



Conscience

The Minister for Peace and Disarmament: An Assessment

by Dr Tim Street



**Conscience launches the Minister for Peace and Disarmament report,
House of Commons, 5th July 2018**

Peace as a platform for radical change

**“I want a world of peace.
I'm not interested in bombs.
I'm not interested in wars.
I'm interested in peace.”
Jeremy Corbyn MP**



Who we are:

This report has been commissioned by Conscience:Taxes for Peace not War and fully funded by Conscience supporters.

It has been researched and written by Dr Tim Street, Associate Fellow, Oxford Research Group.

We would like to extend an enormous thank you to everyone who gave up their time and expertise to make this report possible, supplying vital research and testimony on a variety of relevant topics.

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by Dr Tim Street
for Conscience: Taxes for Peace not War

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report provides an assessment of the Labour Party's proposal to create a Minister for Peace and Disarmament (MPD) and highlights the political and practical obstacles to, and opportunities for, the post being a success. Conducting this assessment was important, firstly because of the lack of civil society and public discussion concerning what the remit and implications of an MPD would be. Secondly, the controversial nature of several of the issues that the MPD could cover, such as regulating the arms trade or conventional and nuclear disarmament, require careful consideration if appropriate policy proposals are to be developed.

Overall, based on the responses of people from the peace, disarmament and security community interviewed for this study, the relevant institutional experiences of British and foreign governments and the current state of domestic and international politics, the report concludes that there is significant potential in the MPD concept, but that it requires further thought and attention from Labour and civil society before it is established and developed in government.

1.1 The roots of the MPD: precedents and potential for success

- The UK has substantial institutional experience on matters of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. This includes having a Minister for Disarmament under a Labour government in the 1960s. Such posts function optimally when the government involved makes these issues a priority and good relations exist amongst the world's major powers.
- Current multilateral nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts involving the UK are at a standstill, with the Conservative government showing little or no interest in the subject, whilst relations between Russia and the USA are at a low point. This situation clearly presents significant obstacles to the MPD's agenda, but opportunities to show leadership also exist.
- The idea of an MPD has roots in, and would complement various initiatives by, the UN and other international bodies. For example, the UN's agenda for Human Security and Sustaining Peace could be advanced by the MPD.
- One means of developing the MPD concept would be to learn from the experiences of other countries. For example, recent research shows that dominant national narratives may strongly determine policy outcomes, perpetuating continuity and blocking progressive reform on international policy.
- If the MPD is to have a lasting impact, a Labour government would thus need to find a way of reorienting the UK's wider approach to national and international security policy in a progressive direction.

1.2 The international context: what does ‘Global Britain’ mean for the MPD?

- The Conservative government’s post-Brexit vision of ‘Global Britain’ focuses on military power projection and the development of relationships with authoritarian regimes. In contrast, Labour has committed to an ethical foreign policy, focusing on human rights, democracy, diplomacy and peace building.
- Despite this, and Jeremy Corbyn’s willingness to challenge the status quo in these areas, Labour’s recent approach to defence and foreign policy has been relatively cautious and moderate.
- Historically, proposals to substantively redirect the UK’s international policy in a progressive direction have faced strong domestic resistance from economic, military and political elites, with British dependence on the USA presenting a significant obstacle internationally.
- Given the gap between what the public and decision-making elites think should be the priorities for national security, an opportunity exists for Labour to present a new approach that reflects public concerns and explains, for example, how an ethical foreign policy led by the MPD can reduce terrorism.
- An opportunity also exists for Labour and the MPD to address the highly secretive nature of international policy and prioritise transparency, democracy and accountability on these issues in government.
- More ambitious changes to the UK’s international policy will require an active civil society working alongside the MPD and sympathetic political parties to alter popular conceptions of security, provide education and harness support for progressive action, for example, on nuclear disarmament.

1.3 The domestic context: can Labour forge a new consensus on UK defence and foreign policy?

- Developing a consensus on a new direction for UK international policy is complicated by the fact that whilst the UK public may be war weary following the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, a lingering sense of national greatness and nostalgia for empire remains in their ‘deep story’ concerning British identity.
- Ongoing internal conflict in Labour, the relatively low electoral salience of defence and foreign policy, the Conservative party’s ‘ownership’ of the defence debate and public distrust concerning Labour’s competency on national security are also barriers to developing progressive approaches to security.
- Labour’s task is therefore to understand the ‘deep story’ of the British people and propose a positive alternative vision for the UK’s international policy which responds to their hopes, fears, beliefs, needs and interests.
- The MPD could ensure that the ‘Global Britain’ concept focuses on diplomacy and peacemaking, for which there is significant public support. Whilst such measures will help implement an ethical foreign policy in the short-term, advancing national and international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament will require longer-term efforts by the MPD and civil society.

- Although the Conservative Party is clearly opposed to the MPD concept, support would likely be forthcoming—to different degrees—from the Greens, Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and Scottish National Party.

2.1 The potential strengths and weaknesses of an MPD

The interviews conducted with the peace, disarmament and security community for this report provided several relevant findings regarding the potential strengths and weaknesses of Labour's MPD proposal.

In terms of arguments for or potential strengths of the MPD, these included:

1. **Institutionalising support for peace, diplomacy and international law**
2. **Contributing to peace and disarmament education**
3. **Promoting alternative approaches to security such as non-offensive defence**
4. **Linking up peace and disarmament with environmental and social justice**
5. **Developing the UK's conflict resolution and peace building work**
6. **Realising arms conversion and defence diversification / reducing military spending**
7. **Advancing nuclear disarmament and the nuclear ban treaty**
8. **Ensuring the participation of women and a gendered perspective in policy-making**
9. **Engaging with civil society at home and abroad**
10. **Diverting tax contributions to support non-violent approaches to security**

In terms of arguments against and potential weaknesses of the MPD, these included:

1. **The danger of the MPD being 'window dressing'**
2. **Lack of an international partner or disarmament workplan / tensions with Russia**
3. **Previous problems with posts similar to the MPD**
4. **Duplicating existing work of other departments / money better spent elsewhere**
5. **The problematic 'peace and disarmament' title**
6. **Lack of public support or awareness / media opposition**
7. **The role being too narrow or weak**

2.2 Situating the MPD in its institutional context

- Labour currently propose that the MPD post will involve a hub and spokes arrangement to implement their, as yet unpublished, 'peace doctrine'. It is also envisaged that the MPD will be based out of a small private office operating at cabinet level.
- These arrangements appear to correspond well with the role as envisaged by several interviewees, who highlighted the need for the MPD to have a monitoring and oversight role in relation to other departments. Some argued that this would ensure that reforms pursuant to an ethical foreign policy were implemented.
- However, in order to avoid the MPD becoming disempowered or marginalised in office, the post would need to have the Prime Minister's backing and be part of a broader reconsideration of UK defence and foreign policy which had significant support from civil society and the public.

- Regarding the allocation of resources, different options exist in relation to the size and scope of the MPD's eventual remit. Labour should be clear about its relevant departmental spending plans and how the MPD's work may be funded, for example, by providing appropriate resources from the FCO and / or MOD.

2.3 Five options for the MPD

The MPD post could be configured in several different ways. The five options presented below, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, take the form of general approaches or characters that the post could assume:

1. New thinking to develop long-term, sustainable and human security objectives

A focus on human security, peace and disarmament could be combined with environmental and social justice in the UK's international policy, with these ideas brought into cabinet discussions by the MPD.

2. Demilitarisation and disarmament

In addition to a focus on conventional and nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, action on demilitarisation led by the MPD could include: exploring non-offensive defence and a humanitarian role for the armed forces; limiting arms exports and diversifying away from the production and export of military technology as part of a transition to a green economy.

3. Diplomacy, peace building and soft power

The MPD could focus on boosting international diplomatic processes such as the global nuclear ban treaty alongside other multilateral agreements and fora. Conflict resolution, prevention and peace building should also be a priority so that the UK becomes a world leader on these issues, with gender equality and rights a central focus.

4. Democratisation and education

The MPD could help to develop a War Powers Act, and generally ensure that government decision-making on war and peace is opened up to wider consultation and participation. Education and outreach to the public and civil society could also prove to be an important aspect of the MPD's work.

5. Becoming an ethical foreign policy watchdog

The MPD could take on a watchdog role whereby it provided monitoring and oversight of government departments, such as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department For International Development, so that they adhere to an ethical foreign policy.

3. Recommendations for Labour

- **Ensure coherence between the title, remit and configuration of the post**

It is important that the title of the post both appropriately reflects what work is principally to be carried out and provides clarity and coherence in relation to its aims and objectives, not least so that the minister is provided with appropriate and justifiable resources.

- **Lead the debate on a positive alternative vision for UK international policy**

Labour must continue to hold the government to account so that the UK acts responsibly and in line with its international legal and moral obligations. Winning the contest of ideas in opposition will, in the long-term, enable Labour to be more ambitious if it achieves power, opening up new opportunities for the peace, disarmament and human security agenda.

For the Shadow MPD

- **Be visible, direct, open to engagement and able to deal with criticism**

Several actions could be taken to develop the MPD role in opposition. For example, Labour should consult with academia, civil society and other military and security experts regarding the 'peace doctrine' prior to its publication, and ideas such as a humanitarian-focused military, new Peace, Disarmament and Security Select Committee and UK-Nordic Council on human security explored.

- **Hold the government to account and build parliamentary support for reform**

Opportunities to be a champion of an ethical foreign policy in opposition include: advocating for the establishment of a War Powers Act; making the case for a critical and selective partnership with the USA; developing policy proposals for defence diversification and arms export controls; exploring how the UK may establish a progressive bloc within NATO.

For civil society

- **Engage with Labour and other political parties on the MPD project**

Groups involved in issues covered by the MPD should consult with Labour and other supportive parties to exchange ideas and develop shared understandings on key subjects in order to develop thinking about the post.

- **Build cooperation and develop shared strategies**

Such groups should also convene joint meetings to discuss areas of mutual agreement to help advance, inform and create public discussion about the MPD's future work.

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Abbreviations

- **All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)**
- **Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA)**
- **British American Security Information Council (BASIC)**
- **Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)**
- **Committee on Arms Export Control (CAEC)**
- **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)**
- **Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF)**
- **Department for International Development (DFID)**
- **Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC)**
- **Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)**
- **Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS)**
- **Ministry of Defence (MOD)**
- **Minister for Peace and Disarmament (MPD)**
- **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**
- **Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**
- **Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)**
- **Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)**
- **Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP)**
- **Scottish National Party (SNP)**
- **United Nations (UN)**
- **United Nations Association UK (UNA-UK)**

Introduction

This report provides an assessment of the Labour Party's proposal to create a Minister for Peace and Disarmament (hereafter MPD). The idea of an MPD, initially put forward by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in 2016, led to Fabian Hamilton, (MP for Leeds North East) being appointed the Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament. The proposal was then discussed in Labour's 2017 Election Manifesto. Since his appointment, Hamilton has been developing the role, working on a 'peace doctrine' to outline the post's underlying principles and remit. Hitherto, however, there has been a lack of public discussion concerning what an MPD would entail and the different areas of work it could include—a gap that this report aims to help fill. Given the breadth and depth of the potential topics involved, rather than providing the final word on the MPD proposal, this report seeks to open up and contribute to a debate on the subject. This means both considering the overall value of the MPD as well as highlighting the obstacles to and opportunities for the post being a success given the many challenges involved.

Based on public statements regarding the post by official Labour publications, as well as comments by Corbyn and the interview conducted with Fabian Hamilton for this study, the MPD—as currently envisaged—would primarily deal with international issues such as multilateral nuclear disarmament and arms export controls, as well as working with the UN on 'conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict peacebuilding, and justice for the victims of war crimes'.¹ Presently, Hamilton's brief covers the countries of North Africa and the Middle East (not including Israel/Palestine), leading on 'all the other conflict areas in the region, such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen'.²

Labour proposes that the minister will 'work across the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office' in a hub and spokes arrangement to implement the aforementioned 'peace doctrine'. It is also envisaged that the minister will be based out of a small private office operating at cabinet level.³ This set of arrangements and priorities raises several political and practical questions, which this report addresses over two parts. For example, a key issue is how the post will deal with the intense controversy concerning the Labour Party's approach to defence and foreign policy. As is well known, Corbyn's prior willingness to challenge the political consensus in these areas, including his long-standing support for unilateral nuclear disarmament, has led to him being cast as a threat to national security by the Conservative party and is highly contested within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP).

Part One of this report begins by considering where the idea for an MPD came from and what may be learned from the UK and other countries' experiences of establishing similar roles to an MPD and alternative approaches to international policy. I then consider the UK's current role in the world and the different directions it may take in future, touching on the key debates and issues facing decision-makers today, including Brexit, the idea of Global Britain, the UK's relations with Russia and the USA as well as climate change. The state of domestic politics is next discussed in relation to these issues, focusing on public opinion and the positions of the main political parties on international policy in order to ascertain the potential for progressive and more radical change in areas relating to the MPD.

Following this, in Part Two, I examine the arguments for and against an MPD more closely, principally by drawing on interviews with a range of people with policy experience and knowledge in this field. From talking to academics, policy experts, campaigners and political figures, it soon became apparent that there are a variety of views on and interpretations of what an MPD would mean in practice. The views of these respondents are therefore discussed as a means of examining what obstacles will need to be overcome and what opportunities taken advantage of if the MPD post is to be a success. With regard to more practical concerns, a key issue is how the MPD will operate in terms of the machinery of government and relate to other departments with pre-existing aims and interests. Part Two therefore also includes an examination of possible institutional arrangements for the MPD, including resources and funding. Having reviewed the political and institutional issues involved, I then provide several different options for how an MPD might be configured, in addition to considering how these options may interact with political choices and developments in future.

PART ONE

Section 1.1 The roots of the Minister for Peace and Disarmament concept: precedents and potential for success

This section considers precedents for an MPD over two parts, looking firstly at institutional experiences focusing on disarmament involving the UK, before examining issues related to peace and disarmament in other countries, in order to consider what may be learned from these examples to inform future decision-making on an MPD. The roots of the MPD concept are also discussed to provide some background on how and from where it developed. Given that the MPD post as proposed is also set to focus on conflict prevention, resolution and peace building, which are areas where there has been more UK government activity in recent years, I principally explore these issues in Part Two of this study.

A very brief history of recent UK disarmament policy

The UK's previous experience of having a Minister for Disarmament began when Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson appointed Alun Gwynne Jones, later Lord Chalfont, to the post in 1968. This was the same year as the agreement of both the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), for which the UK was a depositary state, and the establishment of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), within which the minister sat as part of the Disarmament Department. This department oversaw all policy work on nuclear and conventional arms control and disarmament until 1972, when, as the website of the UK's National Archives explains, it was 'renamed the Arms Control and Disarmament Department' which 'oversaw an Arms Control and Disarmament Research Unit established to undertake research into the long-term implications of disarmament'.⁴

Whilst the Arms Control and Disarmament Department lived on into the 1980s, the election of a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in 1979 coincided with what Scilla Elworthy describes as a 'fall from grace' of arms control efforts involving the UK. Elworthy goes on to argue that this was, however, not the fault of 'one government in particular', because at a time of 'heightened international tension', arms control generally went 'out of fashion' with 'politicians in the West'.⁵ The end of the Cold War and the arrival into government in 1997 of New Labour, with its initial talk of an ethical foreign policy, suggested a UK-based peace and disarmament dividend might be on the cards.

However, following the USA's line, Tony Blair showed far greater enthusiasm for boosting defence spending, modernising the UK's nuclear weapons and conducting overseas military interventions. Partly in response to 'Blair's wars', in October 2003 Labour MP John McDonnell proposed a Bill to parliament that a 'Ministry of Peace' be established, with the 'function of promoting conflict resolution and the avoidance of military conflict'.⁶ This proposal was also supported by MPs from other parties such as Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party (SNP), as well as an NGO called 'The Ministry for Peace'.⁷ Whilst the idea for a ministry fell out of favour and did not, apparently, directly inform Corbyn's idea for an MPD, the Ministry for Peace group's focus on developing a society 'based on direct, structural and cultural *nonviolence*' remains valuable, not least because it provides a comprehensive and integrated philosophy on which an alternative approach to UK security might be developed.⁸

Gordon Brown's tenure as Prime Minister saw a greater rhetorical emphasis on nuclear disarmament efforts and some promising new initiatives, driven both by his need to shore up

support from Labour's left wing and a desire to contribute to nuclear non-proliferation.⁹ Following efforts by US and other prominent international statespeople to promote a nuclear weapons free world at this time, Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett announced in a June 2007 speech that 'when it comes to building this new impetus for global nuclear disarmament, I want the UK to be at the forefront of both the thinking and the practical work. To be, as it were, a "disarmament laboratory".¹⁰ Amongst other things, Beckett's speech led to the initiation of nuclear arms control and disarmament verification exercises involving the UK and Norway, which continue to this day.¹¹ Yet, despite such efforts, as with the USA, nuclear weapons modernisation, as well as significant spending on conventional military equipment, remained firmly on the agenda for the UK.

Subsequently, the 2010 Liberal-Democrat and Conservative coalition government appeared to maintain some emphasis on disarmament, although the post of Ambassador for Multilateral Arms Control and Disarmament was dissolved in 2011.¹² According to the NGO the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), the Arms Control and Disarmament Department was also 'renamed the Counter Proliferation and Arms Control Centre in 2013' and is now, 'managed jointly by the FCO, Ministry of Defence, Department for International Trade and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Within this Centre there is an Arms Control and Disarmament Research Unit, consisting of two staff members'.¹³ Yet BASIC notes that the FCO's focus has, for several years, been on a 'more coercive prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons'.¹⁴ Moreover, Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry drew attention to the current Conservative government's disdain for multilateral nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament by asking Prime Minister Theresa May in an October 2017 Guardian article, 'When did disarmament become such a dirty word?'¹⁵

International precedents for and principles informing an MPD

The idea of a Minister or Ministry for Peace and Disarmament also has roots in and would complement various initiatives by the United Nations (UN) and other international bodies. For example, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council the UK has a 'primary responsibility' for maintaining its ideals and framework.¹⁶ Of particular relevance here is Article One of the UN Charter, which calls for the 'prevention and removal' of threats to international peace and security, including 'acts of aggression', using means 'in conformity with the principles of justice and international law'.¹⁷ Moreover, as Sir Richard Jolly notes, since the early 1990s, the UN has been 'calling for a shift of focus from military security (the use of armaments and other military means for protecting a country's borders) to human security (using non-military means to protect its citizens from a variety of more general threats)'.¹⁸ In 1999 the UN General Assembly passed a motion calling for governments to 'work in partnerships with peoples from all parts of the community for the promotion of a culture of peace'.¹⁹ More recently, goal 16 of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, agreed in 2015, was 'dedicated to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels'.²⁰

Another important related concept is that of 'sustaining peace', which emerged as a key framework for the UN following two influential reviews of the organization's activities that concluded in 2015. According to Dr Ian Davis, this framework 'envisages multiple interventions, including strengthening the rule of law, promoting sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, social development, sustainable development and national reconciliation'. For Davis, since the UK has previously supported resolutions advancing this concept, the MPD could focus on ensuring that the British government 'recognises sustaining peace as its primary responsibility

in identifying, driving and directing priorities, strategies and activities, including in defence and foreign policy'.²¹

There are a few international initiatives aimed at pushing forward the UN agenda on peace. For example, the Global Alliance for Ministries and Infrastructures of Peace is 'a home for the various national efforts related to peace and disarmament.' Moreover, according to the website of the Peace Alliance, 'the world can celebrate four Ministries of Peace at this time: Costa Rica, Nepal, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea; and South Sudan, Philippines, and Kyrgyzstan have an Office of Peace at the highest level of government'.²² More recently, in February 2018 the New Zealand government announced that it would be appointing a Minister for Disarmament, with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern connecting this to her nation's long-held anti-nuclear stance.²³ Many countries, including the UK, also retain ambassadors who attend meetings at the conference for disarmament and other international fora such as NPT conferences.

Other prominent pre-existing examples of disarmament institutions include the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), which began in 1961 before being merged into the State Department in the late-1990s.²⁴ ACDA's remit was to 'strengthen the national security of the United States by formulating, advocating, negotiating, implementing and verifying effective arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament policies, strategies, and agreements'.²⁵ Yet ACDA's role was weakened over time, despite hopes that the USA would make meaningful progress on nuclear abolition following the end of the Cold War. In terms of conflict prevention and resolution, the US Institute of Peace has a budget of \$38m and conducts work in several regions of the world, whilst European states work through the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union's External Action Unit. Numerous countries around the world also contribute to regional peacekeeping operations, including through the United Nations.²⁶

Studying other countries' institutional arrangements and experiences in order to draw lessons for both the UK's defence and foreign policy and the MPD is a potentially useful exercise, although there is not space in this report for a full assessment. A future study of this topic might include a consideration of successes and failures in relevant policy areas in order to consider how the UK could develop best practice—as well as how the domestic political obstacles to prioritise peace and disarmament were overcome.

One such possible initiative in this direction was suggested by Fabian Hamilton, who discussed in his interview with me the possibility of setting up a UK-Nordic group to, amongst other things, learn from how Scandinavian countries approach international peace building and security.²⁷ As Dr Ian Davis notes, this could include the UK studying Sweden's 'feminist foreign policy', which aims at establishing 'equality between men and women'.²⁸ Davis also argues that the UK could help form a progressive bloc in NATO, which may include Scandinavian nations and discussions of non-nuclear approaches to security.

In addition, UK-based NGOs have recently produced research to consider how other nations organise their international policy and security arrangements and what the UK may learn from them. For example, Rethinking Security's 2018 study *Contrasting Narratives: A Comparative Study of European and North American National Security Strategies* observes that, 'it is likely that prevailing interpretations of history exert a powerful influence on security narratives, providing a strong storyline regarding the factors that have contributed to security or insecurity in the past'.²⁹

The key point being made here is that dominant narratives within a nation may strongly determine policy outcomes, perpetuating continuity and blocking progressive reform. In the UK's case, its singular status and history—including a national self-image as a former Imperial power, as well as the victor of two World Wars and the Cold War—are strong drivers of its militaristic posture. It should also be recognised that the UK's particular history and national identity means that other nations' experiences may have limited value in terms of what may be learnt from them, for example, if the MPD went beyond a focus on conflict prevention and peace-building and towards a more comprehensive and radical reshaping of UK international policy.

As Celia McKeon of Rethinking Security thus persuasively argues in relation to the MPD concept,

'while a peace and disarmament minister is a positive idea, insofar as it signals a break with existing foreign, security and defence policy, the more important task is to rethink and reframe the government's overall approach to national and global security. Attitudes to, and policies on disarmament flow from the top-level narrative and direction of travel on security. If the government were to frame a progressive new agenda for security, then ministerial responsibility and resources could be allocated for scoping out and implementing specific policies including on disarmament.'³⁰

McKeon's observation raises several questions, which are of particular relevance to this report. These include, for example: what are the main narratives about national security within British society and how do such narratives vary between different sections of society? What obstacles to and opportunities for change do these narratives present for those who wish to reform international policy? What developments in public opinion are necessary to facilitate the development of bigger changes to the UK's international policy? In order to explore these questions in relation to the MPD concept, the next two sections of this study considers the MPD in terms of the international and domestic political context. In doing so, I examine how top-level, elite narratives relate to the rest of UK society—for example, civil society and the public—in order to better appreciate the challenges involved in establishing the MPD and making it a success.

Section 1.2 The international context: what does 'Global Britain' mean for the Minister for Peace and Disarmament?

This section considers the differences between established thinking on international policy and the direction a Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn might take. Understanding these differences will allow us to better appreciate the thinking behind the idea of an MPD and the domestic and international political obstacles and opportunities for making this post a success. Traditionally, as the Foreign Affairs Committee's (FAC) recent inquiry on the concept of Global Britain noted, the attributes which make the UK a 'global player' include it being 'a nuclear-armed P5 member of the United Nations Security Council, the second-biggest military spender in NATO, a major contributor to humanitarian aid around the world, and a key member of networks such as the Commonwealth, the G7 and the G20.'³¹ The significance of this privileged position, as US political scientist Samuel Huntington noted in 1993, is that 'Global political and security issues are effectively settled by a directorate of the United States, Britain and France'.³²

As seen by events in Syria and elsewhere, despite the end of the Cold War, this triumvirate still seeks to exert control today, although the rise of China and a defiant Russia—amongst other influential state and non-state actors—raise significant problems for the West in terms of how it should, under US leadership, collectively respond. For the UK meanwhile, remaining in the

directorate and a big player in managing global order, requires constant action, ambition, will and commensurate military spending. Maintaining the UK's position would be challenging enough today, given prevailing conditions of austerity, yet recent developments—primarily the UK's decision to leave the European Union and the arrival into office of President Trump in the USA—have significantly complicated decision-making on international policy. Despite these ruptures, in early 2017 Prime Minister Theresa May announced that she was committed to maintaining the UK's global position. Yet, as Mark Curtis noted, May and her government's vision of 'Global Britain' included a focus on military power projection and the development of relationships with authoritarian regimes.³³

Labour's 2017 manifesto provided some clarity on how its vision for the UK's future engagement with the world—and the idea of Global Britain—contrasted with that of the Conservative party, by outlining how a Corbyn-led government would 'put conflict resolution and human rights at the heart of foreign policy, commit to working through the UN, end support for unilateral aggressive wars of intervention and back effective action to alleviate the refugee crisis'. In terms of diplomacy, the manifesto also outlined how Labour would not be 'afraid to disagree' with the USA when the Trump administration 'chooses to ignore' the UK and USA's 'shared values'.³⁴

Whilst the FAC criticised the government for lacking a strategy to make Global Britain a reality, Labour claimed that it would develop 'a modern and inclusive strategy, uniting the interwoven foreign policy instruments of diplomacy, defence and development.' Moreover, the gap established between the Conservative government and Labour's international policy was underlined by the latter's intent to prioritise 'peace, universal rights and international law'. The proposed MPD, would thus, amongst other things, lead work to realise Labour's strategy on 'protecting civilians in conflict, setting out detailed plans for work on conflict prevention and resolution, post conflict peacebuilding, and justice for the victims of war crimes.'³⁵

Elsewhere, in May 2017, Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry wrote in the Guardian that a Labour government would return to former foreign secretary Robin Cook's ethical foreign policy, taking 'immediate steps in government to enact it'.³⁶ As Lord David Owen and David Ludlow recently argued, Cook's ethical foreign policy had previously been 'contested from No.10 and finally died on the streets of Baghdad after the invasion in 2003'.³⁷ A Corbyn government could thus present an opportunity to implement an ethical foreign policy consistently and across government, within which the MPD could form an important component.

Yet Labour's inability to resolve its internal divisions, which I discuss more in Section 1.3, were the likely cause of it suspending its 2016 Defence Review. Seasoned analysts, such as Professor Paul Rogers and Dr Rebecca Johnson, had strongly argued that this review should consider scrapping the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system.³⁸ Thornberry reportedly justified this delay by arguing that Brexit required the party to reassess the UK's economic position, but she and her senior colleagues in the party were clearly also keen to avoid handing the Conservatives a chance to expose Labour splits on this totemic issue.³⁹ Ultimately, this decision was a blow to those who hoped that the review would provide a real opportunity to rethink the status quo and suggested that Labour were going to pursue a cautious approach towards defence and foreign affairs for the foreseeable future.

The roots of continuity for UK international policy

Aside from disagreements in and between the main political parties, the challenges posed by international tensions and the magnetism of US power, historically, one of the main barriers to reorienting UK international policy in a more progressive direction is its highly centralised and

secretive nature. In order to deal with this opacity, several commentators such as Mary Kaldor, Scilla Elworthy and Mark Curtis have, in recent decades, variously proposed a range of measures that would increase popular participation in questions of war and peace and make them subject to processes of transparency and accountability.⁴⁰ Moreover, as Dan Smith observed in the 1980s, which is the last time the Labour Party sought to challenge the prevailing political consensus, ‘any attempt to resolve the main dilemmas’ of British defence policy ‘must be based on an effort to deal with their domestic roots’.⁴¹ The point Smith was making was that without social change in such a class based society as the UK’s, then it is unlikely that the fundamental tenets of British international policy, characterised by continuity and a strong resistance to change by the political and military establishment, will move in a progressive direction.

The same argument applies today, as can be seen from the UK’s particular focus on commerce in its foreign affairs. As Thomas Raines pointed out in his 2015 study of British attitudes to international policy, this focus ‘reflects the systemic importance of a relatively small number of multinational companies to the UK’s economic health’.⁴² Such economic and political elites naturally want business and trade to be at the centre of the UK’s foreign policy. One significant result of this in recent years, as Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, commented to the FAC in 2015, was that human rights are no longer a ‘top priority’ for the Government within his department as they had been ‘in the past’, since precedence has been given to the Conservative’s ‘prosperity agenda’.⁴³

Raines also notes that the British public (who do not control investment decisions and may well not benefit from them) are more focused on security questions closer to home, such as ‘border protection and counterterrorism’. Similarly, a key finding of Catarina Thomson’s 2018 report into ‘the differences and commonalities that exist between security elites and the general public’ was that,

‘the public feels more threatened by issues that are considered less critical for security elites (including international terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and large numbers of economic migrants and refugees coming to the UK) – something to be expected as they touch on economic and social issues that are closer to the public’s immediate interests.’⁴⁴

This observation gets to the root of the division between elite and public perspectives of what the UK’s national interests are and shows the potential for the Labour Party to advance an alternative approach in this area that is more in line with the values and views of the majority. The focus of the public on terrorism highlighted by Thomson’s report is made even more pertinent given the fact that, according to a YouGov poll in 2017, ‘the majority of the public believe, as the Labour leader appears to, that British foreign policy has been at least in part responsible for terror attacks on the UK’. The significance of this poll for Labour now is that, ‘voters from across all parties were more likely to side with the Corbyn stance than not.’⁴⁵ Yet despite such findings, other polls indicate that Conservative leaders remain more trusted on national security than Corbyn, which may at least partly be a result of doubts regarding his previous links with militant groups based in Ireland and Palestine, in addition to Labour not yet properly explaining their policies to the electorate, or convincing them of Labour’s competence and internal unity on these issues.⁴⁶

Given the democratic imperative of reforming international policy so that it better aligns with public opinion, the proposals in Labour’s 2017 manifesto regarding democracy are particularly important. For example, the manifesto states that, ‘a Labour government will establish a Constitutional Convention to examine and advise on reforming the way Britain works at a fundamental level’.⁴⁷ Although these proposals were not explicitly linked in the manifesto to

questions of defence, diplomacy and development, Corbyn did recently indicate the relevance of institutional democratisation to defence and foreign affairs when discussing the UK's use of military force against the Syrian government. This he did by making the case for a War Powers Act that would bring into law the convention on consulting parliament regarding the use of force.⁴⁸ Notably, a 2010 study by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces found that the 'British Parliament has only "very weak" war powers', in comparison with 24 other European democracies, many of whom have 'strong' or 'very strong' parliamentary war powers.⁴⁹

Overall, the significance of the preceding discussion for the MPD post is that whilst opportunities certainly exist to advance progressive changes to UK defence and foreign policy, it is vital to understand the sources and shape of the strong resistance to substantive change emanating from influential domestic and international constituencies. Awareness of these obstacles has surely already moderated Labour's recent approach to these issues, despite Corbyn and others' willingness within the party to challenge the status quo. Whether the MPD will seek or be able to lead on a more ambitious programme of progressive reform is therefore intimately connected to the wider strategic choices on international policy that the Labour leadership feels it can make, particularly given the balance of political forces in the UK. In order to better understand the potential for meaningful change in these policy areas and what opportunities may be taken advantage of, in the next section I therefore examine the UK's domestic political landscape in more depth, focusing on British public opinion and the positions of the main political parties concerning defence and foreign affairs.

Section 1.3 The domestic context: can Labour forge a new consensus on UK security, defence and foreign policy?

Having briefly reviewed the international context and policy orientations of the current government and Labour Party, this section looks at the domestic political context that the MPD will be launched in and have to respond to. In doing so, I review the relevant attitudes and positions of key actors in the debate, principally focusing on public opinion in relation to the positions of the main political parties, in order to assess some of the potential obstacles to and opportunities for the MPD role being a success. The importance for this study of considering both public and elite attitudes is that, as discussed above, given the UK's particular history and existing institutions, significant changes in its international policy would require the development of supportive and active constituencies within the public and civil society at large.

Understanding international policy—and public opinion on it—is complicated by the fact that there are several different levels to the debate. These range from the UK's history, including the legacy of Empire and two World Wars, to recent military interventions and specific issues—such as terrorist threats, cyber-security and more traditional concerns—such as nuclear weapons, human rights, the arms trade, relations with other nations, conflict resolution and peacekeeping. The obvious temptation for the British political class, driven by short-term electoral cycles—both at home, but also in the USA, given Washington's decisive influence over Whitehall decision-making—is thus to simplify reality into familiar narratives and maintain continuity in order to avoid unwelcome disruptions and damaging political conflict which may bring more political costs than gains at home and abroad. Institutional pressures and the force of habit thus strongly determine top decision-maker's choices so that business as usual wins out over crafting sustainable and responsible long-term alternatives, despite the obvious and growing threats to the life, liberty and wellbeing of people in the UK and beyond posed by issues such as conflict involving nuclear weapons and climate change.

However, it is also reasonable to speculate that the British people's understanding of themselves and their country is shifting, driven by the confluence of different economic, political and social—including generational—factors. A useful way of trying to understand people's attitudes and preferences, and how they inform policy formation, has been developed by sociologist Arlie Hochschild, who refers to the 'deep story' people maintain. As Hochschild explains,

'A deep story is a feels-as-if story—it's the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgment. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel. Such a story permits those on both sides of the political spectrum to stand back and explore the subjective prism through which the party on the other side sees the world. And I don't believe we understand anyone's politics, right or left, without it. For we all have a deep story.'⁵⁰

This study is therefore based on the assumption that Labour's task under Corbyn, if it is to form the next government, move UK international policy in a progressive direction and make the MPD a success, is to understand the deep stories of the British people and other key political actors and then propose a positive alternative vision for the UK which responds to their hopes, fears, beliefs, needs and interests. One of the principle questions this report poses is thus—how do the values and goals represented by the MPD relate to the British people's deep story, if at all? In order to address this question, I begin this section by exploring public opinion on key issues relevant to the MPD before discussing the views of other key domestic actors, particularly political parties.

Great Britain: great power?

A 2014 YouGov poll for Chatham House found that a majority of the public thinks that the UK should aspire to be a 'great power' rather than accept that it is in decline. Another YouGov poll, in the same year, on the legacy of the British Empire, found that 'by three to one, British people think the British Empire is something to be proud of rather than ashamed of – they also tend to think it left its colonies better off, and a third would like it to still exist'.⁵¹ These findings support Paul Flynn MP's observation that the 'British psyche is still deeply nationalist with lingering imperial traits'.⁵² Such sentiments likely inform the government's attempt to rebrand the UK as 'Global Britain' following the decision to leave the European Union. Yet as Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum, noted in 2017, it is 'dangerous and regrettable' for the UK to focus almost exclusively on the 'sunny side' of its own history rather than conducting the kind of 'rigorous and courageous' approach that Germany has taken towards its troubling past.⁵³

Whilst nostalgia for empire may still exist in the hearts and minds of some, responses to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan suggest a different story. For example, a 2010 research project by academics Rob Johns and Graeme Davies found that 35% of the British public either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'The use of military force only makes problems worse', whilst 42% were neutral and 25% disagreed or strongly disagreed.⁵⁴ Elsewhere, Patrick Wintour of the Guardian reported in 2014 that 'senior figures in the Ministry of Defence' were concerned that 'an increasingly multicultural Britain' would change the nature of UK overseas interventions. For example, 'long-term war weariness' was amongst the 'future configurations' that 'would make the recent intervention in Libya possible...but not a repeat of Afghanistan or Iraq'.⁵⁵ Overall, as Dr Joel Rogers De Waal of YouGov observes, 'the shadow of Iraq and Afghanistan hangs indefinitely over public opinion' so that future interventions must be limited, follow international law and have Parliamentary approval.⁵⁶

Issues and initiatives in relation to war and peace

The MPD post, if established, is likely to be required to respond to a variety of sub-issues in the area of war and peace. In order to better appreciate political support for the proposed workplan of the MPD, it is therefore useful to study the number of public opinion polls that exist on specific issues covering topics such as nuclear weapons, conflict resolution and peace building, international relations, NATO membership and human rights.

To begin with conflict resolution and peace building, two recent polls conducted by United Nations Association-UK (UNA-UK) and Conciliation Resources are useful, with the former finding that, 'the majority of Britons think strong international relationships are more important than a powerful military'.⁵⁷ As for the latter, 'strong backing' was found 'among Britons for the idea of engaging with armed groups – including those labelled as proscribed terrorist organisations – in order to resolve conflicts around the world'. In addition, the survey tested levels of public support for broader peace building processes, finding that,

'Amid vigorous debate in the media over the UK's overseas aid spending, 60 per cent of people agree that the UK Government should invest more in peacebuilding, with only 10 per cent disagreeing with this idea. 71 per cent of UK respondents believe that peacebuilding plays a vital role in ending violent conflicts.'⁵⁸

With regard to nuclear weapons, whilst public opinion polls variously show majority support and opposition for the UK's nuclear status, depending on how the question is put, a 2013 YouGov poll found that 24% would like to give up nuclear weapons completely, 26% would like to replace the current system with another that is equally powerful and 35% would support replacing Trident with a less powerful or expensive system.⁵⁹

In terms of international alliances, a 2014 YouGov poll found that 61% of respondents thought that NATO is either 'vital' or 'important' to UK security. However, a larger number of respondents also thought that the UK should have closest ties with the EU (30%) rather than the USA (25%), suggesting the European dimension of the alliance may be more important to the public. As for human rights, a 2016 poll by the Pew Research Center found that '72% of those who place themselves on the left of the ideological spectrum say improving human rights should be one of Britain's most important foreign policy goals, compared with just 32% of those on the right'.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, on the specific question of whether an MPD is a good idea or not, there is very limited data. For example, in response to the question posed by YouGov in 2017, 'Would we be safer if the government had a minister for peace?' 15% said we would be safer, 3% said we would be less safe and 80% said it would make no difference either way. As this one survey suggests, people may be unaware of the issues involved and thus uncertain in their responses, or not believe the MPD could successfully challenge existing ministries, highlighting the need for the Shadow MPD to begin developing a stronger public profile.⁶¹

The electoral salience of international policy

Another key question, both for political parties in general when shaping their international policy and for the future of the MPD, is the extent to which defence and foreign policy issues are political priorities for people or influence election results. In terms of recent elections, foreign policy and defence don't tend to enter the top five most important electoral issues for voters. For example, according to YouGov's political tracker, defence and security was, for those polled, only the sixth or seventh most important issue facing the UK in 2018.⁶² Significantly, however, a 2017 poll by the British Election Study found terrorism to be the second 'single most important issue facing the

country', behind Brexit and narrowly before the NHS in third place—a phenomenon that may be partly explained by the high-profile terror attacks that took place in the UK during that year.⁶³

Overall then, whilst the picture is made more complex by the various aspects of these issues concerning defence and foreign policy, some important trends may be discerned which could usefully inform the development of the MPD post. For example, whilst the UK public may be war weary following Iraq and Afghanistan, a lingering sense of national greatness remains in their 'deep story'. This raises the question of how Britain should be 'great', if the public only accepts the use of military power in limited circumstances, so that it follows international law and humanitarian ends? One answer to this is that conflict resolution and prevention—as well as peace building—appear at present to be less controversial than nuclear disarmament in the public's mind. This presents an opportunity for Labour and the MPD to ensure 'Global Britain' focuses on diplomacy and human security, developing the UK's reputation as a peacemaker, not least because this may help prevent terrorism—which should be clearly communicated to the public. As Dr Catherine Barnes has argued in a 2007 report for Conciliation Resources, the benefits of such an approach could be that it,

'might help to prevent the UK from being a target of terrorist actions and other hostility. It may help to counterbalance the effects of the UK's interventionist foreign policy that has seemingly led to increased hostility towards the UK and radicalising some elements in the country'.⁶⁴

Achieving British nuclear disarmament, meanwhile, may prove to be a more long-term goal. This is because nuclear possession is, for a significant portion of the public and policy elite, associated with the defence of the realm and maintaining national power and influence on the world stage. Such beliefs are currently heightened since Russia, as well as Iran and North Korea, are being presented by sections of the military and political establishment as an urgent and growing threat to Britain's security.⁶⁵ The MPD could therefore contribute to national and international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts in the short-term by both highlighting the costs and risks of nuclear possession whilst also contributing to efforts aimed at easing international tensions—particularly between the West and Russia.

The Labour Party

In terms of Labour's ability to rethink UK international policy, a key question is whether the party wishes to principally appeal to its current base of support or craft a nationally popular policy. Regrettably, since Corbyn's ascent to the leadership, infighting has compromised the party's ability to develop and advocate a progressive approach to defence and security—which could have given additional weight to the MPD's position—just when real opportunities for such a national conversation were emerging. Labour's Defence Policy Review was thus shelved in late 2016, with Clive Lewis (before being moved from Shadow Defence to Shadow Business Secretary) announcing during the party's annual conference that his party would not seek to 'undo' its support for replacing the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system before the next general election.⁶⁶

Given the ever-rising costs and risks involved with constructing the UK's next generation of nuclear-armed submarines, party strategists may have made this move in the hope that the nuclear issue will be as much of an albatross for the government as the negotiation and implementation of Brexit—in addition to preventing the Conservatives using it as a political

weapon to highlight Labour's internal troubles.⁶⁷ Whilst Labour's decision was obviously disappointing for the pro-disarmament camp, it is not surprising given the varied views within Labour and the union movement on this topic. Several prominent union figures have expressed deep scepticism regarding the potential of the UK to diversify its economy and industry away from military production.⁶⁸ Thus on the one hand, prominent unions such as Unite espouse a proud commitment to internationalism, with peace and disarmament front and centre, whilst on the other hand exclaiming that the protection of existing jobs is their first priority.⁶⁹

For Corbyn to accomplish a swing within Labour to favour unilateral nuclear disarmament would thus be an impressive feat given that, according to the Telegraph, up to 130 of the 232 Labour MPs in Parliament support the UK's possession of nuclear weapons, with up to 90 opposing.⁷⁰ Elsewhere, the lack of appetite amongst the British public for leaving NATO, as well as the strong support within Labour for the military alliance, has led Corbyn to argue that the alliance needs to be brought 'under democratic control' and consider carefully future eastwards expansion, rather than for British secession.⁷¹ Other evidence shows considerable public disquiet with the status quo, including a 2015 YouGov poll which found that a majority of swing Labour voters want the party to be 'less subservient to the USA', not 'get involved in American wars' and instead be 'more positive about Britain's role in Europe'.

Looking more widely, Peter Osborne provided an apposite summary of parliament's stance on issues of war and peace when reviewing how in October 2016 more than 100 Labour MPs refused to back a motion concerning Saudi Arabia's bombing of Yemen, leading to its defeat. The motion—tabled by Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry—called for a full independent UN-led investigation to be established 'into alleged violations of international humanitarian law in the conflict'.⁷² For Osborne, the Yemen vote demonstrated 'something that has been apparent ever since the vote on 18 March 2003 to support the invasion of Iraq: the party of war holds a majority in the Commons'. This party, he wrote, 'comprises virtually all of the Conservative Party and the Blairite wing of Labour' and provides 'a clear and demonstrable connection between the vote for war in Iraq, opposition to an Iraq inquiry, support for the calamitous intervention in Libya, and opposition to Jeremy Corbyn'.⁷³ It is thus reasonable to suggest that the 'party of war' Osborne alludes to would be particularly hostile to the MPD if it developed in ways that challenged the pre-existing consensus on international policy.

The views of the Blairite wing of Labour are also represented by authors such as Professor Jon Bew, who outlines a deep story focusing on Labour's 'noble tradition' of 'liberal internationalism' which, he claims, 'the current sect at the top of the Labour Party represent a direct threat to'.⁷⁴ Bew's argument chimes with those within Labour who hold that Michael Foot's 1983 election manifesto, which on nuclear disarmament promised to 'use unilateral steps taken by Britain to secure multilateral solutions on the international level', was responsible for the party's electoral collapse, despite evidence to the contrary.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, Paul Mason, from the pro-Corbyn wing of the party, has attempted to articulate an international policy platform that fits with both the new leadership and the trade unions—but which would retain Trident.⁷⁶ Such debates once again highlight the challenges posed to the MPD given the difficulty in forging a new consensus on these issues that is acceptable to both the Labour leadership and the PLP—hence the temptation to maintain business as usual, albeit with moderate modifications to existing policy.

The Conservative Party

As has become abundantly clear since Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader, the Conservative party and other establishment voices will seek to capitalise on any perceived weakness or division in the Labour Party on defence and foreign policy, a predicament which has obvious relevance to the proposed MPD post. The Conservatives feel that as the self-proclaimed 'natural party of government' they own these issues and enact policies best reflecting the majority of the population's deep story, as the party that presided over victory in World War Two, the Cold War and Falklands War.

A bullish confidence in their political standing on this issue thus informs the hostile comments on the MPD by Conservative MP Sir Gerald Howarth, who is reported to have said that,

'It is a complete absurdity to appoint a minister for peace. What are they going to do, go around and be nice to people? That is not the way the world works. We face a pretty unprecedented time of international tension with British armed forces on operations as we speak. It is simply peacenik Corbyn posturing and putting the nation's defence at risk, were the nation ever to be so foolish as to give him the keys to No 10.'⁷⁷

Elsewhere, Conservative MP Johnny Mercer commented that,

'It is clearer than ever that Labour cannot be trusted to keep our country safe. Abandoning Trident, disbanding our armed forces and now a Minister for disarmament. Freedom is not free. I do not want us to relearn our painful lessons of the past that required such great sacrifice.'⁷⁸

Such sentiments can also be explained by the strong support for military spending amongst Conservative voters, the prevalence of Cold War stereotypes, and the symbolism of Trident as a means of painting any opponent as weak on defence, as witnessed with former Prime Minister David Cameron's extraordinary allegation that Corbyn's ideas made Labour a 'threat to national security'.⁷⁹ With Corbyn's Labour Party polling neck and neck in the polls with the Conservatives throughout 2018, the challenge posed to the traditions and values of the latter party, and its supporters, have thus led some amongst them to cast their opponents as both dangerous and illegitimate.

Other political parties

In his interview for this report, Fabian Hamilton explained that his goal was to be as 'open and inclusive as possible' as Shadow MPD, and that he was working to engage with MPs from all parties to promote 'liberal values' abroad.⁸⁰ It is possible and useful to speculate on the attitudes of the other political parties represented at Westminster to the MPD by reviewing their 2017 election manifestos alongside recent pronouncements. Of these parties, the Green party is likely to be most sympathetic to the MPD in its current shape. Indeed, the Greens have criticised Corbyn for not being more radical and committing to the cancellation of Trident replacement.⁸¹ Several aspects of the SNP manifesto also correspond to Labour's, including on arms export controls and peace-keeping. One area of divergence concerns the SNP's clear commitment to scrapping Trident.⁸² Plaid Cymru is also likely to be sympathetic to progressive approaches to security. For example, their manifesto pledges to 'oppose military action without UN and Parliamentary authority' and to 'scrap Trident'.⁸³

The Liberal Democrats would likely be sympathetic to many of the MPD's current aims, including the focus on multilateral nuclear disarmament. For example, their manifesto states that, 'the UK should only intervene militarily when there is a clear legal and/or humanitarian case, endorsed by a vote in parliament, working through international institutions whenever possible.'⁸⁴ Finally, the Democratic Unionist Party are likely to be least sympathetic to Labour's MPD proposal given their call for increased military spending and enthusiasm for military intervention and a traditional approach to defence and foreign policy, which includes the retention of nuclear weapons.⁸⁵

PART TWO

Section 2.1 The potential strengths and weaknesses of a Minister for Peace and Disarmament

Having briefly reviewed the origins of and precedents for the MPD as well as the domestic and international political context into which the post might be established, we may now begin to look more closely at the role itself in terms of its potential remit and functions. In order to canvas wider opinion on the MPD, I conducted interviews with a range of individuals and groups who have experience and knowledge of working on issues relating to peace, security and disarmament. Comprising more of an illustrative rather than an exhaustive review, this exercise was undertaken to help begin establishing the likely strengths and weaknesses of the proposed role as currently envisaged. Moreover, as noted above, if the MPD is to be a success it will need to draw on the support of civil society. Understanding different interested groups' ideas on the post at an early stage would thus likely be an important exercise for the minister.

Assessing the arguments from different experienced individuals regarding the possible advantages and disadvantages of an MPD is complicated by the fact that as something that doesn't exist in practice and which hasn't been widely discussed, respondents have different understandings of what the post might mean and are therefore likely to project their own ideas and interests onto it. My general initial impression based on the interview data was that awareness amongst civil society of the MPD proposal is of a mixed quality and limited in scope. For example, those who had better contacts with Labour tended to be better informed about the MPD. This may partly be a result of the Labour Party and its organs not promoting it widely, suggesting both that the party may not be fully aware or supportive of the proposal and that there is a need for greater engagement with civil society on this subject, which could occur concurrent with consultation and discussion on the post within Labour itself.

Despite these limitations, from the interviews it was possible to usefully identify: i) several key arguments supportive of the post, highlighting potential strengths ii) several concerns and criticisms of the post, highlighting potential weaknesses. I have therefore placed these arguments and ideas into two groups as outlined below. Where appropriate, respondents are directly quoted and/or their arguments summarised and contextualised. I also note the response of Fabian Hamilton to the points raised based on my interview with him, where possible.

i) Arguments for an MPD and potential strengths of the role

The following ten areas, listed in no particular order, summarise those arguments respondents gave that were supportive of or identified strengths in the proposed MPD post and the areas viewed as priorities for the role should it be established. I have tried to pick out those ideas from the interviews that were particularly thought provoking, relevant and original. Where useful I identify the frequency of support for an idea given by respondents, mainly as a means of indicating common ideas or themes across those surveyed.

1. Institutionalising support for peace, diplomacy and international law

Several respondents, including Dr Teresa Dumasy of Conciliation Resources, Sam Walton of Quaker Peace and Social Witness and Lindsey German of Stop the War, argued that the MPD

post would show that Labour was seriously committed to peace and disarmament. For Sir Richard Jolly, the post would also provide an opportunity to move the UK from a focus on military to human security, as envisaged by the UN.

Angie Zelter of Trident Ploughshares highlighted the importance of the MPD making a 'commitment to uphold international humanitarian laws' which would apply to areas including the UK's nuclear weapons. In addition, some respondents argued that the UK's use of military force and ties with countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia should be reviewed by the MPD, with Milan Rai of Peace News commenting that the post should help in 'assessing the humanitarian/human rights impact of, and reporting on British military/foreign policy.'

2. Contributing to peace and disarmament education

Some respondents saw the MPD as making a potential contribution to educating parliamentarians, military personnel and the public about peace and disarmament issues. This could be done, it was suggested, through putting issues such as peace building, conflict resolution and non-violent security on school and university curriculums. For Sarah Lasenby of Trident Ploughshares, the MPD post could thus help challenge the UK's 'culture of war and militarisation', whilst Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) Vice-President Bruce Kent noted that 'there is massive public ignorance about the way the international world works—or doesn't' so that it would be important for the MPD to ensure public access to educational materials on institutions such as the UN.

3. Promoting alternative approaches to security such as non-offensive defence

Respondents such as Eddy Canfor-Dumas, of conflict management consultancy Engi, highlighted the importance of the UK shifting to a non-offensive defence posture. This would involve moving away from capabilities focused on power projection towards those such as cyber security, intelligence and diplomacy. The MPD could thus help to 'coordinate' non-offensive defence with the other three 'pillars' of security i.e. 'civil defence', 'environmental defence' and 'preventive defence'.

Canfor-Dumas also noted that sections of the British military may be more open to such a reshaping of their role than commonly expected, not least because of their understanding of the importance of conflict prevention and protecting civilians as well as the changing nature of conflict. In response to this idea, Fabian Hamilton agreed that the MPD could advocate the UK's armed forces moving to a 'purely defensive' role and also that NATO should be a non-aggressive and non-nuclear alliance.⁸⁶

4. Linking up peace and disarmament with environmental and social justice

Some respondents, such as Angie Zelter and Josephine Roele of Gender Action for Peace and Security, highlighted the need for the post to link up peace and disarmament issues with other topics. These include gender equality, health, environmental sustainability and the refugee crisis. For Milan Rai, this could also include the concept of a just transition to a low-carbon economy. Looking more widely, UK-based NGOs such as Oxford Research Group have argued for the UK to adopt a sustainable security approach, 'prioritising and protecting the rights and needs of the majority of people, in Britain and the world, to advance social justice,

sustainable development and global stability’, whilst also recognising the interdependence of environmental, social and political issues when developing international policy.⁸⁷

5. Developing the UK’s conflict resolution and peace building work

Sir Richard Jolly emphasised how the UK, including in the FCO, has a wealth of experience and knowledge in the areas of conflict resolution as well as ‘in negotiation and reconciliation in peace-building situations’ which could be harnessed by the MPD. Dr Teresa Dumasy similarly outlined what she saw as the MPD’s remit, arguing that it should:

‘build up the capabilities and devote the resources to anticipate and support prevention of the crises of tomorrow. The priorities should also be based on a realistic and more humble assessment of the UK’s added value / comparative advantage, invest in people’s capacities for peacebuilding and prevention in conflict settings and seize more opportunities for peace, not only react to the risks of conflict.’

Dumasy went on to comment that conflict resolution and peace building tools could be made more coherent and strategic, so that the MPD helped to,

‘orchestrate and sequence UK’s relative resources and capabilities (including the use of sanctions) over a longer term period to ensure they are deployed to work *on* conflict and its root causes and drivers. They could also support and guide the work of the Foreign Secretary in building of alliances with other states to pursue a peace process.’

Other respondents drew particular attention to the need for the MPD to focus on rethinking the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). This initiative, set up by the government in 2015, ‘provides development and security support to countries which are at risk of conflict or instability’. For example, Eddy Canfor-Dumas argued that the MPD needed to ‘take on and develop’ the CSSF, whilst Dr Iain Farrell argued for the MPD to extend the work of the CSSF across government departments—an idea explored more in Section 2.2 below.

The need to reform the way the CSSF works was also highlighted in a March 2018 report by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which scrutinises UK aid spending and reports to the Commons’ International Development Committee. As the Guardian noted, the Commission warned ‘that shortcomings in the way the fund and programme are administered, including the programmes it supports, “are undermining the fund’s contribution to building peace, stability and security”’.⁸⁸ Notably, Labour’s 2017 manifesto included a promise to publish a strategy document covering these policy areas, led by the MPD—which should include a review of the CSSF given the concerns noted above.

6. Realising arms conversion and defence diversification / reducing military spending

Several respondents, including Arthur West of Scottish CND and Dr Steven Schofield, pointed to the importance of the MPD prioritising arms conversion or defence diversification in their work. Fabian Hamilton has previously commented that the UK ‘should not be selling weapons to any state that uses, or could potentially use, weapons we supply for internal repression or

for foreign wars'.⁸⁹ In addition, the UK has the world's fifth largest military budget and several respondents argued that the MPD should seek to redirect such spending onto civilian goods and services. For example, Ben Donaldson of UNA-UK suggested that the MPD could consult with the 'Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and local government...around the plausibility of diversification from defence sector'.

In 2017 the Trades Union Congress passed a motion calling for Labour to set up a shadow Defence Diversification Agency in close consultation with the Shadow Department for Industry.⁹⁰ Ann Feltham of Campaign Against Arms Trade stated that a group of NGOs working on this issue would prefer work on defence diversification, including the establishment of a new agency, to be handled by the Shadow Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Secretary 'given the need for arms conversion / defence diversification to be fully integrated into industrial strategy'.

This raises the question of the role the MPD would have in relation to these issues, given both the implications for UK defence and foreign policy and the expectations from sections of civil society and the media that the MPD would be leading work on defence diversification and arms export controls.

7. Advancing nuclear disarmament and the nuclear ban treaty

Several respondents, such as Kate Hudson, General Secretary of CND, saw the MPD post as a potentially important means of advancing the UK's responsibility to realise its nuclear disarmament obligations under the NPT. This would also include support for the nuclear ban treaty, which the current Conservative government has refused to sign.⁹¹ Peter Burt also commented that one of the MPD's 'important tasks' would be to 'devise a roadmap for how the UK could meet its disarmament commitments under the treaty'. Notably, the Labour Party has signalled its commitment to signing this treaty when in power, with Fabian Hamilton commenting that 'the British Government now needs to join the other 122 signatories to acknowledge and support the UN Nuclear Ban Treaty, so Britain can lead the way on the banning and eventual abolition of nuclear weapons'.⁹²

8. Ensuring the participation of women and a gendered perspective in policy-making

Groups I spoke to including Action Aid and Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), highlighted the importance of the MPD engaging with and supporting women's groups, for example, by 'increasing financial and technical resources' including on the 'peace processes for Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan'. This was necessary, according to Jon Date of Action Aid, to ensure:

'genuine and meaningful participation of women's rights organisations and women affected by conflict in all UK-hosted and supported peace, security and aid policy, programmes and events regarding fragile and conflict affected states.'

Other possible advantages raised by respondents such as Josephine Roele of GAPS, from a women's rights and feminist standpoint, include the MPD's ability to provide 'policy coherence', including on arms exports to countries in conflict, so that a 'gendered perspective' on peace and security is 'taken seriously' rather than being an 'add on' given the need for a 'broader consultative process for women's rights'.

9. Engaging with civil society at home and abroad

Sam Walton of Quaker Peace and Social Witness suggested that the MPD could act as a 'gatekeeper' providing access to government for civil society and interest groups. This was a role that, Walton noted, Jeremy Corbyn played for several years, but which the MPD could now take on, connecting with different sections of society in the UK as well as those suffering from oppression abroad, such as representatives from human rights groups in Bahrain, Yemen and elsewhere.

10. Diverting tax contributions to support non-violent approaches to security

For some respondents, the MPD post could contribute to their campaign efforts, such as diverting portions of their tax contributions from military to non-violent means of maintaining national security. For example, members of the Conscience Executive Committee I interviewed, such as David Milner, commented that the MPD post 'would provide a possible alternative destination for taxes that conscientious objectors do not wish to go to the military.' Others proposed that the MPD could then also monitor how the government distributed the funds i.e. to ensure they were spent on socially beneficial goods and services.

ii) Concerns and criticisms regarding the MPD proposal

The following seven points summarise the main areas of criticism and concern regarding the MPD post raised by respondents. Some of the points listed are objections to the existence of the MPD, while others are issues that need to be considered to make the role effective. These comments came from those both generally supportive of and more sceptical about the value of the post. Again, the points are presented in no particular order, with direct quotes given as appropriate with brief context and commentary provided where necessary.

1. The danger of the MPD being 'window dressing'

Milan Rai was one of a few respondents raising the concern that the MPD post 'could well end up as window dressing/propaganda.' This was because, Rai argued, that 'having a minister for peace and disarmament while investing in nuclear weapons/replacing Trident doesn't make sense to me.' However, Rai went on to comment that 'having a minister for peace and disarmament after a government had committed itself to disarmament and that minister having a role guiding us towards a more peaceful role in the world does make sense to me.' The danger Rai highlights here is that, 'if the post was established without the government having committed to disarmament', then the MPD is 'going to be either constantly fighting or constantly sidelined. Either way, they are unlikely to win significant funding or power.'

In response to this concern, Fabian Hamilton recognised the domestic political challenges involved in scrapping Trident but argued that even without the UK doing so there were still many actions that could be taken to ensure the UK becomes a leading voice for 'peace and sanity'. These include advancing disarmament diplomacy internationally and ensuring that the armed forces were used for peace building.

2. Lack of an international partner or disarmament workplan / tensions with Russia

Professor Malcolm Chalmers of the Royal United Services Institute argued that ‘in better times, it might make sense to have a junior Minister in the FCO to lead on these issues, but it is less clear there would be much of a role at the moment, at least on the disarmament side, given the absence of a credible Russian partner.’ For Professor Lawrence Freedman, the concern here is thus that the ‘without willing interlocutors such a position would be meaningless and eventually embarrassing.’ In addition, Paul Schulte (Honorary Professor at Birmingham’s Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security and former MOD Director of Proliferation and Arms Control) argued that the deadlock between major powers ‘offered little room for realistically transformative UK proposals, especially if these were to be organised around support for the Nuclear Ban Treaty’, which was ‘unanimously opposed by all NATO allies, and presupposed a world that doesn’t exist’.

3. Previous problems with posts similar to the MPD

Several respondents highlighted perceived problems or failures with previous attempts to establish a similar post to the MPD. Professor Chalmers thus stated in his correspondence that Harold Wilson’s Minister for Disarmament had ‘mixed results’. Meanwhile, Professor Freedman—referring to the low point in relations between the USA and Russia and the associated absence of arms control and disarmament discussions compared to the 1960s and 1970s—observed that ‘the basic problem was that this was a job that required international activity to fill it up. There was a lot more then than there is now.’

4. Duplicating existing work of other departments / money better spent elsewhere

A fairly common observation amongst respondents was that rather than diverting resources through the creation of a new post such as the MPD, it would be better to commit resources to revivifying the FCO, which has been subject to significant budget cuts since 2010, or other capabilities in support of existing structures. For example, Professor Freedman argued that the ‘best outcome is to strengthen FCO and ‘diplomatic resources.’

Similarly, Professor Beatrice Heuser observed that rather than the MPD being put in place, she already saw:

‘the FCO as the ministry that deals with peaceful relations. For arms control and reduction purposes, the MoD takes over as it has the experts on the kit, but usually arms control and reduction negotiations involve both MoD and the FCO personnel. So the structures are already in place.’

Similarly, Arthur West, Chair of Scottish CND, argued that one of the main obstacles to the MPD ‘might be the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office working in different ways’ whilst others also raised the fear that the MPD may act as a distraction from the FCO’s existing work. In response to these concerns, Fabian Hamilton argued that the MPD must work hard to prevent duplication and focus on departmental ‘integration’ to ensure a ‘collaborative operation’ in government.⁹³

5. Problematic ‘peace and disarmament’ title

Several respondents questioned the title of the proposed MPD post. For example, Eddy Canfor-Dumas argued that it would be ‘a red rag to a bull’, anticipating likely criticisms from the ‘defence establishment and right wing media’. Elsewhere, Professor Freedman commented that ‘peace is a pretty hopeless job description. Everyone wants it but there is no agreed view on how to get it. And do you mean the negative peace of no violence or the positive peace of social justice?’ Professor Schulte, meanwhile, observed that the ‘grandiosely idealistic’ title would exacerbate domestic and international suspicions that Jeremy Corbyn was intent on ‘dismantling the UK’s long-term identity as a strategically effective and responsible actor, or a reliable ally’.

These comments again highlight the issue of how domestic opponents of progressive proposals may seek to expose weaknesses for their own political ends. In order to respond to such negative framing of the post by hostile groups, Dr Ian Farrell therefore commented that the MPD would,

‘have to affirm that their policies were not pacifist but pacific; not aimed at peace at any cost like 1930s appeasers but at achieving fair and equitable relationships with other countries which enhance mutual economic and social development and do not use imbalances of power to exploit one party for the benefit of another.’

Others proposed alternative titles for the post based on their opinion of what the MPD should focus on. For example, Professor Paul Rogers suggested it may be better to call the post a Minister for ‘Peace and Security’, whilst Eddy Canfor-Dumas favoured including ‘Conflict Prevention, Stability and Security’ in the title, Sir Richard Jolly preferred ‘Human Security, Peace and Disarmament’ and Dr Ian Davis proposed ‘Minister for Human Security or Minister for Sustainable Peace’.

6. Lack of public support or awareness / media opposition

Several respondents noted important challenges to the success of the MPD post in terms of popular awareness and the public discourse. For example, Sir Richard Jolly noted that amongst the ‘public and media’ there is a ‘misunderstanding of the practical advantages and opportunities for disarmament’. Meanwhile, retired civil servant Mike Segal noted that the obstacles to the post ‘are huge’, because ‘the establishment and virtually all the media’ are ‘bitterly opposed’ to the type of ideas represented by the MPD. For Segal, it will therefore ‘take a huge effort to win over public opinion, which ultimately has to support the objectives if the policy is to succeed in the long term.’ Elsewhere Peter Burt and Ann Feltham noted that civil society groups focused on peace and disarmament issues should engage with the public and other activist groups in order to share ideas and information on new proposals such as the MPD.

7. The role must not be too narrow or weak

Another concern raised was that the role would be pushed aside, like a ‘shuttlecock’, in Paul Schulte’s formulation, between major departments for whom disarmament, arms control and peacebuilding were intrinsic parts of foreign, security and international development policy. Thus, for Paul Ingram, Executive Director of BASIC, ‘the main danger would be the work

being sidelined. The Minister would need the support of the whole cabinet, so this ought to be a regular agenda item within the weekly meetings'. Ingram was one of a few respondents, including author and journalist John Gittings, who favoured the post being part of a 'large single ministry'. Similarly, Angie Zelter noted that the demands of the post meant that it 'needs to go further than just an appointment of a Minister. The Minister needs to be part of the Cabinet too and to be able to sit in on all defence and foreign affairs discussions.'

Dr Teresa Dumasy also raised a concern about 'putting peace and disarmament together under one minister' so that it might be preferable for 'disarmament to be held by a dedicated MOD/FCO Minister and for 'peace' to be held by a FCO/DFID Minister'. The risk Dumasy felt needed to be addressed was that the 'peace' aspect of the MPD could become 'subsidiary and/or held hostage to the disarmament agenda which is political' since 'disarmament involves multilateral negotiation as well as domestic negotiation on how the UK would convert the arms industry—so FCO and MOD dual hatted might be better'.

Section 2.2 Situating the Minister for Peace and Disarmament in its institutional context

Having reviewed the domestic and international history and politics of an MPD as well as some of the main potential strengths and weaknesses of the proposed post, this section looks in more detail at practical and operational questions such as: what should the size and scope of the MPD's remit be; how might an MPD operate in terms of its position in government, including its relationship with existing departments; and what resources should the MPD be provided with? In doing so, I outline key aspects of the UK government's current institutional set up, in order to better understand the impact that the MPD might have if and when it is established.

Given the range of pertinent information on these questions provided by interviewees, I draw substantially on their ideas and expertise in my discussion. Once again, given the limitations of the report, the intention here is to provide an introduction to the most important aspects of the debate rather than a comprehensive or conclusive study. Following a review of these issues, in Section 2.3 I provide an outline of several possible guises and directions that the MPD could take, taking into account both existing institutional and political dynamics and future possible developments and preferences.

Opinions on the possible size and scope of the MPD post

Several interview respondents provided ideas on the potential size and scope of the MPD. As noted above, Labour currently propose a hub and spokes arrangement for the MPD to implement their, as yet unpublished, 'peace doctrine'. It is also envisaged that the minister will be based out of a small private office operating at cabinet level. It should be noted that respondents were not all aware of this proposed arrangement. In addition, responses were quite varied, with some advocating that a large department with cross-governmental powers accompany the MPD, whilst others favoured a more limited role. There were also some common views, for example, concerning the internal resistance to changing business as usual. Overall, from the responses it became clear that, when considering more minimal or maximal incarnations of the post, it is vital to also appreciate their institutional consequences, for example, at the party political and governmental levels.

On the question of the size and scope of the MPD, a useful point of departure was provided by Professor Paul Rogers who suggested that the minister in charge could lead a 'small department with free rein' in order to shake up thinking in Whitehall. Rogers drew attention to the precedent of previous initiatives such as Harold Wilson's Department of Economic Affairs and the Stabilisation Unit, formed in 2007.⁹⁴ Paul Ingram of BASIC outlined in more detail what this inward-facing aspect of the MPD's work could mean in practice, commenting that if the post were established its main focus should be on, 'ensuring all the relevant branches of government...are working together to deliver on a sustainable peace and security agenda in a holistic manner'. Thus, rather than the MPD's 'top priority' being on representing the government at 'international events' the minister should focus on making sure that the 'delivery of peace and disarmament' is 'integrated'.

Based on this analysis, Ingram suggested that the ideal approach would be for the MPD 'to conduct a root and branch review of government approaches, structure and policy and to involve as many interested parties with experience and expertise as possible. One place to start could be a focus on national security policy.' In order to implement these ideas, Ingram also proposed—assuming there was no wider 'structural reform'—that the MPD should be based in the cabinet office and have a 'roving brief' with a team of 'around 50 civil servants' as well as 'scope for external involvement through consultancy or grant funding' with a 'prime responsibility' to 'work with government departments to propose reforms, and initiate international proposals'.

Other respondents, such as Dr Iain Farrell, made a related point in terms of the international aspect of the MPD's work, arguing that the post-holder could have a 'broad brief', with a focus on providing oversight across 'any part of government which has involvement with other nations'. The MPD would thus become 'an extension of the CSSF by bringing in trade, industry and finance to have an overview of policies that may impact on fair trade.' In addition, the MPD could 'have scrutiny of private business practice and be able to recommend where this was creating tension and undermining government policy on economic and social development in fragile nations.' Similarly, Dr Teresa Dumasy of Conciliation Resources argued that the MPD could ensure that 'other areas of external relations' such as 'environmental, trade, and energy policy' are 'conflict-sensitive'. Such monitoring, it could reasonably be argued, would comprise important components of any governmental attempt to pursue an ethical foreign policy.

Peter Burt also favoured the MPD leading a group within government, suggesting that the role could comprise a 'second tier ministerial post with a dedicated team'. Establishing a role with some weight could also help 'ensure a legacy', for example, if a subsequent government diluted or scrapped the post. Moreover, for Burt, the MPD would need to act in ways that 'embedded' relevant ideas amongst the public. For Mike Segal, meanwhile, the MPD post could 'only be effective (a) with the full and continuing support of the Prime Minister, and (b) if the post is either a Cabinet one or at least the holder is given the right to attend Cabinet. If it is not a Cabinet post, the Secretary of State who is his superior must be given clear instructions that disarmament in all its forms is one of his/her top priorities'.

However, other interviewees, such as Professor Paul Schulte (who was also founding head of the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit, now the Stabilisation Unit), were sceptical about the effective leverage of an MPD comprising a cross-ministerial post or department, arguing that previous approaches to this model—such as the Stabilisation Unit—have disappointed. This was primarily because the 'organisational design' was flawed in that they 'lacked power' to take on the departments they sat across and were, often deliberately, marginalised. Moreover, to be worth creating at all, Schulte observed,

‘the new minister would have to provide, or be provided with, intellectually cogent proposals for UK initiatives which did not amount simply to unilateral disarmament and could survive inevitable pushback from major departments. Such ideas have not emerged in the current international climate and can hardly be certain in the unpromising future.’

Thus, whilst Schulte, Rogers and others agreed that ‘strong fiefdoms’ exist in Whitehall, divergent perspectives exist regarding how established centres of power may be productively challenged—if at all. In order to consider how this question may be resolved, it is worth highlighting a point of convergence between respondents. There was quite general agreement that, given the challenges involved, if Labour wishes to make the MPD post meaningful it will need to be part of a broader reconsideration of UK defence and foreign policy. As Ann Feltham observed, such a reformist effort would, in itself, greatly benefit from a period whereby support for alternative policies were built up amongst civil society and the public. The MPD could then play the part of a focal point for appropriate education and engagement initiatives.

The machinery of government

In terms of the wider machinery of government on security issues, Dr Farrell posited that the MPD should be,

‘ex officio a member of the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy and a Privy Councillor with access to security briefings to place them on an equal footing with other senior Ministers and shadow Ministers rather than be told ‘no’ on confidential grounds of national security.’

Dr Teresa Dumasy made a complementary point, stating that the MPD ‘could play a useful role in inter-ministerial coordination and developing/leading longer-term strategy on peace/peace processes - complementing the more short-term and narrower perspective of the National Security Council.’ This point again usefully highlights how the MPD could serve a strategic role, introducing long-term thinking into government—something that the Institute for Government highlighted as being especially necessary and important in a recent report discussing the limitations of the National Security Council, including its ‘tactical and operational’ focus.⁹⁵

Dr Farrell also made some other pertinent suggestions concerning the possible duties of the MPD, proposing that the post-holder should ‘make an annual statement to the House of Commons’ on the ‘UK’s peace-building work’, that was more substantial than ‘the dry nuts and bolts report on the Conflict Pool read into the record by the Minister at the FCO or a deputy as has been recent practice.’ In addition, ‘a new select committee should be set up with an appropriate title’ which would help ‘spawn, or rejuvenate’ a related All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG). This committee would then ‘have a watching brief on the various country APPGs to promote opportunities which support peace-building’. As Farrell pointed out, such existing relevant APPGs include that on Women, Peace and Security and the various country-focused APPGs which ‘exist to promote peace in their region e.g. African Great Lakes APPG.’ In response to this suggestion, Fabian Hamilton agreed that a Select Committee on Peace and Disarmament could provide oversight for the minister and potentially subsume the Committee on Arms Export Control (CAEC) or create a new arms licensing committee.⁹⁶

Notably, a few respondents also raised the issue of whether the MPD should be exclusively focused on foreign issues. For example, Dumasy and Rai noted the potential for the minister to work on Northern Ireland and community relations. As discussed above, the MPD as currently envisaged by Labour is focused on international affairs, with the Shadow MPD monitoring developments in North Africa, Middle East and North Korea. Potential downsides of any such expansion of the MPD's brief would be the dilution of international policy work and infringements on existing minister's or department's territory, leading to wrangling over resources.

Resource issues

As highlighted in Section 1.3, considerations of the resources required by an MPD need to be seen in the context of existing relevant government spending and capabilities. In recent years, this debate has been defined by the austerity policies of the coalition and Conservative governments, which have impacted significantly upon both the FCO and MoD. This has led to criticism from MPs, including from the Foreign Affairs Committee, who published a 2015 report entitled 'Protect FCO's Budget or Reduce Britain's Global Diplomacy'. This report argues that:

'The cuts imposed on the FCO since 2010 have been severe and have gone beyond just trimming fat: capacity now appears to be being damaged. If further cuts are imposed, the UK's diplomatic imprint and influence would probably reduce, and the government would need to roll back some of its foreign policy objectives'.⁹⁷

Similarly, despite the MoD's annual budget, at £35 billion, being one of the largest in the world, several serving and retired senior military personnel have argued that the armed forces are being 'hollowed out'.⁹⁸ Spending cuts, in addition to overblown military procurement plans—particularly on Trident replacement—and the potential negative economic impact of Brexit, has thus led the current government to conduct a review of defence expenditure.⁹⁹ Such developments present an opportunity for progressives to argue for alternatives to buying hugely expensive, high-tech military equipment, especially given their cost overruns and continuous operational problems. Fabian Hamilton's idea that the MPD will lead on evolving the UK's armed forces and intelligence services towards a humanitarian role, retraining and re-tasking them to peaceful purposes, could thus be a productive one, particularly if the military are consulted and brought on side.¹⁰⁰

There is also a need to consider how best to apportion civilian resources, both in terms of money and personnel, given current restraints. In this light, the suggestion from several respondents that existing FCO work be properly resourced—in addition to its approach being reoriented—appears to be a more pragmatic and persuasive option. Another way of looking at the resource implications of the MPD post is that, as several respondents observed, in making existing funds and spending more coherent (such as the CSSF) efficiencies might be forthcoming. On a bigger scale, Lindsey German made the point—which would likely be a common assumption amongst peace and disarmament activists—that the impact of the MPD being a well-funded and major role would 'of course be among other things in terms of saving huge amounts of money now spent on arms and the military.' Redirecting the military budget to civilian goods and services is indeed an aim of Corbyn and Hamilton, but one that will require political momentum to be built—for example, on disarmament—through grassroots organising.

In terms of specific budget allocations, Mike Segal argued that, ‘as a first shot’ the Prime Minister and Chancellor ‘should agree at the start to give the Minister 10% of the staff of each of the Foreign Office and the MoD, with a budget to match, and an immediate cut of a few percent in the defence spending budget to provide more general funding.’ Ben Donaldson of UNA-UK noted that it might be worth ‘investigating options for a fixed % GNI or GDP target for diplomacy’. For example, based on the existing 0.7% allocation of UK GDP spent on development and 2% on defence, ‘diplomacy should be the third leg to this stool.’ Elsewhere, Dr Farrell argued that, if the MPD took on a ‘broader remit’ i.e. to manage the CSSF and provide relevant departmental oversight, then this ‘would mean a budget of maybe £2bn’, which, he noted, is ‘roughly equivalent to the cost of Brexit to the civil service’. Farrell went on to note that the MPD would then need ‘to make an annual case to the Treasury for an appropriate level of funding.’

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a precise proposal for what an appropriate level of funding and set of resources the MPD should command, principally because the scale of resources for the MPD would flow from the size of the brief and the responsibilities taken on. Clearly, however, ending austerity and repurposing military spending, particularly on high-tech weaponry, towards civilian goods and services, needs to be seriously considered by Labour if it wishes to empower the MPD. Since the issue of how to fund the MPD could also be a subject of some controversy, it would need to be agreed and dealt with at an early stage as part of Labour providing clarity on its departmental spending plans, so that it does not distract from the minister’s work. In addition, early consideration of how the MPD can evidence its impact would be worthwhile, especially at a time when existing funds, such as the aid budget, are under particular media and parliamentary scrutiny.

Section 2.3 Five options for the Minister for Peace and Disarmament

This section considers different ways in which an MPD’s role could be configured, if established in government, based on the key points highlighted in the preceding discussion. The five options presented below take the form of general approaches or characters that the post could assume and include several of the ideas and suggestions proposed by interviewees. The options are not necessarily mutually exclusive but are principally intended to give a general sense of how the role could develop in future. Some of the options are focused more on international and some more on domestic—as well as institutional—issues than others. In addition, some of the options are more cautious and some more radical in their approach than others given the need to take into account the political context in which the post is established.

Furthermore, the options presented below focus on configurations for the MPD in line with how the minister’s work is currently being proposed, and not alternative options that do not involve an MPD in some shape or form, even though these may, in some circumstances, be preferable. For example, neither a new department—such as a ministry for peace—is considered, nor is the idea of better resourcing existing departments or just developing alternative approaches to security without an MPD.

I. New thinking to develop long-term, sustainable and human security objectives

The MPD could function as a cross-departmental catalyst for ‘new thinking’ within government. For example, bold and radical policies could be developed and introduced into cabinet discussions to break from established dogmas on defence and foreign policy, exploring the potential of linking

up a focus on human security, peace and disarmament with environmental and social justice. Best practice could be developed by learning from past experience, including the successes and failures of previous similar roles in UK government and initiatives made by other governments abroad, for instance Norway and Sweden. The MPD could also engage widely with academics, expert practitioners—including from the military, NGOs and the United Nations—to generate policy ideas and connect the post with civil society and social movements. For this orientation to be successfully implemented, there would need to be top-level Labour Party support for the MPD and prior agreement on the need for broader changes to UK international policy.

2. Demilitarisation and disarmament

The MPD could provide a lead on national conventional and nuclear disarmament efforts, which could include unilateral and multilateral action, so that existing treaties are respected and enforced. There would also be potential here to focus on demilitarisation as part of a wider package of reforms aimed at reorienting the UK's military posture. This could include: enhancing security for citizens, including through counter-terrorism efforts; non-offensive defence; limiting arms exports and diversifying away from the production and export of military technology as part of a transition to a green economy, prioritising civilian goods and services. This approach would likely only be possible if Labour came to power with a sizable majority and felt able to push a more ambitious agenda, which was supported by key groups, such as the trade unions, and which included a positive alternative vision for how the UK should act in the world.

3. Diplomacy, peace building and soft power

The MPD could focus on boosting international diplomatic processes such as the global nuclear ban treaty, and other multilateral agreements and fora such as the CTBT, OPCW, OSCE and UN. Supportive international developments would help make this option more feasible and useful. For example, rapprochement between Russia and the West, with a new process of non-proliferation and disarmament talks, would help bring this approach to fruition. Regional peace initiatives could also be an important focus to ensure that, post-Brexit, the UK provides leadership on international development and crisis management. In addition, if Labour maintains a more cautious and moderate approach to international policy there is still much work to be done on developing conflict resolution, prevention and peace building so that the UK becomes a world leader on these issues. Women's equality and rights should be a central focus of all of these initiatives.

4. Democratisation and education

Whilst not necessarily in the MPD's currently existing remit, there are several tasks relevant to the UK's domestic political agenda that could be taken on. For example, these could include institutional democratisation, to ensure that government policy is opened up to wider consultation and participation and that decision-making is accountable and transparent. Education and outreach to the public and civil society could also prove to be an important aspect of the MPD's work, which would benefit from the minister cultivating a prominent media profile. Issues that could potentially be focused on domestically include the Northern Ireland peace process and defence conversion and diversification. The MPD could also provide funding to civil society for peace building and education projects.

5. Becoming an ethical foreign policy watchdog

The MPD could take on a watchdog role whereby it provided monitoring and oversight of government departments, such as the FCO, MOD and DFID, so that they adhere to an ethical foreign policy. For example, the MPD could ensure that British actions, including those of business, do not violate the human rights of citizens or contribute to conflict in countries the UK was active in. If this orientation were to be a success, then the post holder would need to develop good relationships with each relevant department and be appropriately empowered to take bold action, which would likely necessitate prime ministerial support and a cabinet position.

Conclusion

Overall, based on the responses of those interviewed for this study, the relevant institutional experiences of British and foreign governments and the prevailing state of domestic and international politics, it is possible to conclude that there is significant potential in the MPD concept, but that the role requires further development and will need to be adapted and improved in practice. Providing a more precise assessment of the MPD concept is complicated by several factors. For example, the title of the role suggests something much broader, idealistic and ambitious than the actual work currently envisaged for the MPD by Labour, which focuses on vital but narrower concerns such as conflict prevention and resolution, as well as multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy, utilising a cross-departmental arrangement supported by a small team.

This is important to recognise because people's response to the MPD (including those interviewed for this study) and what they think it will mean in practice, is and will largely be based on their existing political and institutional perspectives, preferences and prejudices. For example, peace and disarmament—to those associated with activist and NGO groups—generally means reining in the arms trade, scrapping Trident, enacting an ethical foreign policy, ending the UK's support and involvement in US-led wars of aggression and moving away from military industry to the production of socially useful and environmentally sustainable goods and services.

Yet at present, Labour's approach to the MPD and reforming UK international policy in a progressive direction has been constructive but cautious, largely conducted under the radar of public scrutiny, for party and domestic political reasons. The focus on making UK policy on conflict resolution, prevention and peace building more coherent and effective is surely welcome, but will therefore likely not go far enough for those Corbyn supporters who campaign for a much more ambitious set of changes. Indeed, it is notable that those interviewed for this study, some of whom have very different analyses and worldviews, agree that if the MPD post is to have a substantial impact then it will need to be part of a much wider reshaping of UK defence and foreign policy.

If this broader shift does not occur then, it is argued, the MPD might disappoint and become, in some respects, tokenistic so that it is unable to secure a legacy. One way of dealing with this problem, proposed by some interviewees, is to rename the post so that it includes reference to 'human security' and/or 'conflict' in the title, which would also make it less immediately provocative to opponents. If the MPD is to take on more powers and a more radical orientation, then this will require the development of a popular movement which will both elect a Labour government and allow it to enact more ambitious changes to international policy, including a meaningfully 'ethical' foreign policy.

To support this, civil society groups should actively organise together around these issues, which will help validate the MPD so that it is seen as a logical and necessary vehicle for delivering reforms. This is also necessary because of the significant obstacles to these changes occurring, largely stemming from the influence and power of elite groups favouring continuity, including within the Labour Party. However, as some within the establishment are keenly aware, ideas about what it means to be British are evolving in ways which make business as usual more difficult to sustain, as the next generation questions the nation's imperial past and casts a sceptical eye over current and proposed military interventions.

It is also important to note that the MPD proposal has emerged at a tumultuous time, not just for British but international politics. On the one hand, these circumstances could provide an opportunity for the next UK government to break with the past, instituting bold, progressive reforms at home—focused on democracy and social justice—as well as rethinking relationships with traditional partners abroad, in line with an ethical foreign policy. On the other hand, forces wedded to the status quo may prevail by arguing that Russian recalcitrance, amongst other emerging threats, means that now is not the time for the UK to take risks with its security and pursue significant changes of course. Ultimately, the result of this contest of ideas will likely depend upon whether the Labour Party and civil society can provide leadership and a positive alternative vision for the UK that resonates with the 'deep story' of the British public, in terms of the values and goals the majority of people associate with their nation.

In the short-term it may seem reasonable for Labour to be careful and avoid taking electoral risks with highly controversial and sensitive areas such as national security. Yet there is clearly a pressing need to take responsibility and provide leadership on these issues in order to design policy that responds to the urgent challenges of war, peace and environmental degradation in the 21st century. Surely this is what is required if 'Global Britain' is to mean something constructive and positive in the future. The MPD could contribute to this process of rethinking British international policy by drawing on the diverse wealth of ideas and energy embedded within the array of activist groups and civil society organisations operating in the UK to help democratise both the Labour Party and the state. In the longer-term, establishing links with the citizenry so that they can better understand and participate in decision-making on questions of war and peace is the best way to ensure the creation of effective policy and political legitimacy.

Recommendations

For Labour

- Ensure coherence between the title, remit and configuration of the post

Given the controversial nature of an MPD, various expectations exist regarding what the role will entail if established. This raises the potential for confusion and disappointment amongst supporters of the concept as well as providing opponents with an opportunity to attack Labour on this issue. It is therefore important that the title of the post both appropriately reflects what work is principally to be carried out and provides clarity and coherence in relation to its aims and objectives, not least so that it may be provided with appropriate and justifiable resources. This will necessitate Labour being clear about its spending plans, for the MPD, MOD and FCO, and providing policy consistency across defence, diplomacy and development. Moreover, Labour should ensure that the MPD has the gravitas, political vision and credibility to develop the post in opposition and deliver policy impact in government.

- Lead the debate on a positive alternative vision for UK international policy

Given the current state of domestic and international politics, it is unlikely that in the short-term Labour will be able to achieve a consensus on a new and progressive direction for UK defence and foreign policy. However, as shown by the recent crises regarding the conflict in Syria and relations with Russia, there are plenty of opportunities for Labour to show leadership on the pressing issues of war and peace facing the UK and the world. Labour must continue to hold the government to account so that the UK acts responsibly and in line with its international legal and moral obligations. Winning the contest of ideas in opposition will, in the long-term, enable Labour to be more ambitious if it achieves power, thus opening up new opportunities for work on peace and disarmament, including the realisation of an ethical foreign policy and nuclear abolition.

For the Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament

- Be visible, direct, open to engagement and able to deal with criticism

In order to be visible and begin leading a national debate on peace and disarmament issues, the Shadow MPD should consult with civil society and others regarding the proposed strategy for ‘protecting civilians in conflict...conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict peace building, and justice for the victims of war crimes’, and the wider peace doctrine, prior to publication, in order to refine and develop these ideas—as has been done previously with other areas of international policy. This process could include conversations with experts from academia, NGOs and the armed forces, in order to understand their concerns and criticisms as well as the challenges of moving towards a non-offensive, humanitarian-focused military.

If the post was established, the formation of a new select committee—for example, on Human Security, Peace and Disarmament—and appropriate links to APPGs, could also develop parliamentary engagement to provide oversight of the MPD’s work and build links to national and international civil society. In addition, establishing formal links with other governments, for example, through a UK-Nordic Council could develop policies focused on achieving human security aims such as gender equality, sustainable peace processes, non-proliferation and disarmament.

- Hold the government to account and build parliamentary support for reform

The MPD needs to develop a profile that inspires people and convinces them that the post-holder will be able to take effective action when in government. One of the best ways to show this in opposition is for the Shadow Minister to be active in highlighting the flaws of the current government and proposing clear and credible alternatives. There are plenty of opportunities to be a champion of an ethical foreign policy in opposition, particularly if other members of the Shadow Cabinet are unable or unwilling to do so. This should also extend to international relations, for example, so that the MPD promotes the UK having a critical and selective partnership with the USA.

In addition, the ongoing replacement of the UK's Trident nuclear weapons, arms sales to human rights abusers and regions of conflict need to be vigorously challenged. It would also be useful for the MPD to further consult with members of other parties in order to find areas of agreement and co-operation so that a wider consensus on a progressive international policy for the UK may start being fashioned. Concrete issues that the Shadow MPD could focus on and promote include: a War Powers Act to enshrine the convention on ensuring parliamentary approval for UK military action; developing work on defence diversification and arms export controls in consultation with the Shadow Minister for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; forming a progressive bloc within NATO to promote non-nuclear, defensive and humanitarian approaches to security. Securing such measures would also help ensure that the MPD has a legacy if a successor government discontinues the post.

For civil society

- Engage with Labour and other political parties on the MPD project

Groups involved in issues covered by the MPD should consult with Labour and other supportive parties to exchange ideas and develop shared understandings on key subjects. Such meetings should inform the production of campaigns and materials discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the MPD proposal to ensure a lively and informed public debate. Activist groups and NGOs should also discuss the MPD proposal in meetings and conferences and conduct research on relevant topics, including sensitive areas such as the UK's position in NATO and relations with Russia, in order to ensure a critical and open debate and inspire the next generation to work on these issues.

- Build cooperation and develop shared strategies

A wide range of civil society groups operates in the UK today, working on a diverse set of issues. However, the political nature of their work, charitable status and organisational demands can present barriers to them meeting, discussing opportunities for cooperation and the development of shared strategies and workplans. This is particularly the case for the more radical anti-war and pro-disarmament groups and those focusing on reformist efforts involving conflict resolution and peace building. Given the wide remit of the MPD role, and its potential to realise the aims of relevant civil society groups, groups interested in and supportive of the post should convene meetings to discuss areas of mutual agreement to help advance and inform the MPD's future work.

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Interviewees

The following people kindly participated in this report as interviewees between March and June 2018. Where appropriate their affiliation is noted below, although their contributions were each provided in an individual rather than an institutional capacity.

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Jon Date (Action Aid)
Dr Ian Davis (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute)
Ben Donaldson (United Nations Association-UK)
Dr Teresa Dumasy (Conciliation Resources)
Dr Iain Farrell (former director of Conscience)
Ann Feltham (Campaign Against Arms Trade)
Professor Lawrence Freedman (King's College London)
Lindsey German (Stop The War)
John Gittings (former Guardian journalist / School of Oriental and African Studies)
Fabian Hamilton MP (Labour Party / Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament)
Professor Beatrice Heuser (Glasgow University)
Dr Kate Hudson (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament)
Paul Ingram (British American Security Information Council)
Sir Richard Jolly (Institute of Development Studies)
Bruce Kent (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament)
Sarah Lasenby (Trident Ploughshares)
Celia McKeon (Rethinking Security)
David Milner (Conscience)
David Polden (London Region Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament)
Milan Rai (Peace News)
Simon Reed (Conscience)
Josephine Roele (Gender Action for Peace and Security)
Professor Paul Rogers (Bradford University)
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Professor Paul Schulte (Birmingham University)
Sam Walton (Quaker Peace and Social Witness)
Diana Warner (Conscience)
Arthur West (Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament)
Angie Zelter (Trident Ploughshares)

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conscience

TAXES FOR PEACE NOT WAR

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conscience campaigns for a progressive increase in the amount of UK tax spent on peacebuilding, and a corresponding decrease in the amount spent on war and the preparation for war. In addition, we advocate the use of non-military security and provide information and resources to support the development of peacebuilding and conflict prevention methods - methods that are widely recognised to provide more effective and better value forms of security than military intervention.

We also campaign for an update in the law, so that people with a conscientious objection to war can have the part of their taxes currently spent on war and its preparations – approximately 6% – spent on peacebuilding and conflict prevention instead. This is in recognition of the fact that although we no longer face military conscription in the UK, we continue to bear a moral responsibility for war through our taxation contribution to the Ministry of Defence.

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If you have any comments or suggestions you would like to raise about this report please contact **conscience** at campaign@conscienceonline.org.uk or for more information about the campaign please visit our website: www.ConscienceOnline.org.uk

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