



Select Committee on International Relations and Defence

Corrected oral evidence: The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa – prosperity, peace and development co-operation

Wednesday 4 March 2020

12.25 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Baroness Blackstone; Lord Grocott; Baroness Rawlings; Baroness Smith of Newnham.

Evidence Session No. 8

Heard in Public

Questions 75 - 81

Witness

[I:](#) Dr Comfort Ero, Programme Director - Africa, International Crisis Group.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Dr Comfort Ero.

Q75 The Chair: Welcome to this session of the International Relations and Defence Select Committee in the House of Lords. We are very grateful to you for adjusting your diary to be able to give evidence at this time. With information technology as it is, if there are any interruptions I will hesitate briefly before we proceed.

Thank you for contributing to our inquiry on UK relations with Sub-Saharan Africa and the countries across such a vast region. We are focusing in particular on the African Union Agenda 2063 to see how the UK can act in partnership on achieving the ambitions it sets out. In this session, I will ask the opening question, as is our usual procedure, and then look to my colleagues to follow up with extra questions. My question tends to be general; the other questions will be more detailed.

What do you see as the most pressing challenges to peace and security facing Sub-Saharan Africa today?

Dr Comfort Ero: First, I thank Baroness Anelay and the entire Committee for inviting me and Crisis Group to take part in your inquiry. I would like to divide my response to your question into two parts. First, I see a range of thematic issues—there are at least six—that constitute pressing challenges on the continent. Then there is a set of geographic challenges that I would like to discuss.

On the thematic challenges, the number one pressing challenge, which has been a trend in recent years, is the danger of multipolarity on the continent. An array of external actors with competing interests is now proliferating on the continent. They are seeking to influence decision-making on the continent as well as to navigate certain crises and political issues.

Oftentimes, with this multipolarity, you will find a number of countries wanting to impose their own influence on the continent. It is worth saying that Africa has not been immune to increased geopolitical competition among major powers. There are the ongoing interests of Gulf countries, which are seeking to influence the continent. We have also seen the return of Russia, and China getting deeper into the continent. Western countries have often been ambivalent in their response, which has added to the complexities on the continent. That is the number one thematic challenge.

A second thematic challenge which I see as a pressing concern on the continent relates to the United Nations Security Council. While the UN is not paralysed on African questions in the same way that it is on Syria, we should assume that UN diplomacy over Africa will become more contentious. It is likely that African affairs will become harder for the Security Council, largely because of the growing interests from Russia and China's continued ascent in its role.

The third issue that I would raise as a pressing concern—again, this has been a constant trend in recent years—is the securitisation or militarisation of the response to conflict management on the continent.

The fourth challenge - a real contest on the Security Council: namely, the question of underwriting African peacekeeping. This relates to the AU's efforts to try to get the Security Council to underwrite authorised AU operations and fund them through UN-assessed contributions. The AU has been working on a 75% to 25% formula with the Council to try to get that, but that has been a real challenge.

Another thematic challenge that I want to raise in the inquiry is peace and security architectures, whether the African Union, the UN or any other kind of multilateral peace and security architecture. Increasingly, they are not fit for purpose to respond to crises on the continent.

The final challenge is the impact of the AU reforms that are currently ongoing. While optimistic and promising, they also raise a number of challenges. A lot of African Union housekeeping issues are arising that may undermine the African Union, even though these reforms are innovative and important and aim at streamlining the African Union. One important example is that at least 40% of the positions in the African Union may be lost if the AU goes along with its current proposal to streamline and cut back some positions. Those are the thematic issues.

On the geographic side, there are three regions and two specific countries that I think will be pressing challenges this year. Right at the top of the list—it has been on Crisis Group's watchlist for the last five years—is the Sahel. It is good and right that the UK has singled out this region as a priority as part of its shifts. It is very clear why that is necessary. We have seen seven years of militarism in the Sahel, starting with the French operation there. It is five years since the UN deployed its peacekeeping mission and the peace agreement was signed, but we have not really seen a dramatic shift on the ground. Jihadi forces remain agile and the crisis in Mali has now spilled over into Burkina Faso. We are very concerned about that country's collapse. Niger and Chad are also increasingly vulnerable.

The other region of concern, where the UK obviously has tremendous interests, is the Horn of Africa. It is a region that is highly unpredictable and very fluid at the moment. Two important transformations and transitions in Ethiopia and Sudan have the potential to yield good dividends, but they could also go into reverse. In South Sudan, we are now waiting to see the outcome, the willingness and commitment of President Salva Kiir, and Riek Machar, and how they will take forward seriously the formation of the unity Government. Of course, there is the critical issue of Somalia, with a very resilient and agile al-Shabaab.

Another region of concern is the Great Lakes. There, the big question is how to avert a proxy war in eastern Congo. In the last year, Rwanda and Uganda traded accusations and have often used eastern Congo to fight

out their own battles or as a backdrop to deal with the economic interests of their countries.

Beyond these three regions, two other countries stand out as pressing concerns this year. One is Cameroon, in the anglophone region; I know you have had deliberations on the anglophone regions. Last month, we saw an up-tick in atrocities. On 14 February, we saw the worst atrocities since the last crisis two years ago, including the killing of 24 people, mainly women and children. The second is Zimbabwe, another country of interest for the UK, where we have also seen a backward slide. So there is a range of pressing issues. There are other countries of concern, such as Mozambique and Tanzania, but we can discuss those in our deliberations.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed for that overview of the very pressing issues across Sub-Saharan Africa. I now turn to Lord Alton, who will ask the first of our more detailed questions.

Q76 Lord Alton of Liverpool: Thank you, Lord Chairman. Dr Ero, welcome to the Committee's proceedings. Thank you for the way you set out the situation and for Crisis Group's work, which we all admire enormously.

In our papers, we have a submission from the Coalition for Genocide Response; I declare an interest as a patron of that body. It recalls the Rwandan genocide when 1 million people died. You just mentioned the situation in Sudan; 2 million died in the civil war there. In Darfur, 300,000 people have died and 2 million are displaced. Reports coming from Darfur now, from Geneina, which I visited, suggest that some 14,000 new refugees have had to flee to Chad and another 30,000 have been displaced since last December.

In addition, there are about 100 million small-arms weapons across the continent, with 8 million in west Africa alone. We see gender-based and ideology-driven violence, which you mentioned—there is the situation in northern Nigeria with Boko Haram as well as al-Shabaab in Somalia—but the situation right across the region is disturbing.

The African Union hoped to achieve its "Silencing the Guns" agenda by 2020. Can you tell the Committee how effective you think that agenda has been? What do you think the biggest challenges facing the African Union will be in achieving that agenda?

Dr Comfort Ero: Thank you for your question. Of course, when you list all those other crises you begin to realise the seriousness of the challenge on the continent. The idea of 'Silencing the Guns' was never a realistic proposition. The AU set a high bar in 2013 when it gave itself just seven years in which to end wars—and, as you say, prevent genocide—on the continent. You cannot silence guns on a continent prone to conflicts like these in such a short space of time. It is also a global phenomenon, so why set yourself such a high commitment?

It is one of those grand gestures that feeds the perceptions that the African Union does not achieve its goals and the agenda items it sets for itself. One of the outcomes of the just-concluded AU Summit last month

was the announcement by the new chair of the AU, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, proposing an extraordinary meeting to focus on conflict prevention. This will be a moment for the AU to reflect on how it will go forward in trying to fulfil some of the items it has set for itself.

To speak in more positive terms, there have been some successes and some important steps have been taken. First, in 2016, the African Union's Peace and Security Department came up with a master road plan of practical steps to help achieve the goal of silencing the guns. Then, in 2017, the AU Peace and Security Council launched what it called African Amnesty Month for the surrender and collection of illegal and owned weapons. Of course, despite these important steps, the challenge here is that there is no real mechanism to find out which states are implementing these decisions. There is no way to assess the number of weapons collected or how many countries have been willing to surrender them and participate in this.

The other success, on the part of the African Union Commission, was the decision to appoint the highly respected Algerian diplomat, Ambassador Lamamra, who was previously the AU's Commissioner for Peace and Security, to the position of High Representative for Silencing the Guns in Africa. He has played a decisive role, first in easing tensions in fraught elections in Madagascar, and then diffusing a constitutional crisis in Comoros. Again, the challenge for him is a matter of resource and personnel: does he have enough people to implement this?

Last year, as you know, Commissioner Smail Chergui managed to bring together the warring factions of the Central African Republic to sign a crucial peace agreement. Of course, the armed groups there remain relevant and still potent, and they are very much driving the agenda. However, these are examples of success. Right at the top of the list, despite what we said about Sudan, we should also acknowledge the crucial role the AU played last year with its initial suspension of Sudan at the moment of the ousting of President al-Bashir. That was an important, forward-leaning position on the part of the African Union. Things could have been dramatically worse; we saw the violence on 3 June.

However, you are right: one cannot overlook the fact that the AU has been ineffective in certain places. Cameroon is a country I would add to the list that you just provided. Oftentimes, it is about matching the AU's ambitions with its own reality. At the same time, we should view the African Union as a work in progress. It is also worth noting that the AU does a lot with the little that it has. Financing remains its Achilles heel.

Q77 Lord Alton of Liverpool: May I ask a very brief supplementary question, Dr Ero? I want to ask specifically about young people and children. One of the most depressing sights for me was seeing children and young people on the streets of Kinshasa carrying AK-47s. Some 6 million people died in the DRC during the conflict there. What is the AU able to do on this? I know that one of its objectives is to demobilise young people and draw them out of these cycles of violence.

Dr Comfort Ero: The AU has struggled in this area. The fact that we are at an inflection point, reflecting on the last seven years of “Silencing the Guns”, answers that question quite clearly. It is an organisation that has been proactive in certain areas and conservative in others. As I said, it comes up with very grand gestures, but it is not able to back them up. It does not have the necessary political will. Its member states do not normally take the decisions made by the Peace and Security Council forward with the seriousness that you would want. Sometimes, the council itself does not grasp those difficult issues. Sudan was a positive example, but then you have more complicated situations, like those in Burundi, Cameroon and the DRC, where there has been a mixed record for not just the African Union but the wider international community. We have to wait to see what happens with this extraordinary meeting in May. The AU will reflect—critically; it needs to reflect—on what it thinks it can do to improve these mechanisms.

The AU also needs to set more realistic goals for itself. For example, what mechanism will it use to assess whether its member states are complying with its new amnesty provision? How will we know how many weapons have been collected? Will we know where they are located? Will the AU go into each of its member states to ensure that each country has a legislative requirement and the appropriate tools for this kind of weapons collection amnesty? It is not the first time we have seen this; West Africa has been doing weapon collections and border security for a long time. But we have still not necessarily seen a reversal of these problems.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr Ero. The next question will be put by Baroness Blackstone.

Q78 **Baroness Blackstone:** Can you tell us how well the African Union engages in peacekeeping, and whether it has good co-operation with the UN in particular and also the regional African associations?

Dr Comfort Ero: Thank you, Baroness Blackstone. Let me start by saying that the one thing we all have to appreciate about peacekeeping on the continent is that the nature of conflict has changed tremendously in the last five to 10 years. It is more transnational and is not contained within one border; conflicts bleed into one another. There has been an increase in the smuggling of children, weapons and arms across borders. Conflicts are increasingly regionalised, and the doctrines and the concept of operations that the AU has relied on for so long, and the scenarios it built for itself in the 1990s, are no longer fit for purpose. It is partly why the African Union today is rethinking and reviewing its own guidelines and concept of operations.

One thing we should say in defence of the African Union is that it is being asked to fill the gaps in places where the UN is reluctant to go. It is paying a heavy price for that. One of the most dangerous peacekeeping missions on the continent today is Mali, a mission that is predominantly filled by African troop-contributing countries.

It is also worth recognising that we talk about peacekeeping, but what we are seeing in some places on the continent—Somalia being a good example—is, in effect, peace enforcement. It is war. In a sense, the AU is not playing the peacekeeping role that the UN plays but fighting. It is fighting against rebel forces and militant armed groups on various fronts. At the same time, a lot of these crises are transnational, as I said.

On how the AU co-operates with regional economic communities, the challenge for the AU is that it sees itself as the primary political body on the continent—after all, it is continental—but not all its member states necessarily see it as the go-to institution when there is a crisis. The region sees itself, first and foremost, as the first point of contact.

It is worth noting that relations between the African Union and the RECs are not always seamless. The regions do not always recognise the African Union and they often do not want it to stick its nose in in their backyard. The principle of subsidiarity is clearly back on the agenda. Back in 2018, it was reaffirmed as the primary guiding principle between the RECs and the African Union. The RECs are member states of the African Union and several other bodies, and they forum shop; they pick and choose which body they want to use at a particular time to serve their own interests. The member states decide when to come to the African Union and when not to.

The other issue that is worth noting is that regional bodies sometimes hold different views from the African Union on critical issues. A good example is in relation to the southern African body, SADC. In January 2019, it took a very different view from that of the African Union on the elections in the DRC. SADC recognised the decision of the constitutional court, but the AU, through an ad hoc coalition of heads of state, wanted to halt recognition of the elections there.

On co-operation, the African Union sometimes finds itself having to defer to the regions, especially with more robust regions such as the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, which has a longer heritage than the African Union with Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea Bissau. In a sense, the peace and security architecture that you see at the AU level is very much derived from ECOWAS.

Then, in some cases, it is clear that the regions do not want the African Union to play a role, or they believe that they are better placed, even when they are struggling to find solutions. IGAD, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development for a few years now has been responsible for getting peace in South Sudan, but it has been often very reluctant to invite others in when struggling to secure peace.

On the co-operation between the AU and the UN, it is worth recognising the limits of the UN. It is questionable how much difference the UN has made in some crises, Mali being one. This is a time when both institutions need to assess their own performance. There are questions about their efficiency and effectiveness. It is very clear to Crisis Group that neither can go it alone. The UN needs the AU; it derives its political legitimacy on

the continent from the African Union most of the time. Similarly, the AU depends on the UN. It is hard to ignore the fact that it needs the UN and the financing that comes from it.

There have been some improvements, but it is still an awkward relationship. Relationships are very strong at the top of the leadership, between the AU Chairperson, Moussa Faki, and António Guterres, the SG. It is also very good between the UN's Chief of Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, and the AU's Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui. There is a perception, real or perceived, that the UN still treats the AU like the younger brother, the junior partner, despite the amount of heavy lifting it does and the great sacrifice that a lot of African troops contribute to what the AU essentially sees as matters of international peace and security mandated by the Security Council.

I will end by saying that there are two battlegrounds right now that will make co-operation between the UN and the AU more difficult in future. One, as I said, is the question of the use of UN-assessed contributions to finance Security Council-authorized, AU-led peace initiatives. There is a formula on the table, but central to the dispute is a doubt about whether the AU has the ability to pay its share of 25% while the UN pays 75%.

The other battleground that will make co-operation even more difficult is the question of Libya. The African Union fundamentally believes that it should have a primary role in this conflict and does not understand why, as a continental body, it has no say on a crisis in its own area of responsibility. That may change, given the Berlin conference and the meeting that took place in Brazzaville, but it is a significant area of contestation. It is primarily why President Ramaphosa has put it on his own agenda and why it became a dominant issue at the recent AU summit in Addis.

Q79 Baroness Rawlings: Thank you, Dr Ero, for speaking to us today. How important is it to engage women and girls in conflict prevention and resolution work in Sub-Saharan Africa? Could you give us some examples of where this has been achieved? How much does it depend on the policy of the leader of an individual country? For example, women were very involved in Eritrea 30 years ago, and it was doing quite well then.

Dr Comfort Ero: This is a very important question. Unquestionably, engaging women and girls in conflict prevention is fundamental to trying to find ways to bring these crises to an end. The UN and humanitarian aid agencies do a great deal already in this area; indeed, significant resources have been devoted to it. The African Union appointed its own Chief Envoy to focus on women, peace and security. We have seen things in the last few years from a number of member states at the AU level—for example, South Africa's Foreign Minister dedicated a month of South Africa's presidency at the UN to the issue of women, peace and security—and Germany is also using its time at the Security Council to champion issues of women, peace and security.

There is clear understanding that we have to focus on this. One question that we need to ask—and it speaks to the question that you asked—is: how can we do better and improve our various mechanisms? I will answer that by giving you an example. One area that Crisis Group has been working on is the issue of the return of women who have been affiliated with Boko Haram or who have found themselves caught up in the Boko Haram crisis.

We have noticed a lot of complexities surrounding the return of these women. Some efforts have been successful in rehabilitating some of them, but we have found that women's disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation play out in the context of military abuse, a lack of state services for education, and no check on impunity or on excessive abuse by vigilante groups that are also supposedly there to protect women from the abuse.

On your question about how to improve the work that international organisations are doing, we have found that a number of initiatives, when funded by the UN or other large donors, have sometimes, rightly, relied on local actors who know the conflicts and contexts very well. However, oftentimes these agencies have delivered what we would describe as very generic solutions that have little bearing on the reality faced by some of these women who have been stigmatised by association with jihadi groups or insurgencies. To guarantee some success, it is also important that we do not have excessive focus on so-called deradicalisation efforts that focus heavily on things like religious ideology, as if that were the single issue that drove a number of women into these groups.

One thing we need to see more often, and I say this specifically to the UK Government, is to ensure that states like the UK are in a position to pressure governments—you referred to Eritrea, for instance, and I have referred to Nigeria—to respect and protect the work of women in very vulnerable or high-stake areas where they have been working to return a number of women and children back into normal society, with the stigmatisation that they face.

It is also important to understand that we should not lay the burden of finding the solution at the doors of women only. We should see women not just as peacebuilders but as political agents. One big area that Crisis Group has been looking at recently is understanding the role of women as militants themselves and understanding the varied roles that women have played in certain crises. Women may have been forced into militancy, through family pressure or other pressures, or may have chosen to go into militancy because there is no other survival route for them. Women are being forced to make choices to survive in areas where the state is either absent or predatory. This is another area that agencies like the AU and UN need to grapple with.

If we are serious about conflict prevention and improving choices for women overall, we also need to find a way to ensure that Governments stick to the commitments that they have signed up to. One way is to think through how governments like the UK can, with the UN, help

another government to make laudable commitments and translate them into legislation so that they can begin to deal with women's issues and address gender-based violence and support civil society groups that have already made innovative steps to address militancy and abuse against women and children who are caught up in violations.

The Chair: Thank you. Before we go to the question from Baroness Smith, Lord Alton has a supplementary question on that same issue.

Q80 Lord Alton of Liverpool: I am grateful, Lord Chairman. Last week, we had a heart-breaking visit here to Westminster by Rebecca Sharibu, the mother of Leah Sharibu who, as you will know, was abducted two years ago at the age of 14, forcibly converted, raped and impregnated, and has recently given birth, so it is said. Her mother said that it took seven months for Nigerian President Buhari to even contact her, and no one has been in contact with her since. She felt the need to come to London to try to tell her story because of this appalling violation, this gender-based violence and ideology-driven attack on a young woman. Boko Haram, which after all even means "destroy Western education", belittles the rights of women to be educated and to have opportunities in their lives.

Do you think that a government like the Nigerian government, and particularly President Buhari, are doing enough to stem the tide of this ideological violence in northern Nigeria and in the Middle Belt? Do you think we should be using the £800,000 that we give to Nigeria every single day in overseas aid to do more to uphold the position of women in Nigeria?

Dr Comfort Ero: Absolutely. I concur with your analysis and your suggestion. Another thing that I should conclude with is that, first, it is very clear that women and children have been vastly affected by the insurgency in north-east Nigeria. We are seeing a crisis in the Middle Belt but also in north-west Nigeria.

Secondly, more pressure has to be put on the Nigerian government, particularly in making sure that the safe houses provided for women really are safe and that we address the stigmatisation of women affiliated with Boko Haram when they return to their societies, so that they can be reintegrated in a safe way.

Thirdly, pointing to your other concern about using money more wisely, if either the Nigerian state or the UN poured a lot more money into the rehabilitation centres in north-east Nigeria, it would be a good thing. I think that the UK Government is in a position to urge that and to unlock a lot more money to service those rehab centres. Right now, women stay in these rehab centres for three weeks and then go straight back into the same reality that might have propelled or forced them into Boko Haram's hands in the first place.

We are bringing these women back into the very same reality they left that forced them into the insurgency. Why not make a major push to support education, for instance, and make sure that government are

investing in that? Why not work with UNICEF and get UNICEF behind this? The UK, given its position in the UN, can urge Nigeria directly, both at the UN level and regionally, to back more educational incentives and focus more on protecting the rehab centres.

The Chair: Thank you. Our last question for this session is from Baroness Smith.

- Q81 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** Thank you. Dr Ero, your opening remarks were interesting and somewhat worrying. The first thematic challenge you identified was the danger of multipolarity in the continent. I am therefore am slightly hesitant to pose the question that is on the paper, but what role can the UK play? In a previous evidence session at Chatham House, it was very clear that various different countries are beginning to build more embassies and be more involved in the continent. Should the UK be playing more of a part in looking at the security challenges in Africa? Is there a role for us in security, or would a lobbying role, as you have been suggesting—with the President of Nigeria, say—be more appropriate?

Dr Comfort Ero: I would say yes to both your questions. I do not like the term “scramble for Africa”, but that is how people are talking about it. You will understand that I think it is the wrong terminology to describe multipolarity, the opening of embassies and the turning to Africa as a last frontier, but let me start by saying that there are certain realities that are worth bearing in mind to guide the work of your inquiry.

The number one thing to understand—it should shape the UK’s implementation of its Africa strategy—is that the continent is no longer dependent on or always open to its traditional partners, the UK being one, or to the West. That speaks to the multipolarity. This is a continent that has lots of choices, arguably too many choices, but lots of choices none the less. Regardless of what we think of those choices, it decides when it wants to turn to other players if it is not satisfied with what it is getting from its traditional partners.

It is also worth saying that, today, what the African Union and the 54 member states are looking for is partners that can fulfil its own ambition for African solutions to African problems. I just give that as the opening context for an answer to your question.

Another reality worth bearing in mind is that African states, and the AU for that matter, have become a lot more assertive in insisting on respect and wanting a seat at the table. Having laid that context down, I shall answer your question about what that means for the UK. Right at the top, that means that the UK needs to have a better understanding of what the continent wants. It also needs to appreciate the varied views on the continent. While the AU is the pivotal continental body, the premier political body on the continent, we should not assume that it always represents the 54. That is another thing that is worth bearing in mind.

Twisting your question around, the major thing the UK needs to ask itself is what its priorities are today and whether it has the necessary resources to back up those priorities. It needs to ask whether it should play a role, whether it should facilitate the African interest, whether it should get more deeply involved in peace and security issues. We are talking in the week the UK has deployed troops into the UN mission in Mali, so the UK has to ask itself some very hard questions about its own financial capacity in, dare I say, a post-Brexit era. We have already seen some important signs, however, from the UK about its own commitments, which we welcome.

I listened very carefully to what Harriet Mathews said to you on 29 January: we have seen an increase in the Africa staff in Whitehall and an increase in the UK's presence in Addis. My colleague recently took part in a learning session that your embassy ran in Addis to improve understanding of the African Union in all its various guises. Again, it is about the size and depth of the UK's ambition on a continent that is growing increasingly relevant. The key will be assessing where the UK feels it can best use its bilateral leverage and where it thinks it makes pragmatic sense to work collectively or in co-operation with partners.

Looking at certain specific crises, there are tremendous opportunities for the UK to play a stronger conflict prevention and resolution role. One area where I think the UK deserves a lot of credit is its renewed engagement of blue helmets and its deployment to blue-helmet missions. It is already involved in the UN mission to South Sudan. Now, as I said, it is sending troops to the UN mission in Mali and playing an important role. When I listen to my colleagues in New York who follow the UN very closely, the message back from them is that the UN Secretariat speaks highly of Whitehall's role as a partner in Mali now.

I would be cautious about the UK's involvement in the Sahel. You will recall that one observation I made in opening is that we are concerned about the increase in military diplomacy, the high militarisation, that we are seeing on the continent. While Crisis Group was not shy about recommending the use of force, seven years after we are seeing a real security traffic jam in the Sahel. We need to rethink, which is why we have called for a strategic shift in the thinking and the posture of international commitments vis-à-vis the Sahel.

Another area where the UK can play a very instructive role and is already playing a very good role—it has very strong equities—is in the Horn of Africa, for example. It was a very wise, a very good decision, to establish a new role in the form of a UK Special Envoy for the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. Your current envoy, Julian Reilly, brings some important Gulf and Middle East equities to the understanding of the Horn of Africa, and vice versa: he also has good understanding of the Horn. That is a very important and pragmatic step in recognition of just how fluid and dynamic the situation is, with the interconnection between Gulf interests and Horn of Africa politics that is also unfolding.

The UK clearly sees Sudan as a priority but, again, Whitehall has to decide how it wants to support what is a deliciously extraordinary, amazing revolution taking place in Sudan. It could go dangerously wrong if there is no quick thinking about how we are going to resource it and prioritise and support a very fragile transition.

One concern for me, however, is in relation to developments that are happening vis-à-vis Somalia and a critical year as we get to parliamentary elections and the presidential election, and whether the UK can see itself playing a moderating role vis-à-vis tensions there among Somalis and divergent views between what one would have traditionally called UK allies in responding to Somalia.

Another thing that is worth noting about the UK's role in conflict prevention is that the UK still has considerable influence—going back to Lord Alton's question—on the UN's development agenda and on the World Bank in particular in terms of how money is deployed to serve conflict-related issues and making sure that the money is wisely deployed to appropriate places to shape conflicts.

One important example is that, while the UK is sending troops into Mali, it needs to keep an eye on Burkina Faso. How can it do that? By supporting key UN agencies and political staff to help prop up the Government of Burkina Faso so that we can stem the tide of further collapse in that country. The UK needs to ensure that it is smart right across the Sahel in how it deals with its activities.

Of course, the UK should always try to get the best outcome that it wants for itself through the UN, but it should be prepared to support conflict prevention and resolution efforts that are being driven by the African Union and other organisations without necessarily needing a strong UN mandate. A very innovative multinational Joint Task Force was established between Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin to deal with the Boko Haram issues. The jury is still out on its performance. It has not been able to neutralise Boko Haram, although to a certain degree it has contained it, but the UK's bilateral engagement there has been instrumental in helping to fight Boko Haram there.

It is hard not to conclude on the point that, with the UK stepping outside Europe and as we exit, the challenge will be how we differentiate ourselves from the European Union and Brussels. By leaving the EU we will still be influential, but we will have a smaller voice—a voice that had a very powerful influence in a significant regional bloc. One of the things that we need to think about is how the UK starts defining and shaping multilateralism vis-à-vis the African continent as well.

The EU is very willing but oftentimes overly bureaucratic and slow, and not agile. With potentially a new-found freedom from the EU, the UK might be nimbler in its approach and might be able to prioritise better and decide key issues where it thinks separately from the EU and not get caught up in competition with the EU. The UK prides itself on some really important programming, but it is not enough to disperse money; it is also

important to make sure that, through so-called UK evidence-based policy, it can assess clearly what it sees as key priorities going forward.

Going forward, making clear what the added value of the UK outside Europe is vis-à-vis the continent will be a challenge, but it also lends itself to various opportunities that can enhance conflict prevention on the continent.

The Chair: Dr Ero, thank you very much for helping us to understand better today the challenges of peace and security across Sub-Saharan Africa. Your contribution is much valued. In thanking you, I close the public session.