

Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

01 July 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

As you prepare to stand down as Prime Minister, having released a Defence Investment Plan which found another £15bn for the military, you will be readying yourself to attend the NATO Summit in Ankara. At this time, we wish to outline our grave concerns about the increasing focus of resources on the military over other forms of international engagement. Development, diplomacy, peacebuilding, conflict and atrocity prevention are all essential and underfunded tools in building a safer world. We also know that tensions are lowered when racial, gender and climate justice are prioritised.

Since last year's Strategic Defence Review and National Security Strategy, your government has repeatedly heralded a national conversation on security. This has yet to materialise.

There is a clear public appetite for broader discussion on how to build a more secure, resilient and peaceful world, with many unconvinced by the prevalent 'war-footing' narrative and focus on rearmament.

The public's wider view of security

Recent polling suggests the public supports both 'peacebuilding' and 'maintaining defence capacity' at similar levels, while placing even greater importance on climate action and international cooperation¹. Meanwhile, most Britons' concerns around security centre on domestic issues such as affordability, access to healthcare, food and energy and street crime.

It is clear that British people conceive security in a broad range of ways beyond military force.

Shift of focus from development, climate action and conflict resolution

We note that your government's current spending plans for this parliament already envisage military spending at its highest level since World War II in real terms, and the highest level in over 30 years as a percentage of GDP. By next year, the UK's ratio of military to international development spending will reach almost nine-to-one. Just six

¹ Martin, T., *Public Opinion and National Security in the UK: A People-Centred Approach*, GCSJ Policy Report, [Open University](#), May 2026, p.21.

years ago, that ratio was below four-to-one. If the UK follows through on commitments made at the last NATO summit to increase military spending to 3.5% of GDP by 2035, this ratio will be skewed further. At the same time, diplomatic, development, education and other ‘soft power’ capabilities face significant cuts, reducing the UK’s ability to analyse and engage effectively with global challenges. This represents a staggering shift of public resources from potentially productive to destructive ends, at a time of intense humanitarian need: 65 active state-based armed conflicts globally², which increasingly kill civilians as well combatants, and over 117 million forcibly displaced people.³

Sending such a powerful message that the UK and NATO are preparing for war, while already greatly outspending any rival, risks provoking comparable responses, making war more likely.

Lack of transparency and spiralling cost of nuclear weapons

We are particularly concerned about the huge increases in spending devoted to the renewal of the UK’s nuclear weapons programme. As the Public Accounts Committee recently reported, expenditure on the Defence Nuclear Enterprise was already 18% of the defence budget in 2025 and is expected to rise to a quarter of the greatly expanded budget over the next decade⁴, doubling in real terms to well over £20 billion per year. According to ICAN figures, UK nuclear spending already considerably exceeds that of Russia – and is now the third highest in the world behind the US and China.⁵ In addition to the legal and ethical implications, this represents a colossal opportunity cost to other public priorities, while remaining largely shielded from public and parliamentary scrutiny.

Security risks of biodiversity loss and the climate crisis

Nowhere is this opportunity cost more wasteful than of the lost potential to accelerate the transition to a low carbon future, embracing clean energy and investing in international climate finance. As this year’s HMG *Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security*⁶ assessment showed, the risk of environmental breakdown to UK national and human security is highly likely and potentially catastrophic. Funding climate action creates meaningful work at a rate that far outstrips arms manufacturing; investment in green industries and clean energy already

² Uppsala Conflict Data Program, [figures for 2025](#).

³ UNHCR [Global Trends report](#), 11 June 2026.

⁴ Committee of Public Accounts, [MoD follow-up Spring 2026](#), Fifth Report of Session 2026-2027, p.11

⁵ International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, [Premeditated: Nuclear Weapons Spending in 2025](#), ICAN, June 2026, p.7.

⁶ HMG, [Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security, A National Security Assessment](#), Jan 2026.

employs over 1.1 million in the UK and, according to the IMF⁷, has a higher multiplier effect.

Sustainable security for all

Building a secure society means actively preparing for peace. While we recognise current geopolitical tensions as well as the pressure on the UK government from its traditional allies, we believe that capabilities to build peace, sustainability and societal resilience should be reprioritised.

The UK has previously shown leadership in areas such as peacebuilding, preventing sexual violence in conflict, support for global climate cooperation and international criminal justice; it is vital to renew and expand upon such commitments.

In Ankara you will face pressure to further entrench the UK in a war-orientated economy. We urge you to resist this, as others in Europe have done, and to take to a more productive path where the UK commits itself to a cooperative, internationalist future in which it nurtures the skills, capacities and institutions required to build lasting and just peace, and stability in an uncertain world.

Yours sincerely,

Rethinking Security

Quakers in Britain

ActionAid UK

Action on Armed Violence

Anglican Pacifist Fellowship

Article 36

CAFOD

Campaign Against Arms Trade

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Christian Aid

Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Christian Climate Action

CND Cymru

Conflict and Environment Observatory

Conscience: Taxes for Peace not War

Cymdeithas y Cymod (Fellowship of Reconciliation)

Cymru Global

Demilitarise Education

Drone Wars UK

Faith for the Climate

Fellowship of Reconciliation (England and Scotland)

ForcesWatch

Gender Action for Peace and Security

⁷ Batini, di Serio, Fragetta, Malina, [Building Back Better: How Big Are Green Spending Multipliers?](#), IMF Working Paper, March 2021.

Global Climate Justice Cymru

Global Justice Now

Green New Deal Rising

Health Poverty Action

The Iona Community

Justice & Peace Scotland

Lakenheath Alliance for Peace

Medact

Minorities in Peace and Security UK

Movement for the Abolition of War

Northern Friends Peace Board

Nuclear Information Service

ODI Global

Omega Research Foundation

Pax Christi Scotland

Peace Direct

Peace Pledge Union

Saferworld

Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund

Scientists for Global Responsibility

Scotland's International Development Alliance

Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Scottish Peace Network

Secure Scotland

Shadow World Investigations

Stop the Arms Fair

Transition Security Project

United Nations Association UK

War on Want

WILPF UK

Women in Black London

World BEYOND War