten-year Defence Equipment Plan (DEP) to spend £186 billion on equipment (including procurement, equipment support, and R&D) between 2018/19 and 2027/28.[23] The plan shows a fairly rapid increase in total equipment spending, from £15.9 billion in 2018/19 to £19.2 billion in 2021/22, before levelling off or falling back slightly in real terms thereafter.

23 Ministry of Defence, The Defence Equipment Plan 2018, 5 Nov. 2018, https://bit.ly/2XSTGxL.

However, this budget is exceeded by the projected cost of the various major armaments programmes planned, which is expected to reach £193 billion, exceeding the planned budget by £7 billion over the ten-year period. Moreover, this assumes a variety of efficiency savings, the details of some of which are hazy. Other risks identified in the DEP give the potential for the deficit to expand to nearly £15 billion, but the National Audit Office (NAO), in its report on the DEP, consider even this to be optimistic given the long and consistent history of cost overruns in major armaments projects. The NAO Report concludes that, based on current budget plans and projections, the Defence Equipment Plan is unaffordable.[24]

24 National Audit Office, The Equipment Plan 2018-2028, 5 Dec. 2018, https://bit.ly/2KWuOjl.

Why do we spend what we spend?

The most recent comprehensive statement of UK security and military policy was the Strategic Defence and Security Review of 2015.[25] This was the second of its kind, the first being from 2010, and in some sense represented a step forward in security thinking in that it sought to take an integrated view of security challenges and of the various civilian and military tools for dealing with them. However, it still places military security at the heart of government thinking, and tends to frame even non-military threats such as cyber security and borders and migration in "hard security" terms, focusing on military or other coercive responses. The SDSR was developed following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its subsequent military support for pro-Russian rebels in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, and thus placed a renewed focus on "state-based threats" to security – in other words, Russia – that had lost much significance following the end of the Cold War.

25 HM Government, "National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015", Nov. 2015, https://bit.ly/2OrrJdB.

The SDSR maintains many elements of UK military policy that have been constants under all governments for many decades. This includes a commitment to the UK remaining a nuclear weapons power, in particular by going ahead with the procurement of new nuclear-armed submarines (now called "Dreadnought Class") to replace the current Trident submarines, at a cost of £31 billion for procurement alone, not counting operational and eventual decommissioning costs, as well as the cost of missiles and warheads. Overall, nuclear weapons are expected to account for as much as 20% of total UK military spending over the next ten years.[26] This would amount to 0.4% of GDP, thus accounting for around half the gap between the UK's military burden and that of, say, Germany, with a military burden in 2012 of 1.2%.

26 See e.g. David Cullen, "Trouble ahead: risks and rising costs in the UK nuclear weapons programme", Nuclear Information Service, April 2019, https://bit.ly/2Oqch11.

The SDSR also sets out a clear expeditionary posture for the UK armed forces. The programme for "Joint Force 2025" aims, by 2025, to be able to deploy an expeditionary force of 50,000 troops, including a maritime group centred on an aircraft carrier with F-35 combat aircraft, a land division with three brigades, including a new "Strike Force," an air group, and a special forces group. This is to expand on "Future Force 2020" which aims to deploy 30,000 troops. When not deployed at such a scale, the goal is for the armed forces to be able to undertake one medium-sized operation, of a similar scale to the anti-ISIL operations in Iraq and Syria, and several smaller operations. The expectation is that most expeditionary operations would be conducted with allies, in particular the USA, France and other NATO members, but with the potential for the UK to act alone if necessary.

Interoperability with US forces is emphasised, with a key goal being the ability to participate in US-led military operations worldwide, as the UK has of course repeatedly done throughout the past 30 years.

The review insists on a global role for the UK armed forces, with an ability to project military power far from our own region. This is justified in terms of the UK's global interest and dependence on global trade and sea lines of communication; of course, all countries are dependent on these, and very many have such global interests to a greater or lesser extent, but few maintain an independent military capability to guarantee such interests. (Indeed, the UK's capacity for this is decidedly limited). But it is a key element of the UK military and foreign policy establishment's self-conceit that the UK must have its own global power projection capability, however limited, rather than relying on multilateral cooperation and/or the US's global "policing" role.

In particular, the UK has in recent years expanded its military presence in the Gulf, opening a permanent military base in Bahrain in 2018 (first announced in 2014), its first permanent military base "east of Suez" since 1971.[27] The Middle East remains an important theatre of UK military interventions, in particular at present in the war against Daesh in Iraq and Syria. In the context of rising tensions between the US and Iran, and indeed between the UK and Iran following President Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, the UK's determination to remain a major military player in the region, and to remain closely tied to US foreign policy and military power, creates a high risk that the UK could become involved in another catastrophic Middle East war, this time with Iran, whether it wishes to or not.

UK military spending is not simply, or even primarily, about "defence" of our own territory, or collectively with our allies. It is based on the assumption that "defence" frequently means attack, using massive military force to fight armed terrorist groups overseas, and potentially to intervene against other states, whether for counter-terrorism or "humanitarian" objectives or otherwise. It is also based on the assumption that defence of broader interests requires a navy operating around the world, valiantly promising to hold the world's sea lanes open, regardless of the necessity of such a task, or the implausibility of the notion that the UK can perform it.

27 Malak Harb, "UK opens Persian Gulf military base in Bahrain", AP, 5 Apr. 2018, https://bit.ly/33qe3DN.

NATO'S 2% TARGET

Much of the discourse on UK military spending, as well as corresponding debates among the UK's European neighbours and allies, is centred around the commitment by NATO member states to spend at least 2% of GDP on the military, and to devote an average of at least 20% of that spending to equipment (procurement and R&D). At present, only seven NATO member states meet the 2% target, namely Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the UK, and the USA, based on data published by NATO, according to national reporting using the NATO definition of military spending.[28] Those countries spending less than 2% are committed to not reducing spending further, and to increasing spending towards the 2% target as their fiscal circumstances permit, with a goal of reaching the target by 2024.[29]

NATO adopted the 2% target as a recommendation in 2006, but this was strengthened to a political commitment – though not a legally binding treaty obligation – at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of civil war in Ukraine between the Ukrainian government and Russian-backed rebels in the east of the country.

The UK government is committed to maintaining military spending at 2% or higher. In 2018/19, the UK's military spending amounted to 2.15% of GDP according to NATO data, though this has been maintained by adding additional items such as spending on pensions for military and civilian personnel, war pensions and others to what is reported to NATO (see Appendix A). The opposition Labour Party is also committed to meeting the 2% target.[30]

The renewed commitment to 2%, including the 20% equipment spending target, was one of a number of other measures agreed upon at the 2014 NATO summit in Wales[31] aimed at increasing NATO's military capability and readiness in Europe. Among the other measures were a Readiness Action Plan, aimed at increasing the speed and numbers at which forces could be mobilised in the event of a major military crisis, and new deployments of NATO forces in the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), to reassure them of NATO's commitment to their defence in the event of an attack from Russia.

The strengthened 2% commitment was a response not only to heightened concerns about Russian military actions and intentions, but also to persistent US complaints that Europe was not contributing enough to its own defence,

28 SIPRI data suggests that more countries spend at least 2%; in some cases, such as France, this is because SIPRI includes spending on paramilitary forces (in France, the Gendarmerie), which are not included in the NATO definition. However in other cases, including Spain and Turkey, the NATO figures appear to include only the main Ministry of Defence budget, excluding numerous items of what are clearly military expenditure by the NATO definition, e.g. military research and development, but which are funded from other budget lines. See SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex.

29 NATO Wales Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, 5 Sep. 2014, https://bit.ly/2qU8Zds.

30 Labour Party Manifesto 2019, Nov. 2019, https://bit.ly/34BkC85.

31 NATO Wales Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, 5 Sep. 2014, https://bit.ly/2qU8Zds.

expecting the US – which has around 62,000 troops in Europe[32] – to shoulder an unfair share of European defence.

There have been numerous criticisms raised of the usefulness or appropriateness of 2% of GDP as a floor for military spending. Some of the most common ones are:[33]

- It is an arbitrary figure, unconnected to actual threats or military tasks, suggesting that, if GDP falls, the need for military spending falls with it, or if it rises, then more spending is required, regardless of threats
- It is an input measure, which does not take into account the actual output in terms of military capabilities
- It is unrealistic in that there is no prospect of countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, or Belgium coming near the figure, given that they currently spend more like 1.2% or even less, and given general budgetary constraints, and such large increases in military spending would likely be unacceptable to public opinion in many of these countries, in particular Germany with its strong post-war anti-militarist sentiments.
- It equates "burden sharing" with spending levels, ignoring other measures of contribution to collective defence (such as providing troops for peacekeeping operations), and also ignores the fact that most US military spending is devoted to its own purposes, unrelated to NATO. Much UK and French spending also relates to their more global goals rather than to collective European defence.

Defenders of the 2% target often acknowledge these criticisms, but argue for its importance as a political symbol of commitment to increased spending, and as a necessary reassurance to the US to motivate their continued commitment to European defence.[34] The arguments used sometimes seem to imply that the 2% figure is to be taken not literally but as an aspirational vision to be worked towards.

A more fundamental criticism of the 2% target is the same as that of UK military spending in general: that it is based on an overly and overwhelmingly militarist world-view and understanding of security, what threatens it and what provides it.

The necessity of increased European military spending is often framed in terms of the renewed threat from Russia following the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine – as well as other non-military Russian actions such as interference in elections, massive cyber attacks, and suspected involvement in the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the UK. Certainly, the Baltic states, with unhappy memories of Soviet rule, have genuine fears of the potential for Russian aggression against them, even if all-out invasion remains highly improbable.

However, NATO's military planning process, to which the 2% target is at least partially connected, is based not solely on deterring Russian aggression, but on a continued willingness to engage in global military interventions to seek to enforce western interests and/or solve international crises. NATO's planning assumes a goal of being able to concurrently mount two major joint operations around the world, alongside six smaller joint operations (such as peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions).[35]

Thus, to frame the 2% target as being about contributing towards Europe's *defence*, or about the US taking the "burden" of such defence is misleading. Rather, it is about contributing to an agenda of aggressive military

32 US European Command, EUCOM by the numbers, https://bit.ly/2pVxXc2.

33 See e.g. Simon Lunn & Nicholas Williams, "NATO defence spending: the irrationality of 2%", European Leadership Network Issue Brief, June 2017, https://bit.ly/2sg4Kt5; Marion Bogers, Robert Beeres, and Myriame Bollen, "Burden-sharing for global cooperation on safety and security", *Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, Vol. 14, no. 1, 2019, https://bit.ly/2q0AW32; and Jan Techau, "The politics of 2 percent: NATO and the security vacuum in Europe", Carnegie Europe, Sep. 2015, https://bit.ly/37Ivzqk.

34 e.g. Jan Techau, "The politics of 2 percent: NATO and the security vacuum in Europe", Carnegie Europe, Sep. 2015, https://bit.ly/37Ivzqk.

35 Simon Lunn & Nicholas Williams, "NATO defence spending: the irrationality of 2%", European Leadership Network Issue Brief, June 2017, https://bit.ly/2sg4Kt5; and NATO website, https://bit.ly/33rFhtN. NATO's new Strategic Concept adopted in 2010 referred only to being able to operate concurrently "major joint operations" (plural) alongside "several" other joint operations. This did not override the "2 and 6" goal, however. See Interview with Supreme Allied Commander in Europe General Breedlove, Journal of the Joint Air Power Competence Centre, Autumn/Winter 2013, https://bit.ly/2ONz85K.

intervention – a posture that itself has contributed to Russia's drive to rearm and to react against further potential NATO expansion through its aggression in Ukraine. As discussed in Section 2, the role of western policy and specifically NATO expansion in fuelling Russian militarism, and the dangers of a new rearmament drive by the west perpetuating this cycle, have received scant consideration by NATO's leaders and planners.

NATO frames its goals in terms of "crisis management"[36] and of NATO's unique ability, through its military capabilities, to "manage" conflicts. However, what this has meant in practice is major military interventions that have escalated existing conflicts and brought about major changes in the strategic outcome: the overthrow of existing regimes (as in Afghanistan and Libya), or the changing of national boundaries (as in Kosovo).

36 See e.g. NATO Strategic Concept 2010, https://bit.ly/33nAr0n.

In fact, according to the latest SIPRI data, two thirds of countries worldwide spend less than 2% of GDP on their militaries, including countries with much smaller GDPs than many NATO members, countries that are not part of an alliance as powerful as NATO, and countries in more conflict-affected regions than Europe. Just why wealthy North American and European countries, in regions of relative peace, countries that already collectively account for more than half of total world military spending, need still more resources to defend themselves, is something that has never been convincingly explained by NATO's two-percenters. However, it is easier to understand in the context of NATO as not simply an alliance for mutual defence against external attack, but as one directed towards global military intervention and power projection.

The 2% target, whether or not it is expected to be met, is also a statement of *priorities* that is profoundly misguided in the face of the global threat of climate catastrophe and the continuing crisis of global poverty and inequality. It is framed as a minimum that countries must achieve if they are to be considered "good citizens" of the international community. But for all NATO members with military spending currently below 2% of GDP, meeting the target would require an additional $116 billion a year, based on data reported by NATO in their latest release – plus of course 2% of any economic growth that takes place between now and the point when the target is met.[37] This is more than the commitment by rich nations to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation in poorer countries under the 2015 Paris Agreement. It is nearly four fifths of the total level of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from wealthy to poorer countries in 2017. To argue that such a large increase in military spending should be an overriding priority for the most powerful military alliance in history, stretches credulity to say the least.

37 NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2012-2019), 25 June 2019, https://bit.ly/2DlFSCv, plus author's calculations.

A more fundamental criticism of the 2% target is that it is based on an overly and overwhelmingly militarist world-view and understanding of security, what threatens it and what provides it.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH: CLIMATE JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

The number one security challenge – stopping climate catastrophe

The global climate crisis is deepening rapidly. Climate-related natural disasters are causing untold suffering for millions of people worldwide, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, including indigenous peoples. Climate change is widely recognised as a "threat multiplier" and is disrupting patterns of food supply in many regions. These factors are in turn leading to massive involuntary displacement of people who then face militarised borders and a hostile environment for migrants, multiplying the dangers they face.[38]

The need to confront the climate crisis is widely accepted in the UK, with large majorities among the general public for strong and effective action, and agreement across the main traditional political parties for major reductions in carbon emissions over the coming decades. What has so far been missing, unfortunately, is concrete policies and adequate funding to achieve these goals.

The Committee on Climate Change is an independent statutory body established by the Climate Change Act of 2008 "to advise the UK government and Devolved Administrations on emissions targets and report to Parliament on progress made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for climate change." Its May 2019 report recommends the UK setting a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.[39] This would replace the current target of an 80% reduction from 1990 emissions levels by 2050. It is still a modest target, arguably insufficient to avoiding the potentially civilisation-ending consequences of climate change,[40] with many climate scientists arguing that the world needs to reach net zero by 2030.[41]

The CCC report finds that the 2050 target could be met with expenditure in the range of 1–2% of GDP, with a central estimate of 1.3% of GDP.[42] While the Government has since adopted the net-zero target, it has fallen short of the CCC's recommendations in a number of areas, and has not set out a plan for actually achieving the target.[43] The most recent report of the CCC shows that the UK is not on course to meet its 4th and 5th "carbon budgets" covering the periods 2023–2027 and 2028–2032 and that indeed the Government has only adopted one out of 25 specific measures recommended to reduce emissions in line with the targets.[44]

38 e.g. UN News, "Climate change recognized as 'threat multiplier', UN Security Council debates its impact on peace", 25 Jan. 2019, https://bit.ly/2R7q8eL

39 Committee on Climate Change, "Net Zero – The UK's contribution to stopping global warming", 2 May 2019, https://bit.ly/2OP5BZl.

40 Breakthrough – National Centre for Climate Restoration, "Existential climate-related security risk: a scenario approach", May 2019, https://bit.ly/2Djgj54.

41 Stephen Leahy, "Climate study warns of vanishing safety window—here's why", National Geographic, 12 Mar. 2019, https://on.natgeo.com/34xkmqE.

42 Committee on Climate Change, "Net Zero – The UK's contribution to stopping global warming", 2 May 2019, Chapter 7, https://bit.ly/2OP5BZl.

43 See e.g. Caroline Lucas, "Theresa May's net-zero emissions target is a lot less impressive than it looks", *The Guardian*, 12 June 2019, https://bit.ly/33wxsTK. Specifically, and contrary to CCC recommendations, the policy includes the use of International Carbon Credits to meet the target – buying offsetting carbon reductions in developing countries, which the CCC say need to be made in addition to developed countries reaching net zero from their own efforts. The new government policy also leaves out aviation emissions, which the CCC say must be included.

44 CCC, "Reducing UK emissions – 2019 Progress Report to Parliament", 10 July 2019, https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/reducing-uk-emissions-2019-progress-report-to-parliament/.

The figure of 1–2% of GDP, or around £22–44 billion a year at current GDP levels, with a central estimate of £28.4 billion,[45] is the annual *resource cost* to the economy as a whole, as in the proportion of overall economic resources that would need to be devoted by households, business and government to the effort to achieve net zero emissions. This takes into account savings from the carbon abatement measures themselves, for example reduced heating bills due to energy efficiency, but not the directly measurable economic benefits from avoided climate change costs, the increased economic and industrial opportunities from developing low-carbon technologies or the monetised value of, for example, improvements to health from lower pollution (completely aside from the non-monetised human benefits).[46] Based on figures reported to NATO, by contrast, UK military expenditure in 2018 was £45.4 billion, or 2.1% of GDP. This cost falls fully on the Government, of course, financed by taxation (of households and businesses) and borrowing (requiring future taxation to finance it).

There is surprisingly little information on what the UK is currently spending on combatting climate change. A CCC report from 2015 gives figures of £6.4 billion expenditure on support for greenhouse gas reduction measures in 2014/15, and £360 million of spending on R&D in 2013/14.[47] This does not include spending by households and businesses induced by government policy measures, that would count towards the total resource cost covered by the 1–2% of GDP figure.[48] More recent CCC reports have not produced a similar analysis, perhaps because of the emphasis on a combination of public and private expenditure and regulatory measures, rather than on government spending alone. However, a September 2019 report by a coalition of 8 NGOs estimated total existing UK public expenditure on "Climate Change and Nature" to be £16.75 billion a year,[49] a figure they said should be increased to £42 billion, starting with the next three years (i.e. from 2020/21). They suggested, however, that some of this spending could come from the private sector as a result of policy measures to encourage it. Separate to spending on reducing UK domestic emissions, the Government announced in September 2019 a doubling of its spending on International Climate Finance – overseas aid to poorer countries to help them reduce carbon emissions – to £11.6 billion over the 5 years from 2021/22 to 2025/26.[50] This forms part of the overall UK ODA budget, which it is current Government policy to maintain at 0.7% of gross national income, in line with UK legislation and UN targets.[51] (Even so, while UK ODA frequently has a very positive value for sustainable development, including climate change, some projects have the opposite effect; in particular the £678 million of aid spent on fossil fuel projects in developing countries between 2010 and 2017. Export credits and other official funding flows have also been extensively used to support such projects).[52]

The balance of priorities for these two areas of spending, both of which relate to security in the broader sense (indeed also in the narrow sense of "national security"), should be clear. Climate change represents an existential threat to the UK and the world, to the continuation of our societies as we know them, as well as a massive threat to human life and health. This is not a future threat, but one that is already causing large scale loss of life and livelihood, and displacement of peoples around the world. Loss of the UK's status as a global military power is not an existential threat. Neither, although the reality of this threat should not be minimised, are Russian actions in Ukraine and elsewhere. Moreover, the evidence both of the consequences of inaction on climate change, and of the effectiveness of the proposed solutions of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions to zero, is clear; the evidence of

45 Projected UK GDP for 2019 in current prices, from IMF World Economic Outlook database, October 2019, https://bit.ly/2OofTRl.

46 The resource cost (the amount spent) should also be distinguished from the overall effect on GDP levels, which takes into account the boost to economic activity generated by government and business investment, and the impact of innovation resulting from such spending. These overall GDP effects are uncertain, with different economic models producing different outcomes, but estimates range from a small negative to a small positive effect on future overall GDP levels. Similar considerations apply to all areas of government spending, including military spending, where the overall impact on GDP levels, whether positive or negative, is again highly uncertain.

47 Committee on Climate Change, "Meeting carbon budgets – progress in reducing the UK's emissions", 2015 report to Parliament, June 2015, .https://bit.ly/2Dnxt1r.

48 For example, if government emission requirements for factories cause businesses to spend money on reducing emissions, then that would form part of the overall spending across the economy towards tackling climate change, but not government spending. If the government were then to reimburse some or all of these costs through a subsidy, then that cost would be transferred from business to government and count as part of government spending.

49 CAFOD, Friends of the Earth, Green Alliance, Greenpeace, Islamic Relief, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the RSPB, WWF: "Government investment for a greener and fairer economy", September 2019, https://bit.ly/35xvX98.

50 Department for International Development, "UK aid to double efforts to tackle climate change", 23 Sep. 2019, https://bit.ly/2rtBsH8.

51 This commitment appears to be maintained, at least for now, under the current Government, despite previous statements from Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling for cuts to the aid budget. However, the current International Development Secretary Alok Sharma reaffirmed the commitment upon his appointment in July 2019. Jessica Abrahams, "DFID survives another day as Alok Sharma named new secretary of state", *Devex*, 25 July 2019, https://bit.ly/2XWETCu.

52 Jonathan Watts, "£680m of UK foreign aid spent on fossil fuel projects – study", The Guardian, 23 July 2019, https://bit.ly/37COdjj.

the effectiveness of military force for countering threats such as Russia and terrorism, or the adverse consequences of lower military spending is not. Indeed, UK military interventions this century, as part of US-led coalitions, have had a highly negative impact on the threat of terrorism in particular.[53]

Yet, the upper range of costs estimated by the CCC, around 2% of GDP, coincides with what most conventional security thinkers insist is the absolute minimum level of military spending that should be considered, and the Government remains completely committed to it – to combat threats that are both far less certain and far less existential than those posed by climate change.

Of course it is an oversimplification to set these two goals up as if one necessarily comes at the expense of the other. It would be perfectly possible for the Government to maintain military spending levels while taking the measures necessary, fiscal and otherwise, to achieve net-zero emissions, through some combination of higher taxes, lower spending in other areas, or higher long-term levels of government borrowing (though all of these would have their costs). Rather, the contrast between the Government's attitude to the two starkly illustrates the fundamentally distorted thinking about security that dominates policy in the UK and elsewhere. The question of spending priorities is also very real. After health, social welfare expenditure, and education, the Ministry of Defence is the next largest area of UK government spending. Government resources are always scarce, and there are powerful reasons why spending on the first three above-named areas should be increased. In the event of increased government resources, whether from higher growth or increased taxes, these would likely be high priorities for new spending. If we are to consider where additional resources for tackling climate change are to come from, therefore, the MOD budget must be a prime candidate. As CAAT and others have argued, such spending could also have powerful benefits for jobs and economic justice more broadly, far more so than spending on the military.[54]

53 "Iraq inquiry: Ex-MI5 boss says war raised terror threat", BBC News, 20 July 2010, https://bbc.in/2Doigxe.

54 CAAT, "Arms to Renewables: Government investment for a greener and fairer economy", Oct. 2014, https://bit.ly/2spJKQZ.

National security, human security, and sustainable security

The traditional understanding of "national security" pursued by most governments throughout the world and over history, which relies primarily on the role of the armed forces (as well as other security and intelligence services), is centred on the security of the state and its perceived interests. This means, first and foremost, ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation (from external military threats) and the continuation of the current polity and form of government (against internal uprising). In

The balance of priorities for these two areas of spending should be clear. Climate change represents an existential threat to the UK and the world. Loss of the UK's status as a global military power does not.

Flooding in Worksop town centre, Nottinghamshire, November 2019

Source: Bassetlaw District Council, accessed 2019-11-09
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the case of the UK and other countries with remaining colonial possessions, it also includes protecting (and maintaining sovereignty over) UK overseas territories such as the Falkland Islands, the Chagos Islands, and others.

Beyond this, the national security concept includes projecting the nation's "power" and protecting its "interests" in a broad sense; this includes goals such as guaranteeing trade and investment interests, ensuring sea lanes of communication, and maintaining an ability to intervene militarily in situations seen as threatening to the nation. From this perspective, the nation is seen as an undifferentiated, unitary actor, with well-defined interests that apply to the nation as a whole.

A human security perspective, by contrast, starts at the level of individuals and communities, and the things that threaten their security and wellbeing. These may vary considerably between different groups within a country. Such threats include armed violence, whether from foreign countries, armed groups or criminal gangs, but also from domestic violence, and indeed from the country's own security forces. However, human security also includes, for example, reliable access to proper nutrition (food security), and sanitation and healthcare (medical security) and also includes security from the effects of natural disasters, including those caused by climate change.

National and human security perspectives are not mutually exclusive – for example, the people of Iraq, Palestine, or East Timor know full well how catastrophic foreign military conquest can be for human security – but they place different actors in the centre of the frame (the state or nation vs. individuals, families, and communities). Human security considers a far broader range of security issues and allows for security interests and threats to be widely differentiated within a country, whereas national security considers security or insecurity to be a property of the nation as a whole.

Sustainable security builds on the human security concept, but emphasises the need for security to be considered in the long term, especially given the current climate emergency. Policies and systems must provide security to people, in the broad sense, not just in the present moment, but in a way that ensures, as far as possible, the sustainability of these systems. This in mind, the report *Rethinking Security*,[55] by the Ammerdown Group (a coalition of NGOs and think tanks) lists the five primary threats to sustainable security worldwide as

a) *climate*, the devastating impact of climate change
b) *inequality*, along with marginalization and exclusion of large groups in society
c) *scarcity*, namely the rapid depletion of the Earth's natural resources
d) *militarism*, the increasing level of great power competition, as well as the growing influence of militaristic values within society (which have worsened since the report was written with the election of far-right leaders such as Donald Trump, Rodrigo Duterte, and Jair Bolsonaro)
e) *violent conflict*, which has increased worldwide since 2011, and which military responses have frequently exacerbated, or have at best failed to restrain.

The report advocates focusing on the long-term, root causes and systemic drivers of insecurity, and regarding security as something to be achieved in common by and for people around the world, rather than concentrating on attempts at short-term hard security "fixes" to acute crises, the underlying causes of which have been allowed to fester.

The tools with which to achieve sustainable security goals are largely non-military, although this framework certainly does not exclude the maintenance and use of armed forces as one element of a much broader strategy. Efforts to combat climate change have been widely discussed elsewhere, and require major and rapid reductions in fossil fuel use and expansion in renewable energy, combined with measures such as reforestation and carbon capture and storage to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.[56] Such efforts must also focus on climate *justice* – ensuring that the transition to a zero-carbon economy worldwide is done in a way that confronts the glaring inequalities that climate change exacerbates, and puts the needs of those most affected by the climate crisis first.[57]

Tackling violent conflict may well include international military or police peacekeeping and stabilisation forces, but mostly requires efforts to tackle the root causes of conflict. These include efforts to reduce inequality between and within nations, and to improve governance, inclusion, and participation.[58]

The UK devotes some resources towards these areas. UK government spending on countering climate change is discussed above. Within the ODA budget, £449 million was spent in 2017 in the broad areas of conflict, peace and security, while £716 million was spent on support for other aspects of governance and civil society.[59] But these remain far less than those devoted to the military and other "hard security" approaches.

A choice of approaches

At present, political pressure is mounting to increase military spending well beyond the 2% target, as part of a goal to renew Britain's status as a global military power. In 2018, the Parliamentary Defence Committee argued that

55 The Ammerdown Group, "Rethinking Security", May 2016, https://bit.ly/2Oo0rVf.

56 For example, a detailed programme of investment over the next 5 years in the areas of transport, nature, buildings, power, industry, international support for tackling climate change, and support for just transition, is laid out in CAFOD, Friends of the Earth, Green Alliance, Greenpeace, Islamic Relief, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the RSPB, WWF: "Government investment for a greener and fairer economy", September 2019, https://bit.ly/35xvX98.

57 The Demand Climate Justice network's website provides one outline of what climate justice and a just transition to a zero-carbon world would look like. See https://demandclimatejustice.org/. Another set of principles for climate justice is set out by the Mary Robinson Foundation. See https://bit.ly/2QURLYc.

58 See e.g. Carrie O'Neill and Ryan Sheely, "Governance as a root cause of protracted conflict and sustainable peace: Moving from rhetoric to a new way of working", SIPRI blog, 20 June 2019, https://bit.ly/34mjIfn.

59 Statistics on International Development 2017, Additional Tables, https://bit.ly/2KXMVFC.

the UK should spend at least 3% of GDP on the military, instead of the current 2% target, an increase of 50%.[60] As part of his campaign for the Tory Party leadership in 2019, then Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt pledged to go half way to this, with a £15 billion increase by 2023/24, to reach 2.5% of GDP.[61] As discussed in Section 3, while not committing to any new percentage of GDP target, the present government is putting military expenditure on a clear upward trajectory.

At the same time, the Government is pursuing a more expansive global military role for the UK armed forces, as part of a vague "global Britain" post-Brexit agenda. The opening of a new permanent military base in Bahrain in 2018 (first announced in 2014) is one major example.[62] In a December 2018 speech, then Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson announced plans to expand the UK's military presence in the Pacific, including a permanent military base, possibly in Singapore or Brunei, and more regular deployments of warships, including a show of force by the carrier group around the new Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier.[63] The UK has already started to increase its Pacific presence, as part of which it conducted a "freedom of navigation" operation (as the US regularly does) through waters claimed by China but regarded as international by the US and UK in the disputed South China Sea.[64] The UK appears intent on maintaining the permanent presence of one major warship in the region.[65]

It is widely recognised that such global ambitions run well beyond the scope of current military spending levels, and frequently overextended armed forces;[66] indeed, this is one of the reasons behind growing calls for increased spending.

Meanwhile, the advanced weapons systems to which UK security thinking remains dedicated become more and more expensive. As discussed in Section 3, the National Audit Office described the current Defence Equipment Plan for 2019-2028 as unaffordable, with a gap of £15 billion between acquisition and budget plans over the period. The new generation of fighter jets that the UK is currently acquiring, the US F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (in which UK industry has a 15% stake), is the most expensive weapons programme in history, and is increasingly over budget, delayed, and under-performing. The two large aircraft carriers the UK is constructing are costing billions to acquire and will cost even more billions to operate, while the UK's next-generation nuclear weapons systems, based on the Dreadnought Class submarines succeeding Trident, as well as the accompanying missiles, will consume a large proportion of the budget. Of the £184 billion planned expenditure on equipment up to 2027/28, £41 billion is allocated to the Defence Nuclear Organisation, which includes the Vanguard nuclear weapons submarines, Astute Class Nuclear attack submarines (one of whose duties is to support the Vanguards), missiles, warheads, and equipment support costs.[67] A report by the Nuclear Information Service in April 2019 estimated that the total through-life costs of the UK's nuclear weapons programme would be at least £172 billion up to 2070, or £3.4 billion per year.[68] The UK government is already rapidly advancing plans to develop a further generation of indigenously-designed advanced fighter aircraft,[69] for which the main purpose seems to be simply to maintain this sector of the UK arms industry and thus to ensure a future capability to produce such aircraft. This will likely be another cost sinkhole, so that these big ticket projects will consume an increasing share of the budget.

60 House of Commons Defence Committee report, "Beyond 2 per cent: A preliminary report on the Modernising Defence Programme", 12 June 2018, https://bit.ly/35HXftg.

61 "Jeremy Hunt: I would spend £15bn more on defence", *BBC News*, 25 June 2019, https://bbc.in/33r4EM0.

62 Malak Harb, "UK opens Persian Gulf military base in Bahrain", AP, 5 Apr. 2018, https://bit.ly/33qe3DN.

63 Gavin Williamson, "Defence in Global Britain", speech at the Royal United Services Institute, 11 Feb. 2019, https://bit.ly/2pVIbcq.

64 John Hemmings, "Charting Britain's moves in the South China Sea", *RUSI Commentary*, 6 Feb. 2019, https://bit.ly/2OQBMry.

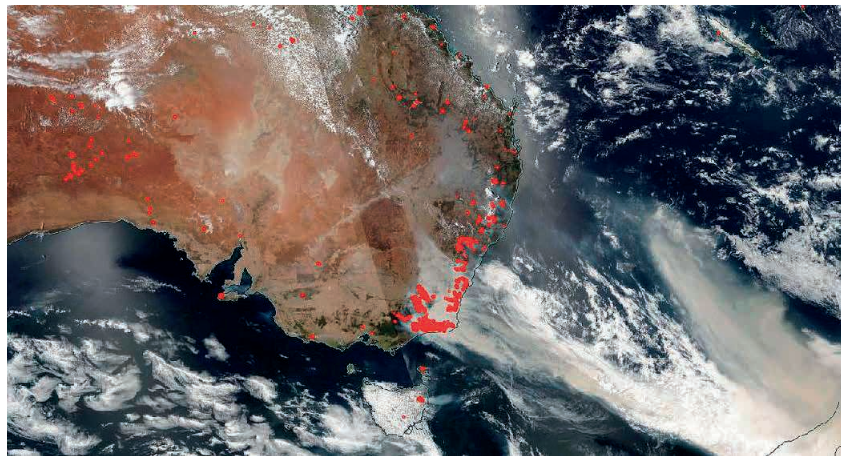
65 Richard Reeve, "The UK military in the Asia Pacific", ORX Explains #1, 28 Feb. 2018, https://bit.ly/2XQQLG5.

66 e.g. Jessica Elgot, "UK 'living a lie' on defence capability, says former army chief", *The Guardian*, 26 June 2018, https://bit.ly/2rrFIa5; and Paul Mason, "The UK must abandon the imperial fantasy of 'global military reach'", *New Statesman*, 2 Jan. 2019, https://bit.ly/2KZ9QAp.

67 Ministry of Defence, The Defence Equipment Plan 2018, 5 Nov. 2018, https://bit.ly/2XSTGxL.

68 David Cullen, "Trouble ahead: risks and rising costs in the UK nuclear weapons programme", Nuclear Information Service, April 2019, https://bit.ly/2Oqch11.

69 Nigel Walker, Antonia Garroway, and Louisa Brooke-Holland, "Combat Air Strategy progress and next steps", House of Commons research briefing, 25 June 2019, https://bit.ly/33tdxoq.



NASA Satellite image with locations of wildfires, Eastern Australia, 2nd January 2020

Source: NASA

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Maintaining, or recovering a status as a global military power is thus an expensive business and not one likely to be achieved with current levels of spending. This leads many to the conclusion, including as noted by the House of Commons Defence Committee, that significantly higher spending is required.

However, the practical benefits of global military power status, whether to the UK or to the world, are rarely spelt out and are highly dubious. Indeed, based on the experience of the past 20 years, the practical consequences of relying on military power in dealing with international crises appear consistently negative. In what ways will regular naval patrols in the South China Sea make the people of the UK or the region more peaceful or secure? Even at higher levels of military spending, a UK military presence in the Pacific would make only a marginal difference to the balance of power in the region,[70] would antagonise China, and would risk embroiling the UK in any potential future regional conflict. The idea of "global Britain" including a global UK military role is sometimes said to be a means of striking favourable post-Brexit trade deals, but no plausible chain of causal reasoning has been presented to explain how the periodic appearance of a small number of UK warships in the Pacific will inspire trade partners to sign munificent trade deals with the UK. Arms exports are perhaps the only area of trade that would benefit from an enhanced military presence, but as CAAT has argued elsewhere, such exports are more likely to drive instability and repression than the reverse and represent a very poor economic return for the extra billions that would be spent on flaunting UK military strength as an export promotion strategy.

The call for global military power status is often framed in terms of the ability of the UK through its armed forces to act as a "force for good" in the world. But, as discussed above, UK military interventions over the past 20 years, have mostly been overwhelmingly disastrous for the supposed beneficiaries. The narrative of UK military power as a force for good is based in many ways on a colonial mindset that assumes British, and western, benevolence and wisdom in the affairs of the world. These narratives and assumptions remain remarkably persistent, in spite of the powerful evidence to the contrary presented by the events of recent conflicts, not to mention any honest reading of the history of the British Empire.

The drive for global military power status is predicated on a militaristic ideology that sees the world in terms of zero-sum great power competition and an expectation of continued engagement in major military interventions of the sort that have been so universally disastrous in the 21st century, as a means of dealing with global conflict and insecurity. The UK should instead be moving away from such a failed approach and should have absolutely no interest in pursuing an arms race with China or joining in any potential US–China confrontation. While Russia's behaviour in recent years has been dangerous, aggressive, and unacceptable, the primary challenges Russia poses to European security – information warfare, cyber warfare, and poisoning of dissidents on foreign soil – are not of a conventional military nature and cannot be dealt with using advanced combat aircraft or aircraft

70 As admitted by John Hemmings of RUSI (John Hemmings, "Charting Britain's moves in the South China Sea", RUSI Commentary, 6 Feb. 2019, https://bit.ly/2OQBMry), who nonetheless supports the move.

carriers. Indeed, pursuing a heavily militarised response is only likely to increase tensions and prompt a deeper arms race and yet more aggressive and paranoid behaviour.

Most of all, global military power status would do nothing to address the real security challenges of either the UK or the wider world. The higher levels of military spending needed to achieve such status would inevitably suck resources from the far more urgent and important priority of combating climate change, as well as from far more effective civilian means of tackling key drivers of insecurity, such as inequality, marginalisation and armed conflict.

At present, with military spending at around 2% of GDP, the UK is caught between two worlds. Policy thinking is still stuck in militarism, seeing ever more powerful weapons to be used in overseas military interventions as the solution to every security threat, yet deploying rhetoric about Britain's global role and power that far exceeds actual military capabilities.

This presents a clear choice: one approach, as promoted by the Parliamentary Defence Committee, Jeremy Hunt and others, is to double down on militarism with greatly increased military spending. This, in our view, would be profoundly misguided, for all the reasons discussed above. The alternative is to abandon once and for all the UK's post-imperial vestiges of grandeur, global military power ambitions and reliance on war as a solution to global problems, and to fundamentally reorient our security strategy towards "sustainable security," redirecting economic resources in particular towards preventing climate catastrophe, which is by far the greatest security threat to the world, and tackling worldwide inequality and marginalisation. It seems extraordinary that serious politicians and analysts should regard global military ambitions as a more pressing priority than the climate crisis, to the extent of it being first in line for an additional 1% of GDP in funding. Rethinking security as a whole therefore seems more necessary than ever.

The alternative is to abandon once and for all the UK's post-imperial vestiges of grandeur, and to fundamentally reorient our security strategy towards "sustainable security," redirecting economic resources towards preventing climate catastrophe.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

UK military spending fell significantly from 2010, as part of austerity measures in the wake of the global financial crisis. This had followed a period of rising spending over the 2000s, largely a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, following substantial falls after the end of the Cold War. Based on the definition used by the MOD, military spending fell to about 1.8% of GDP in 2018. However, figures reported to NATO, which have started including an increasing number of additional items outside the MOD budget, put the figure at 2.1%. Spending levelled off after 2015 following the publication of the *Strategic Defence and Security Review* and in the wake of the 2014 Ukraine conflict and has now begun to increase again.

Pressure for increased military spending in the UK is growing. Perennial cries that the world is an ever more dangerous place, accompanied by the recital of a long list of actual and potential threats, lead to the claim that only a stronger military can provide security against these threats, even though many or most are not of a conventional military nature, or obviously susceptible to military solutions. Brexit has furthered this agenda, especially among supporters of the current Government, with the idea that a global military presence is a key way in which the UK can thrive as "global Britain" in a post-Brexit world – although exactly how this will work in practice is rarely spelt out.

Thus, austerity-related cuts to military spending have halted and are beginning to be reversed, and long-standing calls for the UK to continue to meet NATO's 2% target, renewed and strengthened at NATO's 2014 Wales summit, have given way to demands for it to be increased as high as 2.5% or 3%, to advance ambitions for the UK to play a global military role, and to be able to launch major expeditionary operations – wars overseas, in other words – around the world.

In this report, however, we have disputed the proposition that the UK, and its NATO allies, need to increase their military spending. We have argued instead that the case for higher military spending is based on a narrow, militaristic view of security that fails to address the most urgent security challenges facing the UK and the world, most importantly the climate crisis, and more often leads to interventions that cause active harm than the reverse. We have further argued that much UK military spending and policy is directed towards either major "prestige" items such as Trident replacement or aircraft carriers,

whose goal appears to be principally about "maintaining Britain's place in the world" rather than meeting any genuine security need, or towards preparing for and engaging in major military interventions overseas, usually as part of a US-led alliance, of the sort that have proved an unmitigated disaster in the 21st century, and which have made us less, not more secure.

On the other hand, we have argued that more resources need to be devoted to non-military sustainable security goals, in particular combatting climate change, but also conflict prevention and management, peacebuilding, and efforts to reduce global inequality and marginalisation.

The obvious question this raises is, how much *should* the UK spend on the military? This is an important question, as any government, even one with a radically different outlook on security from the current one, would need to make short and medium term decisions about the budget for the armed forces. However, it is not a question that can be answered long term without first considering policy and funding for security as a whole, including what role the armed forces should play in the sort of "sustainable security" model this paper supports, and therefore what the goals and objectives of military spending should be. More broadly, an open debate is needed as to the UK's role in the world, what it has been up to now and what it should be in the future. Such a debate would require honesty and humility regarding the impact of UK military intervention, and imagination as to the different ways in which the UK could play a proactive and mutually beneficial role in world affairs with other actors, especially in relation to climate change, global justice and development, and human rights.

Therefore, while this report would certainly advocate for a transfer of resources away from military spending and towards climate spending, we do not attempt to specify a long-term level to which military spending should fall. However, we can propose a number of principles regarding the prior question of the appropriate role of the military as part of an overall sustainable security approach. Such considerations should guide decision-making about future levels of military spending, and what it should be spent on, rather than arbitrary targets for shares of GDP, 2% or otherwise.

1) The role of the military should be assessed as part of an overall sustainable security strategy that assesses current and long-term security threats and opportunities, and the various tools for addressing them, in a joined-up manner. In this process, there should be no automatic priority given to military in threat response, or to those threats that are most susceptible to military responses.[71]
2) The UK should abandon the ambition of being a "global military power" or of using military strength as a means of advancing its diplomatic or economic position in the world, or its prestige or status in general. Such an ambition, as well as requiring considerably more military spending than at present, provides at best dubious and unverifiable benefits while frequently leading to immense harm, responds to no clear security threat, and is of necessity a zero-sum game, as it depends on countries' *relative* levels of military power, thus potentially encouraging damaging arms races.
3) In keeping with this, the UK should terminate military projects the primary goal of which relates to this ambition. This includes the aircraft carriers, the Future Combat Air Systems (Tempest), and the planned expansion of overseas military bases and operations, especially in the Pacific. Where contracts have been signed so that terminating a project

71 For example, Oliver Scanlan points out how military planners tend to operate from the "1% principle" – namely that the military must be able to respond to serious threats even if there is only a 1% chance of them happening, whereas most climate science, and the policy frameworks that follow from them, tend to work on the basis of "95% confidence intervals" – that is, conclusions about which scientists are 95% sure. Oliver Scanlan, "A Tale of Two Puzzles: Accounting for Military and Climate Change Expenditures", Oxford Research Group, 28 June 2018, https://bit.ly/37M14j1.

would be more expensive than fulfilling it, the UK should minimise the scale of these projects and operational spending related to them.

4) The UK should move towards becoming a non-nuclear-armed country. This should include the immediate termination of the Dreadnought Class submarines programme, rapid moves towards disarmament of existing Trident nuclear weapons and active support for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.[72]
5) The UK should remove objectives of engaging in major expeditionary combat operations from its military policy and strategy. The implications of this for specific major procurement programmes are less clear, as many systems have multiple potential uses, but such a change would clearly involve rethinking both procurement and operational spending. In particular, it would suggest reversing recent efforts to expand the UK's military presence in the Gulf, around which some of the UK's major recent military interventions (in particular Iraq) have taken place.
6) The UK should challenge current confrontational approaches to maintaining European security and work with NATO and EU countries to promote an alternative approach that seeks to de-escalate military tensions with Russia, and that works upon a premise of shared security, rather than one based on military dominance.

The implications of such an approach would almost certainly mean lower military spending than at present. It would involve a military strategy directed more narrowly towards national and collective European defence and international peacekeeping and conflict management, as part of broader, primarily civilian efforts, to prevent and contain armed conflict, tackle the root causes of conflict, reduce international tensions and promote shared, sustainable security.

There is widespread consensus that the unfolding climate crisis caused by global heating requires urgent action. As yet, concrete measures to achieve the rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions needed, to prevent the catastrophe from worsening and becoming irreversible, have been severely lacking in the UK, as in most other major economies. Changing this will require major political will and significantly increased economic resources. This in turn requires a fundamentally different mindset that recognises climate change as the fundamental global security threat that it is, and affords it the same level of priority traditionally given to matters of "national security". **If climate change is to be tackled, then it needs to become the "first duty of government". To make this paradigm shift requires jettisoning the persistent delusion that the UK can bring peace and security to the world through a global military presence involving massively expensive weapons systems and major military interventions.**

72 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 7 July 2017, https://bit.ly/2QXret6.

APPENDIX: HOW UK MILITARY SPENDING IS COUNTED

There is no standard international definition of military spending, which can make international comparisons difficult. Even within a country, the way military (and other government) spending is reported can change over time, as indeed it has done in the UK. This can make it very challenging for even well-informed observers – or indeed policymakers themselves – to understand what is actually going on with military spending in a given country or worldwide.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) seeks to apply a standard definition of military spending to all countries to provide consistency, although it is not always possible to find data corresponding to this definition.[73] This becomes especially difficult (or indeed impossible) for countries that hide a significant portion of their spending – for example, many oil-rich states use oil funds to purchase weapons directly and unaccountably, without being accounted for at all in the state budget. Spending in more democratic countries is usually more transparent, but even so elements of military spending can be accounted for in different budget lines, outside the main Ministry or Department of Defence budget. SIPRI makes considerable efforts, using open sources, to uncover such additional lines of spending (disclaimer: this was the author's job for seven years), but does not always succeed.

NATO also applies a common definition of military spending (indeed, the SIPRI definition was based on the original NATO definition),[74] but this has also changed over time. Moreover, the way NATO members have applied this definition has varied – sometimes seeking to exclude certain items that could, arguably, be included under the definition, to prove how peaceful they are, and at other times (as at present) seeking to include as much as can possibly be permitted, even stretching the definition, to show that they are good NATO allies and try to reach the NATO target of 2% of GDP. Indeed, this is precisely what the UK has done in recent years. Thus, while the NATO definition is theoretically a common standard, in practice, comparisons over time and between countries, even using NATO's data, are not always consistent.

The UK Ministry of Defence reports its budget according to two different measures: Defence Spending, which is based on an accruals system of accounting, and Net Cash Requirement, which is cash-based.[75] The accruals

73 SIPRI Military Expenditure Database Sources & Methods, https://bit.ly/33r9Z6e.

74 NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2012-2019), 25 June 2019, https://bit.ly/2DlFSCv.

75 Company accounting in the UK and according to international standards is accruals based. The difference between cash and accruals based accounting is that in the first you measure when money actually comes in or goes out, while the second looks at when the income is earned or the expense incurred. Thus, if you receive an electricity bill in February covering the electricity you used in January, but don't pay the bill until March, a cash-based system would treat the expenditure as happening in March, while an accruals-based system would count it as happening in January, when the electricity was used.

based system, called first "Resource Account Budgeting" and later "Clear Line of Sight" budgeting, was an attempt to bring government expenditure reporting in line with international accounting standards used by companies, but the numerous changes to the way it has been defined since being introduced in 2001/02 makes it of limited use in assessing trends over time. Fortunately, the simpler Net Cash Requirement measure is much more consistent over time, and is also consistent with the earlier cash system of accounting used by the Government up to 2000/01, allowing for meaningful comparisons over long periods of time. This is the definition of military spending used for analysis in this report, in particular in Section 3.

The MOD figures (by either measure) exclude one element of military spending that falls within the SIPRI definition (though it is not currently included in SIPRI figures for the UK), namely the additional cost of military pension payments over and above what is provided by MOD employer contributions to the Armed Forces Pension and Compensation Scheme. This amounts to around £1.5–£1.8 billion a year. As the promise of a future pension is a key part of the compensation package for any employee, the cost of this scheme should be considered a part of the overall cost of maintaining the armed forces.

Aside from the different ways of measuring MOD spending, a further source of confusion is the growing discrepancy between what is reported in the MOD budget and the figures reported to NATO and published in the annual NATO information bulletins on the military spending of member states.[76] Figure A1 below shows UK military spending from 2000 to 2018 (in 2017 inflation-adjusted pounds) according to both the MOD cash/NCR measure, and the figures reported to NATO. From 2001 to 2004, the NATO figures actually fall significantly below the MOD figures, due to the fact that the cost of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars were not included in the NATO figures. These figures were included from "at least" 2009, which clearly gives a more accurate picture of total military spending.[77]

Figure A1: UK military spending from 2000 to 2018.

Source: MOD Statistics, Departmental Resources; and NATO, Information on Defence Expenditures.

However, from 2010 onwards, the NATO figures begin to systematically and increasingly grow larger than the MOD figures, with the gap reaching £7.5 billion in 2018, making the NATO figures 20% higher than those of the MOD. This huge gap is the result of efforts in recent years by the UK government to meet the NATO target of 2% of GDP for military spending by repeatedly

76 For the most recent release, see NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2012-2019), 25 June 2019, https://bit.ly/2DlFSCv.

77 "Shifting the goalposts? Defence expenditure and the 2% pledge", Report by the House of Commons Defence Committee 2015/16, 21 April 2016, https://bit.ly/2R3f0z8.

"shifting the goalposts," in the words of a Parliamentary report,[78] adding a variety of items to the figures reported to NATO that are not included in the MOD budget. Military pension payments paid through the Armed Forces Pension and Compensation Scheme appear to have been included in the returns to NATO from 2005, based on earlier NATO releases.[79] (It seems that, from 2005-2008 the inclusion of pensions and exclusion of operations spending roughly balanced each other, though this does not explain why the figures are so close in 2009). Other items that have been added more recently include[80]

- payments for pensions of retired MOD civilian personnel
- war pensions
- the UK's contribution to the cost of UN peacekeeping operations[81]
- military spending funded by MOD income (as opposed to allocations from the Treasury)
- some intelligence spending

This shifting definition of military spending as reported to NATO – by the UK and other countries – makes the NATO data of limited value in assessing trends in military spending by NATO members, compounded by the lack of transparency as to what is and is not included in any given year. If a country's spending is increasing (or decreasing), it can be hard to know if this is due to an actual change in spending, or merely a change in what is included in the figures. This is why we have chosen to rely on the MOD Net Cash Requirement figures for this report, as providing the clearest and most consistent measure available over time of UK military spending.

78 Ibid.

79 See e.g. the data release for 2011, NATO, "Financial and economic data relating to NATO defence", 10 Mar. 2011, https://bit.ly/37I93xJ.

80 Shifting the goalposts? Defence expenditure and the 2% pledge", Report by the House of Commons Defence Committee 2015/16, 21 April 2016, https://bit.ly/2R3f0z8.

81 An assessed contribution calculated for each UN member state on the basis of their level of GDP, with the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council paying a higher rate. See United Nations Peacekeeping, "How we are funded", https://bit.ly/33nJ4Ij.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAAT	Campaign Against Arms Trade
CCC	Committee on Climate Change
Daesh	Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or the Islamic State (IS).
DEP	Defence Equipment Plan
DFID	Department for International Development
DIT	Department for International Trade
DSEI	Defence Systems and Equipment International
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NAO	National Audit Office
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCR	Net Cash Requirement
ODA	Official Development Assistance
R&D	Research and Development
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UK	The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
US or USA	The United States of America

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