

Press release

New report urges British government to make fundamental changes to security and defence policies

LONDON, 4 June 2015 – The United States has led the way in developing a new way of conceptualising and executing war. The emphasis now is on effecting warfare at a distance by relying on smart technologies and light-footprint deployments rather than more traditional military approaches. With the rise of austerity in Europe, other Western states have adopted part or all of this ‘remote-control warfare’ approach.

In the United Kingdom, the election of a Conservative-majority government in the May 2015 general election is unlikely to result in any significant departure from this approach. In fact, increased reliance on the tactics of remote-control warfare is likely as budget savings are made across Whitehall and the government responds to multiple security threats and conflicts around the world.

However, a new report from Open Briefing makes it increasingly clear that remote-control warfare has its limits. The report, commissioned by the Remote Control project, outlines some of the key unforeseen consequences from the use of remote-control warfare, including the **transposition of Middle Eastern battlefields to Western cities through the deployment of special forces to respond to terrorist incidents at home**, the **enabling of adversaries to develop sophisticated cyber offensive capabilities through reverse engineering the cyber weapons deployed against them**, and the **risks presented by the terrorist use of weaponised civilian drones to attack critical national infrastructure or VIPs**.

From the **deployment of larger and more autonomous armed drones**, to the **development of ever more sophisticated cyber defence and offensive capabilities**, the report also outlines the ways in which states are pursuing various ‘arms races’ in an attempt to maintain the strategic edge over their adversaries.

In light of these and the other trends discussed, *Securing Change* makes 31 specific recommendations for the new British government. These include:

1. **Improve the training, equipment and arsenals of police firearms units** rather than increasingly diverting special forces to counter-terrorism at home.
2. **Make funding available for the purchase of counter-drone systems** to provide protection for high-value target sites and critical national infrastructure.
3. **Use the forthcoming National Security Strategy update to send clear signals to international partners on options to manage the proliferation of cyber weapons** and flag the prioritisation of norm development in cyber warfare.



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The report also urges more fundamental reforms, including:

1. **Actively support the creation of an effective international control regime for unmanned combat air vehicles** and other armed drones.
2. **Consider initiating a national moratorium on the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems** in order to allow international experts to more fully consider the practical and ethical questions raised by such systems.
3. **Move away from the broad approach of attempting to counter *all* extremism** and towards concentrating finite resources on tackling those at highest risk of adopting violent approaches.

What is ultimately needed is a comprehensive rethink of defence and security strategy and a move away from remote-control warfare towards more enduring, accountable and effective responses to today's multiple security threats.

Speaking at the launch of *Securing Change*, the founder and executive director of Open Briefing, Chris Abbott, lead author of the report, said:

'The recommendations presented in this report will allow the British government to mitigate some of the pitfalls of the current strategy. The hope is that innovators within cabinet, parliament and the Ministry of Defence will take them up and leave their mark through the promotion of lasting stability and security in the United Kingdom and more globally.'

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. *Securing Change: Recommendations for the British Government Regarding Remote-control Warfare* by Chris Abbott, Scott Hickie, Steve Hathorn and Raphaël Zaffran is published by Open Briefing on 4 June 2015. It is available to download from www.openbriefing.org/thinktank/publications/securing-change.
2. Please address any questions about Open Briefing or the report to Chris Abbott. Please email chris.abbott@openbriefing.org or call +44(0)7979 428 312 or +44 (0)20 7193 9805.
3. Open Briefing is the world's first civil society intelligence agency. It is a unique collaboration of intelligence, military, law enforcement and government professionals from around the world. It provides intelligence and research services to civil society organisations and concerned citizens. It does this so that properly informed citizens can more effectively engage in peace and security debates and civil society organisations can make better advocacy choices.
4. The Remote Control project is a project of the Network for Social Change hosted by Oxford Research Group. Remote Control examines changes in military engagement, in particular the use of drones, special forces, private military companies and cyber warfare. The project acts as a facilitator for the exchange of information and commissions and publicises work undertaken in the area, aiming to examine the long-term effects of remote warfare.