

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: [Integrated Security Fund](#), HC 914

Tuesday 20 May 2025

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Members present: David Mundell (Chair); Tracy Gilbert; Noah Law; Alice Macdonald; James Naish; Sam Rushworth; David Taylor.

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Witnesses

[I](#): Nic Hailey, Executive Director, International Alert, and former UK High Commissioner to Kenya (2015 to 2019); and Mike Jobbins, VP - Global Affairs and Partnerships, Search for Common Ground.

[II](#): Eva Tabbasam, Director, Gender Action for Peace and Security; and Lewis Brooks, UK Policy and Advocacy Co-Ordinator, Saferworld.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Nic Hailey and Mike Jobbins.

Q1 Chair: This is an evidence session looking at the integrated security fund, and we have two panels today. The first panel is Nic Hailey, Executive Director of International Alert and former High Commissioner to Kenya, and Mike Jobbins, who is the Vice President, Global Affairs and Partnerships at Search for Common Ground.

I will begin by inviting you, Nic, to say a bit more about yourself and your organisation.

Nic Hailey: Thank you for inviting me. International Alert is a UK-based peacebuilding charity that works mainly at the community level, at the local level, in around 15 countries around the world, on relationships between people that deal with the root causes of conflict and violence. I spent most of my life before that in the British Foreign Office.

Chair: Mike, would you like to tell us about yourself and your organisation?

Mike Jobbins: Thanks for having me. My name is Mike Jobbins. I am the Head of Global Affairs at Search for Common Ground. We are an international non-profit that also supports conflict resolution. We have about 60 offices in 35 countries around the world. We work very closely with HMG, including with the ISF and CSSF, but also with a range of other Governments.

Today, I am happy to share our experiences in places like Syria, the Sahel, and Mozambique, working with the ISF, but also our experiences as we work with the Americans, the Canadians, the EU and how other Governments are structuring their funds to address similar integrated security challenges in the places that we work and that our colleagues and communities experience.

Q2 Chair: Excellent. I will begin the formal questioning with Nic. As High Commissioner to Kenya and in your other diplomatic postings, what was the significance of the CSSF to you as a tool and where was it most and least helpful?

Nic Hailey: The CSSF filled a very important gap. Before Kenya, I was Deputy Ambassador in Afghanistan and I was also the Africa Director in the Foreign Office, where I ran the Africa CSSF. In all those roles, it filled the gap between the long-term development approach that DFID at the time was funding and the security-based diplomatic conflict resolution efforts that one would be doing as a diplomat or with security experts from the Met Police on terrorism, for example.

If I take counter-extremism in Kenya, you would have those experts doing their thing on one end, you would have a long-term development approach for Kenya on the other, and then in the middle the CSSF would



be able to work, for example, with communities on the Kenyan coast where relationships between young men and the police were a big driver of recruitment to terrorist organisations. The CSSF could fund work with community groups to repair those relationships, to reset those root causes of what was driving recruitment, and that was the gap that was filled. What I worry about, and perhaps we can come back to this, is that that gap is no longer being filled in UK development policy, with the ISF moving more and more towards a national defence tool and British development aid moving more and more away from peacebuilding in fragile states. However, that goes beyond your question.

Q3 Chair: It is something that we will be returning to in the course of the questioning. You rightly identify it as a key issue. Mike, based on your work, what did you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the CSSF, which, for the record, I should say is the conflict, stability and security fund?

Mike Jobbins: One of the things, building on what Nic shared, was the degree to which the CSSF, now ISF, was risk-tolerant and able to match on-the-ground actions with diplomatic priorities. For example, in Syria for three years the CSSF supported us and through us a large number of civic groups working in every zone of control in Syria to build their capacity to support local dispute resolution, work that was incredibly risky at the time, politically risky from the FCDO's perspective, and physically risky for people engaged in that programme, but also hugely meaningful.

Today, given the changes over the past six months in Syria, we are seeing those seeds that were sown with CSSF, risk-tolerant, rapid funding to on-the-ground practical activities, give fruit. Many of those groups that were being supported through these expeditionary resources and programmes are now playing a key role in shaping the future of Syria. That ability to move quickly, to do things that manifested in real life, like the examples that Nic was sharing, but that fit into a strategic logic for long-term stability was one of the key things that we saw the CSSF playing.

Along with what Nic said, one thing I would emphasise as we look around the world is that the CSSF is a special tool that the UK Government put in the hands of the diplomats that they deploy around the world, in the hands of the FCDO, and that ability to support particularly civilian-led action that practically unfolds on the ground risks getting subsumed. If it gets shunted into supporting routine security operations, routine budget priorities, that ability to move quickly risks being lost. The civilian nature is often the missing gap. That is a special tool that the CSSF offers.

Q4 David Taylor: Thanks for your answer, Mike. I want to specifically talk about the project that you just mentioned in Syria. Where we expected to see sectarian violence with the fall of Assad, we are thankfully so far not seeing that, notwithstanding the incident on the coast a few months ago. By and large, we are seeing relative calm and peace. It strikes me that for a relatively small amount of money, you are able to achieve work that



is contributing to a peaceful Syria, which is much less expensive than the amounts that we would have to spend if that country were to go to civil war again. Is that a fair view? Could you just confirm how much money that specific project received?

Mike Jobbins: Sure. That is exactly right. In many ways it is that stitch in time that saves nine, that engagement early on and in tough moments built the trust, built the relationships and built the ability to shape where things are going. These groups that the CSSF was supporting, within, I think, a week of the fall of Assad, had already begun uniting, organising calls, discussions between women, between minorities, between different people of all stripes across Syria, using all the online platforms to begin shaping the future. That is work that they continue up to this day.

I can get back to you on the overall budget, but it is extremely cost effective because there is a big focus on investing in local people. The overall budget, I believe, was less than £700,000 per year, all of which was invested directly in the communities that were doing the work and yielding real fruits.

Q5 **James Naish:** If I could come in there, Mike, the CSSF in its format was there about nine years. Would you say that what you have described was true just towards the end or was CSSF having an immediate impact when it was first introduced?

Mike Jobbins: I cannot speak to all the CSSF programmes, given the sensitivities in Syria at the time. I do not have visibility on what other organisations were doing or other things that it was supporting. What I can say is that across a range of contexts where we work, Mozambique, Yemen, the Sahel, we have seen that same ethos of supporting insider mediators, local dispute resolution, atrocities prevention efforts, civil society infrastructure building. We have seen that time and again as one of the real things that CSSF offered in that space. I cannot speak to the rest of the Syria portfolio but we can say that it has been highly effective and has been smart use of taxpayer funds.

Q6 **Chair:** Nic, do you think there are countries where the CSSF or the ISF have worked especially well?

Nic Hailey: I am a bit like Mike, I cannot speak to every country in the world, but I would talk maybe about our work in Ukraine briefly. We worked alongside a larger contract with civil society to support the manner in which civil society builds relationships between people in a tense environment. You have a lot of polarisation within Ukraine; people have moved between different parts of the country. People speak Russian or Ukrainian as a preference. There are disruptions clearly to family life and to the market because of the war. Relationships between the Government and communities can be stretched and all those things need working on, and they will need working on after a ceasefire as well, not just rebuilding the physical bridges but the bridges between people. We have found the CSSF a very effective tool for supporting that work. As



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Mike says, again, at a small scale, it does not require vast funding but it enables you to fund those local efforts where relationships between people are restored, working through the local community groups.

Q7 Chair: Mike, are there examples of CSSF funding contributing to programmes that prevent forced displacement that you can tell us about?

Mike Jobbins: Sure. I can give one example. For those who follow, there is a very serious insurgency in northern Mozambique that spans the border between Tanzania and Mozambique, which are key partners. It is an area where there is a lot of investment, including British investment, and where the insurgency that is linked to ISIS has created enormous amounts of displacement, death and humanitarian suffering. One of the effects of that insurgency and ISIS becoming involved is that both Governments, the Tanzanians and the Mozambicans, shut down the border so no commerce could go back and forth. Trade cut in half across that region and created, on top of the humanitarian displacement, tremendous economic needs that had the perverse effect of actually fuelling the insurgency as people were desperately looking for their livelihoods. The economy was devastated on top of the security being devastated.

Working with the CSSF, working with the British High Commission, working with the two Governments, there was a set of high-level conversations that we supported between those Governments to reopen the borders, which was a political conversation. However, what was critical was that the CSSF also enabled the on-the-ground feasibility studies for a small amount of money, less than £60,000, which was less than one day's worth of lost border revenue. The CSSF enabled those feasibility studies that led to the reopening of the border.

Just six weeks ago, one of the key ferry crossings between Tanzania and Mozambique reopened, addressing some of the economic suffering that fuelled the insurgency and the economic desperation that contributes to migration, both within the country and beyond the country. We have seen those tangible on-the-ground actions, not resting only in the conference rooms that often are quite divorced from the realities of petty traders carrying tomatoes and other goods back and forth, really unstick a sticky issue and reduce the need of people to flee, creating the ability within the wider security context for people to begin rebuilding their lives there without being forced to migrate or flee that area.

Q8 Noah Law: It is interesting to hear some of the very tangible examples of the projects the fund has worked on. Taking a step back, starting with Nic, could you maybe explain a bit more where you would like to see greater clarity around the objectives and overall aims of the now integrated security fund?

Nic Hailey: I am clearly well out of Government, so others will speak better, but my sense is that the ISF is now moving towards a much more directly national security-focused fund and there is certainly a place for



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that. It is not the work my organisation does but it is a legitimate thing for a Government to do. On the other hand, though, the UK's development programming seems to be moving more and more towards dealing with the symptoms of conflict rather than the causes. I saw the Minister's appearance at this Committee last week: a big focus on humanitarian need, understandable. It has quadrupled in 10 years. We are at record levels, but that is the symptoms of conflict.

As the World Bank has set out, 80% of humanitarian need is driven by conflict, understandably. Somewhere between those two is a conflict prevention capability, which the UK, in my view, really needs to have and is losing. It is much cheaper to prevent conflict as well as the human suffering, yet the share of UK ODA going to peacebuilding has gone from something like 4% 10 years ago to 1% now. This gap that I mentioned at the start is widening and that concerns me.

Q9 Noah Law: Briefly, before turning to Mike on the same question of overall aims and focus, what do you think the political impetus is for that increasing focus on the symptoms, as you described?

Nic Hailey: My speculation would be that humanitarian aid is hard to argue against. We must help those who need our help most. Few of us would argue against that. The demands that that need has placed on the international aid system have been immense. My sense—and I am speculating—is that it is also politically easier. It is clearer to talk about direct help to those who are starving, for example, than to talk about the often more complicated, knotty conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It can be harder to prove the case also for peacebuilding to show the evidence. We can count the number of people we have fed but can we really evidence that we prevented a conflict?

I think what really is evidence is that the cost of conflict to the world is unmanageable, so the case is there to invest. The UK should be good at this because of the merged Department, the combination of diplomacy and development, the presence of the UN, and so on. This should be an area for the UK to lead.

Chair: Sam wants to ask a question.

Q10 Sam Rushworth: Sorry, I have to dart out for 30 minutes. I know both of your organisations well because I have worked with International Alert in Rwanda and Search for Common Ground in the Central African Republic. I have seen that grassroots work. It sounds to me that what you are saying is you think that what is going to disappear is a lot of the support that happens, the ultra-grassroots prevention work. Are you seeing that already? If that were taken away, what do you see your organisations doing?

Nic Hailey: We are certainly seeing it on the UK front. My organisation gets almost no remaining ISF or CSSF funding. That is a result of cuts mainly. Work we were doing on long-term issues like gender-based



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violence in Central Asia, which the CSSF had funded for some years, has then been cut because that is no longer in the UK's direct interest. Clearly, the US is now broadly not doing this any more and we will see what emerges now from USAID. USAID was a significant funder of this prevention work in places like Rwanda, where it funded what we did there.

We are finding there are other countries interested. We are keeping going. We believe in what we do and we will keep raising money for it but it is a real concern. In Rwanda, for example, the thousands of genocide perpetrators, the ones who never asked for forgiveness so got the longest sentences, they are now coming out of jail after 30 years behind bars. There are probably 8,000 coming out in the next five years. That is a risk to the future stability of Rwanda. Our work there involves supporting those people, processes of reconciliation with communities—you may know something of it—and processes of forgiveness and economic projects. You can reintegrate these individuals but if you do not, nobody thinks now about the risks of further conflict in Rwanda, thankfully. However, without that less visible work, there is a real risk in the future.

Q11 Noah Law: I will turn to Mike on the same question. Where would you like to see greater, perhaps briefly, clarity in the aims and objectives of the integrated security fund?

Mike Jobbins: One area would be to clarify the role of the integrated security fund versus other mechanisms. As Nic said, I think there is a real risk of cutting the development priorities to putting band-aids on wounds rather than solving problems on one hand. Then a shift towards the security side on the CSSF leaves that gap and inability to nip crises in the bud.

I would encourage the Committee and the Government to think clearly about where two key functions of effective work in conflict sit. One, how to address the long-term root causes, which might be a development challenge that might rightly sit in the bilateral assistance. It does need to sit somewhere and it cannot be forgotten. Secondly, the ability to respond rapidly, strategically and in an expeditionary way alongside British diplomacy to end some of these chronic crises that plague the world, but that also plague British foreign policy and that are key priorities for this Government and for the British public, places like the Middle East, Syria, Ukraine.

I encourage you to think through those two capabilities. Particularly with the CSSF, what I would highlight is it draws on some of the key strengths as we look around the world, across different Governments that the UK has in its robust embassy infrastructure, its strong culture and history of diplomacy within the FCDO, its presence in international forums and its ability, not exclusively on the funding side but on the political side, to provide a voice of clarity as it has been doing in Sudan, for example.



That is all assets on the political side that the CSSF and ISF can back up and support. If there were to be a ceasefire in Sudan, how would you support ceasefire verification? How would you support humanitarian access if the parties were to agree to that? That ability to match up diplomatic breakthroughs or respond to emerging risks is a tool that the FCDO is uniquely positioned to use and the ISF is uniquely positioned to supply.

As there are aid cuts in Washington and in London, in other capitals, and as donors become less full spectrum donors and more focused on where they have their own unique value add and their unique contributions, I would encourage—as we look around our partners, one of the key value adds that the UK has and where it is uniquely suited is that question of effect, how you effectively work in conflict to bring about peace, and linking that assistance with the diplomatic imperative and a focus on these key places.

Q12 Noah Law: Turning back to Nic, on that question of the strategic direction, how have you seen previous national security strategies guiding the use of the conflict, stability and security fund?

Nic Hailey: I think it has always been a part of it, but I would say the same trend that I noted earlier I have seen in national security strategies. From a period where the UK national interest was defined quite broadly, insecurity affects us, a breeding ground for terrorism, drivers of broader threats, to a much narrower focus. I understand the reasons for that. Of course, I understand the great sense of insecurity that people feel around the UK's core interests.

I do think it is a mistaken direction to take long term for the UK's interest because the withdrawal of a focus on drivers of fragility—I think David Lammy said in his speech in January that preventing conflict is how we stop people fleeing their homes in the first place, for example, and I would agree with that. I would argue for a return to a broader conception of national interest around that.

Q13 Noah Law: Finally, how does the overall focus of the ISF sit alongside the broader sustainable development goals and the spirit of the ODA rules, do you think? Sorry, there are two quite big questions to answer.

Nic Hailey: I know less about the ODA rules, four years out of the Foreign Office, than I used to. It has been an advantage for the CSSF to blend ODA and non-ODA. For example, another project in Kenya, when I was posted there, was training people deploying to Somalia on how to avoid IEDs. You could train both police and military at the same facility. You could not worry too much about the ODA-bility. Those tools are helpful. I see the ISF increasingly as a defence and threats tool rather than a development tool. That goes back to my point about the gap.

I think it is a real challenge for FCDO with a smaller baseline, which has essentially allowed a lot of conflict prevention work to happen under the



CSSF for many years, while other development activity happened on FCDO baseline. I do not see the FCDO baseline absorbing what the CSSF has given up and I think that is a real risk for the next few years.

Q14 James Naish: I want to just take a step back. We are talking about CSSF in the UK context and saying that it is a great strength. What are other countries doing in that same way? What is the benchmark here that we are comparing to or, in reality, is there not such a benchmark in other parts of the world?

Nic Hailey: To my awareness the Canadians have a similar mechanism, so peace ops, which we have worked with in a number of places. It has, in our experience, been a bit longer term, which is helpful. This annual allocation process and reprioritisation process in CSSF has been a real handicap for longer-term conflict prevention. The Canadians have been flexible but longer term. The Germans have something similar, so their Foreign Ministry is part of conflict prevention rather than the development ministries, which I think works in similar ways, although I have less direct experience.

One strength that I have not seen in any other donor is the ability to join up across Government that the CSSF provided. As a High Commissioner, as the SRO, so the lead for the CSSF programme in east Africa, I have had, I think, 12 different Government Departments sitting on the Nairobi platform. Their work was joined up by a single strategy endorsed by the National Security Council, with CSSF funding to back various interventions under that by the NCA or the Department for Transport on aviation security, those kinds of things. That is a real strength, I think, for the UK, in particular in its overseas posts, to join up the cross-Government effort, which the CSSF has provided, if you like, a blood stream for in funding terms.

James Naish: Mike, anything that you want to add on that?

Mike Jobbins: I would echo what Nic said. One of the strengths of the CSSF, from a Government perspective, is we appreciate how it balances transparency and competition among groups that are applying for funding with the need to be fast and to be credible on the ground.

At least when it was founded—I am not sure of the statistics now—about 70% of the funds from the ISF/CSSF were going through a framework of about 100 pre-vetted organisations, which would have mini-competitions for funding. It was not published publicly because that would create enormous security risks, but it was not just awarded to whoever the friend of whoever was. It was a good balance of rapidity and the ability to use vetted partners. The CSSF also has an ability to move funds directly to embassies around the world to enable the embassy local teams, where they have the capacity, to use those funds, but also where they do not have the capacity to draw upon the management resources in London. In a lot of places where there is conflict and atrocities, there is not always that ability. Things are moving quickly. It is not always every embassy



that can manage those capabilities.

I think that ability to work through competitive procurement, through contracts, as well as locally led grants, is a real strength that the CSSF brings. As a result, we would say it is relatively more transparent and relatively faster than a lot of the sister organisations and sister instruments, including those that the US used to use, which was heavily reliant on contractors. The CSSF has the ability to work much more directly with niche expertise, supporting things on the ground without going through a series of middlemen, in the same way as things moved in the US, yet it showed a set of reliable partners through that pre-vetting process that the CSSF does.

From a procurement perspective, we do appreciate the transparency and the way that those funds are used. I might highlight that as one of the mechanical strengths in addition to the strategic strengths of the CSSF.

Q15 David Taylor: These funds have been integrated across Government. Could you outline for us the advantages of that approach and perhaps some of the challenges of that approach?

Nic Hailey: As I said before, the advantages of a funding mechanism that incentivises cross-Government working is important. Secondly, as a diplomat, that allowed one to capture those projects in a Government-to-Government framework. The Kenya-UK Security Compact, for example, which I helped negotiate and which the then Prime Minister launched when she visited, that captured a number of these different programmes, which for the Kenyans added up to a coherent offer around security, was diplomatically recognised as such and could be funded as such. That is an advantage.

On the downside, the annual allocation is problematic, particularly when new priorities emerge and suddenly all the money needs to be found, understandably, for Ukraine or for Gaza, and other things suffer as a result of that. One further disadvantage is the extent to which sometimes quite long-term projects, which arguably should have sat on the Department's baselines, would be funded by CSSF; for example, long-term National Crime Agency-led anti-corruption units within countries, sensible, helpful things, or long-term military training activities led by the MOD, British Support Team East Africa, where I was. Good things, but things that were designed to last essentially for the long term but were being funded by a fund that told itself it was catalytic and flexible.

There was a real tension there when you came to that annual, "Let's reprioritise what matters most". You would have, "Well, we can't really close this or stop that because it is essential to the ongoing operation". There was an extent to which the Government was—I am going to use the casual phrase—playing shops with the CSSF. The money would come in and then it would go to fund the MOD to do this activity or the NCA to do that activity. That meant less of it going to organisations at the local level.



David Taylor: Mike, is there anything you want to add to that?

Mike Jobbins: I would echo the advantages and disadvantages. Flexibility is a double-edged sword, because on one hand it helps you meet the needs. In one country in west Africa, we saw the UK, I believe with CSSF support, supporting security sector reform efforts, security strengthening in a country experiencing terrorist violence and, at the same time, there were areas where those military could not operate. Their patrols would not be accepted, they were considered too dangerous for the soldiers to patrol, so CSSF was able to come in and support us to work with local networks, to have town hall forums, to have public discussions and negotiations to enable the military that were receiving security assistance to enter in and resecure these towns that had been outside of its control for months or years.

That is when it is the best, when you have a key need and you are blending security efforts and strengthening their capacity, but working on the civilian side to create that demand for soldiers to return. That is the strength.

On the weakness, as Nic said, flexibility is a double-edged sword. It takes an awful lot of discipline to not put baseline expenses into what is your nimble and flexible funds. That is something that we are also very worried about. We are also worried, as the UK sets its priorities, that the ability to respond to atrocities might get lost in the mix. As we set priority regions, priority thematics to focus on, the reality of something slipping through the cracks and not being able to respond is an increasing risk. The Jews were not a priority in 1939; Rwanda was not a priority in 1994. There is a risk that allocating in an area where everyone is facing funding cuts, we take away the ability to respond flexibly in places where there are real atrocities.

Thinking about the ISF, I would encourage not earmarking everything for specific conflict, specific security threats in particular geographies, to make sure there is that ability to respond in a light, flexible way to atrocities or risks around the world. The CSSF, because it is global, because it is multi-mandated, because it can be managed from London and therefore move quickly, is a unique tool in that arsenal. As people programme the funds, we would encourage them not to lose sight of the need to respond to the unforeseen, including outside of Ukraine or other top priority crises.

Q16 **David Taylor:** That is a good point, Mike, and one I think that a number of us on the Committee worry about. Yes, it is good to see that Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan are potentially going to have their funding protected, but as a long-term Syria watcher, that is my worry, too: that not only there but other places as well might flare up and we will be limited in how we respond, especially with the USAID cuts.

I would like to follow up with a question to you both. Were there any innovations or challenges in the transition to the ISF? In that period



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where the CSSF changed to the ISF, were there great innovations that came forward or what were the challenges in that process?

Nic Hailey: I do not have a good answer to that, in the sense that we currently do not have a sufficient number of ISF projects. Because of the direction it has taken, it is less in line with my organisation's work. I do think that there is a place within Government for a fund that is setting up to do what I understand the ISF to be doing, but I think that is getting quite a long way from the conflict prevention work that I am focused on. That is the challenge that I wanted to flag.

David Taylor: Mike, can I have a better answer?

Mike Jobbins: No. I appreciate, at least at a conceptual level, the shift to the ISF and the ability to link problem sets at home in the UK with problem sets abroad in the international drugs trade, for example, or in the cyber-security space. Conceptually, there could be key innovations in blending the home and abroad. We certainly see many questions and threats that are neither in the extremism space or they are not exclusively a domestic nor an international problem.

There is an innovative idea, I suppose, there. We have not really seen funds being deployed in that way. How those are deployed outside of the routine baseline budgets of Departments is not perfectly clear. I would say that, at least conceptually, it is something that is worth monitoring and looking into.

On the challenges, one thing that I would highlight maybe for this Committee and the Government to look into is the simple planning cycle of the CSSF and ISF. Over the past few years it appeared to us, at least from the outside, that the deadlines might be slipping in terms of the aid allocations and the CSSF allocations to different countries. On several occasions, I would meet British ambassadors who would not know what resource they would have even a few months ahead because the allocations had not been done. For the donor co-ordination, particularly for the British to be able to tell the Americans or the Europeans or the Japanese or whoever these are some of the resources that will have to support this peace process in DRC and Rwanda or in Sudan, that predictability to enable frontline diplomats to plan their own interventions and to be able to communicate to the foreign counterparts in the burden-sharing spirit is important.

I would encourage in the next phase of the ISF to make sure that those planning cycles are relatively rigid and relatively clear so that everyone can understand. Not only those within Government but everyone who is working with Government can understand where the decisions are being taken, when they are being taken, when envelopes are being allocated, when thematic priorities are being set. I think that that did slip, or at least from outside of government it seemed to me that slipped a little bit from the CSSF to ISF transition as things were being reorganised internally.



Chair: We noted Nic nodding while you were speaking there, Mike.

Q17 **Alice Macdonald:** This is probably more for Nic. I want to go back to James's point about what other countries are doing. Obviously, the relationship with the EU is pretty high on the agenda at the moment. What is the EU model that they have around a similar ISF model? Do you think there are more ways that we could be co-operating with the EU around pooled funds or a joint approach around this?

Nic Hailey: Absolutely, in principle. The EU has the foreign policy instruments funding in the External Action Service, which we work with in some of our peace process support work, for example, which is fairly similar to CSSF. In principle, short-term funding but it can be extended for longer-term periods—relatively flexible, run from the diplomatic part of the EU rather than the development part. We have been able to work pretty successfully with that in supporting some of the Track II work, so the work with civil society around a peace process.

Yes, it is not a dissimilar instrument. I had not thought of it that way before. If there is scope for the UK to pool funds with the EU is more a question for politicians, I guess, than for me, but it would certainly be something that as a peacebuilding organisation I would want to encourage. One of the phenomena in peacemaking at the moment is what is called forum shopping. The increasing number of countries and bodies that are seeking to mediate conflict—more actors like Turkey, Qatar, others coming forward—is a good thing, but if you are belligerent, the temptation to try all those different routes, to play them off against each other and to shop around those forums, is becoming quite strong. We have seen some peace processes that have been really hampered by that.

The more that countries can co-ordinate around shared interests and shared projects, the better I think it is for peacemaking.

Q18 **James Naish:** You have mentioned Ukraine a few times, Nic. We do not really know what the end of that conflict will look like and we do not know the role of ISF within that. If we assume that ISF were to play a role, how do you think any future UK peacekeeping operation would start to affect other activities beyond Ukraine? Will that be all-consuming in your view or is there a broader role that we will still be able to sustain as a country?

Nic Hailey: I am clearly not an expert on the military budget, but I do know, particularly from my work in Afghanistan, quite how expensive the deployment of troops is. My strong guess is that if the ISF were being used to finance, for example, a troop deployment for ceasefire monitoring or border security, that would consume pretty much everything very quickly. Then you would need to have either a MOD conversation or a reserve conversation. I guess others who are working on this will know. That is a risk.



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I would also say, if I may, on Ukraine that hopefully we will get some kind of ceasefire and clearly the UK should, in my view, seek to support that. There will be a lot of other work needed to repair Ukrainian society well beyond any ceasefire. I would want to express the hope that UK resources would not just go to the hard security elements of that, important as they would be, but they will go to healing some of the wounds in Ukrainian society created by the war, supporting veterans returning to their families, looking at issues like gender-based violence that tend to arise after conflict. There is a whole set of things there that are about rebuilding the bridges between people, as well as the physical bridges destroyed by the war.

There will, of course, be actors—you can guess who I mean—who will be actively seeking to undermine that social cohesion well beyond any ceasefire. So I would argue that strongly in the UK's interest.

Q19 James Naish: Mike, do you have any thoughts on the risk that some peacekeeping can end up being so significant that it has a wider detriment on the role of the ISF?

Mike Jobbins: No. I would agree with Nic's assessment that the peacekeeping in Ukraine will be a multi-year—quite a number of years—task and is probably a routine budget. There will be a MOD preoccupation certainly for many years to come.

One thing that I might highlight is that whether it is Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Congo, for all these peace processes there is a set of common issues, skillsets and capabilities that will be required for any ceasefire, let alone a peace deal to stick. That will include ceasefire verification, not just through military but through civilian verification. It will include war crimes and accountability investigation. There is a set of post-conflict reconstruction, demobilisation and security sector reforms, strategic communications, and so forth. There is a set of capabilities that the UK and every international Government will need as we enter this age of ceasefire negotiations and peace processes. They can equally serve Ukraine as Myanmar, as Congo.

Every conflict in crisis is unique in many ways, but many of these key sticking points are common issues across them all. The MCD, the conflict directorate in FCDO, will play a key technical expertise role. There is a clear role for it to play, not only here but across all those different issue areas. However, then the ISF to be able to support ceasefire verification, let's say, not only in Ukraine but a hypothetical ceasefire in Sudan or Myanmar, is something that is a key capability that outside of the Ukraine challenge will be something that a large number of diplomats and special envoys will be dealing with. Building that capability to serve multiple issue areas makes a lot of sense.

Q20 James Naish: Yes, it is a skillset that needs to be valued and prioritised. The flip of the cost drain that could be Ukraine will be the fact that the Government are committed to raising defence to 2.5% of GDP. What



effect do you think that might have on ISF, Nic?

Nic Hailey: Well, it has had a very clear effect on the development budget, which is a trade-off that the Prime Minister has clearly chosen to make and which I, for what it is worth, profoundly disagree with, for the reasons I mentioned earlier around how you define the UK's national security interests. I think the ISF is significantly smaller than the CSSF used to be. I know that UK peacebuilding funding and conflict prevention funding is now about 1% of its ODA against 4% 10 years ago, and that is a percentage of a smaller pie, so that has shrunk. The UK has gone from the leading global funder of peacebuilding—even at 4% it was the top—to I think the fourth now. The impact is already pretty clear in the UK's aid programming.

The last factor is that the share of UK aid going to conflict-affected states is also falling. Despite the fact that those conflict-affected states now account for most of the extreme poverty in the world—and the Minister said to this Committee last week that poverty alleviation was the key driver, and that is what the Act says as well—more than half of it is now concentrated in conflict-affected places, and that is just going up and up. Yet the UK aid budget is spending less in those places than it used to. All those factors combined I find profoundly troubling.

Q21 **James Naish:** From what you have seen, is that partly to do with the rise in in-donor refugee costs here in the UK or is that a general trend prior to that becoming a bigger issue that we have dealt with?

Nic Hailey: In-donor refugee cost is another, if you like, tax on the aid budget, clearly, and that overall sum. However, even within a smaller sum, it would be possible to have a greater focus on fragility. DFID I think in the mid-2010s set a target that at least 50% of ODA would go to fragile states, for example. The previous Government's White Paper fell short of that target. The current Government's policy falls short of that target.

Despite the concentration of need, we are seeing aid not go there. I think some of the reasons for that are that it is just challenging to do development in conflict-affected places. Clearly, it is more challenging than in stable places. Some of the systems that are set up that are payment by results for these large commercial contracts that the UK Government like to issue can incentivise contractors to work in easier places. If your payment is to educate this number of girls, then you are more likely to do that in an easier place than a complicated one. The whole system is bending towards favouring stable places in a way that I worry about.

Q22 **Alice Macdonald:** I have one follow-up on that, Nic. One of the challenges in making the case for investing in conflict-affected states is how you break the cycle of conflict and investment. Is there an example of a particular country or context you can point to where investment in the things you are talking about has meant sustainable development and



growth?

Nic Hailey: Some of these conflict cycles are very long. I would hate to be proved wrong, but I would give Rwanda as an example. We are working very closely in our work with the Rwandan Government such that it is not just us working with the genocide survivors and the perpetrators on the process I described to your colleague earlier, but we have also helped them to build a national reconciliation policy, to roll this out in all their community service provision and change profoundly how the Rwandan Government think about community relationships. I hope I am right. I think that that addresses the lasting root causes.

Another example, briefly, might be Nepal, where the civil war ended some time ago but was profoundly driven by a sense among ordinary people that they were very alienated from the elite settlement, from the state. We continue to work in Nepal with survivors of sexual violence of the war, on redress, on reparation, on justice. Again, I cannot prove to you absolutely that that means it will never happen again, but I am very clear that those root causes of what drove that conflict are being addressed, again, changing how the Government then respond to that, what laws are enacted around transitional justice, and so on. This takes time. It is not madly expensive, as Mike was saying, but it is important.

Q23 Alice Macdonald: Mike, we have touched on other countries. There are big decisions that have been made in the US when it comes to international aid spending. How do you think the decisions being made in the US context might affect the operating environment and put constraints on the ISF?

Mike Jobbins: Thank you, that is a great question. The US cuts were shocking and really devastating, particularly sudden cuts to US foreign assistance, with grants and contracts terminated. We got messages to shut down our programmes in Goma. The day the city was falling, we got a message on Friday night to shut things down by Saturday morning as rebels were entering town. It was quite devastating, particularly the suddenness and the destabilising effect the cuts had.

As we look a little bit forward, we are mid-stream in the budgeting process. The President and Secretary Rubio have laid out their visions. They are presenting those in Congress later today, in the Senate. We are expecting certainly cuts in the United States. What I would encourage any Government to do, notably the UK, is to understand in direct conversation with the Americans where things are being prioritised, because certainly USAID was one of the largest donors to the sector. No donor can replace that. As important as what has been terminated is, understanding what is coming back and where the US will not have that capability over the next year, two years, is important. My understanding is that the US is looking to bring back a lot of, perhaps not all, its humanitarian assistance, its basic needs assistance in the health and, to some extent, perhaps in the food security space—many of the things where the US has been a leading donor.



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It is less certain, at least any time soon, of its ability to support, to match up a diplomatic energy in seeking peace processes with the on-the-ground work that supports peace. While we see, for example, a lot of US energy into a Rwanda DRC peace process, right now and until we get another year or so in the budget planning and restructuring process, the US will not be able to necessarily support the work on the ground to support that peace effort. That is where tools like the ISF become an even more unique value add in the international community. While there is a political interest in the US in supporting a transition in Syria, the mechanisms will not be in place for a little while for the US to be able to support the civic infrastructure that upholds that.

I would encourage the UK, as it sets its own priorities and understands from the Americans where the US will not be able to bring maybe the value it once did, to step up. Equally, where there has been a dip and an interruption of life-saving support, which is unconscionable but where over the long term US assistance will be back up and running with greater certainty, I would really encourage that direct co-ordination about the unique value adds that the UK has, the unique value adds that the US intends to sustain, and then focus on what the key gaps are. I think the ISF will become all the more relevant in a world where the US is spending the next year, two years, reorganising its conflict mitigation infrastructure.

Q24 Alice Macdonald: Nic, do you have anything to add on that? It is a very big question but, given the global politics and what is happening around the world, do you think models like the ISF are sustainable or do we need to think outside the box and have a totally new model when it comes to addressing some of these issues?

Nic Hailey: Thank you for the question. I think the model of international aid needs to change profoundly. In 2000, 5% of extreme poverty was in conflict-affected places; now it is 50%. If you take the OECD definition of fragility, which is a bit broader than just conflict but is basically about conflict, it is more than two thirds and it is over 90% by 2040 of extreme poverty.

We have a development model that has supported profound progress in lots of places around the world. Child mortality under five, for example, has gone from 12 million to 3 million a year in stable places since 1980. In fragile places it has gone from 3 million to 3 million; it has not budged at all. Extreme poverty has not budged at all in conflict-affected places. To my mind, if you have a business model that has achieved brilliant progress in one set of places and no progress at all in another, you need to look again at that business model.

For me, that is about moving towards more focus on prevention and less on symptoms. It sounds callous to describe humanitarian crises as symptoms, but they are effectively symptoms of failure in all sorts of ways. It is about putting peace and social cohesion as an outcome, an explicit outcome, of development policy.



Q25 **Alice Macdonald:** I should say I am on the board of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Do you think, in terms of democracy building and democratic processes, that that is an important point? I do not know if the ISF has ever been used for any of those activities at all.

Nic Hailey: I do not know if it has, but I definitely think it is an important point. In one sense, peacebuilding in the way that we do it—and I venture that Mike’s organisation does as well—is a form of local democracy in a conflict environment. It is about bringing people together who do not agree with each other to make decisions in a peaceful way and then to stick to them. Absolutely, democracy promotion is an important part of that.

Q26 **Alice Macdonald:** Finally for Mike—and I think, Nic, you were nodding your head as well around what happened in Goma—what were the impacts of that decision for the USAID to be withdrawn? Did anything fill the gaps? How did you keep going or did you keep going?

Mike Jobbins: I can tell you, quite frankly, we continue to work in DRC. About half of our funding was suspended overnight. In Goma, we were told to shut down radio stations. We were supporting FM broadcasters. As a result, people who heard gunshots fled towards the frontlines instead of away from them because the radios were not able to be online and broadcast. The effects were really shocking.

We, as an organisation, continue to work in the country with support from the public, from foundations, from other Governments, and we engage with the Administration here in Washington, with Secretary Rubio’s team, on how to resume the programmes that are fundamentally lifesaving, although not humanitarian. It has been devastating. What I would encourage international Governments around the world to do is to understand in detail what are the gaps being left and being created by this US cut. If American \$1 million was cut, that does not mean an equal amount of British pounds is needed. The question is: how do you shore up some of that impact? How do you shore up the effects in communities of those things being cut? It is not necessarily a one to one replacement; in many cases it is significantly cheaper to shore up the base impact of those programmes.

We continue to work, we continue to engage, but it has been very difficult for the Congolese people and for people around the world as these cuts, freezes and uncertainty struck around the world. While no one can pick up the total budget of what USAID is pulling away from, there is an opportunity to continue to make use of the infrastructure that exists to deliver the results at a much lower cost over the years to come.

Q27 **Tracy Gilbert:** This is to both of you. Obviously, we are coming up to our spending review here. If there were to be cuts or redirection of the budget for ISF, what do you think would be able to cover that space? How do you think those services will continue to be provided?



Nic Hailey: For me, the key question for the spending review, which I understand only as an outsider, of course, is how much is the FCDO prepared to take on to its baseline of the peacebuilding and conflict prevention work that the CSSF used to support, which the ISF increasingly does not support because it is not its core mission. My sense is to make a parallel. If the Department of Health is going into a spending round, it has a pretty good argument that prevention is cheaper than cure. I would strongly urge the Foreign Office to be making—I hope it is and I am certainly urging anyone who is willing to talk to me about it—a similar argument around conflict.

As Mike said, the US humanitarian funding was 42% of all humanitarian funding. That is not all coming back. Even when it was there, the humanitarian need in the world was not meetable by donors. Something needs to change with a greater focus on prevention. I think there is a clear case for that in the spending round.

Tracy Gilbert: Mike, did you have any additional thoughts on that?

Mike Jobbins: I might also just add on a tactical level that as we enter into a context of doing more with less, I encourage the CSSF staff and ISF staff to continue to take a look at value for money in some of the key decisions. At the end of the day, it is not a spending exercise; it is a strategic tool. What pounds are buying is the local woman who is negotiating and mediating between two armed groups so that there is not an outbreak of gunfire and forced displacement in Syria. Money is only as effective as the results that it is buying. To what extent within its own systems, within how funds are allocated, is there the opportunity, even in a reduced budget, to be faster, to be more effective, and to be more direct in terms of ensuring not that the total amount of the envelope is allocated, but that local mediation in Syria that prevents the future displacement and loss of life?

That is a healthy question and it is one for everyone to engage in and use the opportunity of a spending review to make sure we are shoring up what is most important, which is—we would argue and agree with Nic—getting off the hamster wheel of humanitarian crises but also making sure that every pound we are allocating delivers the most impact. By and large, that means making sure it is actually doing good on the ground.

Q28 **Tracy Gilbert:** Just coming back to your point there, Nic, you said that the FCDO could possibly pick up some of that peacekeeping and long-term prevention work. How might it do that? In your experience, what would be some examples that you may have?

Nic Hailey: Clearly, some of it is about what choices it makes within the aid envelope, how much support is provided for those activities. There are two other things I think matter. One is what capabilities FCDO has in its posts. There is a very strong cadre of conflict advisers, governance advisers and people with deep expertise who I have seen work incredibly effectively with Governments, both local and national, in conflict-affected



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situations and who can be influential on the rest of the UK's programming.

That, for me, is the other key bit. When you are doing an education programme or a health programme in a country, you can do that in a way that is shaped by thinking about the conflict dynamics: who is going to get this help? How does it affect them? How can we build a peace outcome into this? Is it designed by a local community in a way that incentivises producing a peace dividend? You can do peacebuilding without thinking you are doing it. You are thinking you are doing it, but without saying you are funding a peacebuilding organisation such as mine, for example. I still see too much development and, indeed, investment by development investors being done in ways that are not sensitive to the conflict context and can either do harm or certainly do no good in terms of peace outcomes. That is some of that change in the business model that I think is now needed, is more adaptive locally designed programming with peace outcomes built into it, even if education is what it says on the tin.

Q29 Tracy Gilbert: Finally, to Mike: are there any lessons for CSSF and ISF or elsewhere when it comes to future funding or opportunities on conflict prevention and resolution?

Mike Jobbins: Absolutely. In addition to what we have highlighted before, which is to prioritise risk tolerance, speed, and that link between diplomacy on the ground realities, I might emphasise the value of looking at what no other instrument can do, and that is what the ISF should be doing. There are traditional ODA things that should be, as Nic said, much more conflict sensitive in addressing long-term reconciliation efforts. There is traditional security assistance and MOD assistance, all of which needs to change given the demands that are there.

I come back to that middle gap, the ability to take risk in an expeditionary way and focus the ISF's ability on that. I have been sharing some examples of things we have seen that have worked well in open session. If it was helpful, I can send some case studies of some of our more sensitive programmes that can speak to how that looks on the ground and where that middle gap is being filled.

As we are all experiencing funding cuts and constraints, I would say: focus on what is the unique value proposition. For me, the ISF is that middle ground and the UK is uniquely positioned to use those expeditionary resources well, given the strength of the FCDO's infrastructure and diplomatic engagement around the world.

Chair: Thank you. We would welcome those case studies, if you can send them to us. Can I thank both of you for your evidence? I have allowed it to go longer than we had anticipated because it was very valuable contributions from both of you, which will be extremely helpful in our deliberations. Thank you very much for your evidence. We will now move to the second panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Eva Tabbasam and Lewis Brooks.

Q30 Chair: We now have our second panel today. We have Eva Tabbasam, who is the Director of Gender Action for Peace and Security, and Lewis Brooks, who is the UK Policy and Advocacy Co-ordinator for Saferworld. Can I begin by asking both Eva and Lewis to say a little bit about themselves and their organisations?

Eva Tabbasam: I am Eva Tabbasam. I am the Director of Gender Action for Peace and Security. We are the UK civil society network on women, peace and security. We are a network of about 18 multi-mandated INGOs that work across peacebuilding, conflict and gender, and we also work alongside women's rights organisations in-country.

Lewis Brooks: My name is Lewis Brooks, UK Policy and Advocacy Adviser at Saferworld. We are a peacebuilding and conflict prevention charity, again working in various parts of the world. We do have some UK funding, including from the integrated security fund and previously the CSSF. The other thing relevant to this is that Saferworld co-chairs a group of conflict policy experts within the INGO community in the UK, the Conflict Policy Group. That group has had a long-term relationship with CSSF as a feedback mechanism within the sector.

Q31 Chair: Can I ask you both, based on your work, what you saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the conflict, stability and security fund?

Eva Tabbasam: For our work that we have done with the CSSF, the main two things would be, first, the work on women, peace and security—the fund has an outcome level that is focused on WPS specifically. A lot of the work that has been done on women, peace and security includes funding for women's rights organisations. That is direct core flexible funding. Quite a lot of the work on WPS is around that.

In addition, I would mention its expertise. What the Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk essentially looks to do is provide support on implementing the UK's commitments on WPS across Government, providing expert technical support on women, peace and security from outside Government, but also having a dedicated team within what was the Gender, Peace and Security Portfolio under ISF—so, being able to have gender advisers across Government to support the work, to make sure that we are integrating gender and the women, peace and security agenda.

Lewis Brooks: Similar to what some of your earlier witnesses said, I think one of the strengths of the conflict, stability and security fund was a dedicated fund for supporting conflict prevention, resolution and stabilisation. As Nic said, there is evidence out there that, while the CSSF was active, the wider portfolio of UK aid was decreasing its focus on conflict prevention, and the share of the aid budget spent on that



particular activity declined from 2016 down to 2019. Then you had the covid-related aid cuts and then the more recent aid cuts. I think having that dedicated CSSF fund was a very important strength, to incorporate conflict in among those other security challenges that Nic was talking about.

One of the other characteristics of the fund—self-proclaimed—is agility. I think this is both a strength and a weakness of the fund. It is quite strong in political terms. If something dynamic happens in a conflict setting or a fragile setting—the conflict changes, there is a coup, or even if there is the sudden possibility of a peace process—the fund is quite adept at shifting its programming to take advantage or to adapt to that new political reality. The problem with the fund is the bureaucratic side of the fund, the dissemination of funds, the identifying of partners that does not necessarily keep pace with political events on the ground. You can end up going through quite a long-winded process in order to secure project funding, which can take many months, even though you have been asked potentially to deliver programming in quite a short space of time. Again, it is good that the fund highlights agility as a characteristic, but there is both a positive dimension to that and a weaker side to that.

Q32 **Chair:** Again, to both of you, are there countries where the fund has worked particularly well or other countries where it has not been used but could have been used and would have made a difference?

Lewis Brooks: I can start on that one. I think Sudan is an interesting country historically in the history of the CSSF. Going back before 2022, in fact, 2021, the CSSF was piloting different ways of programming in that country. That included one of our projects, something called the Conflict Sensitivity Facility. This was a training and research hub that provided conflict analysis to the development sector so it could understand how to deliver development aid or humanitarian aid in a conflict-sensitive way. The CSSF was an early innovator in those facilities to advise the rest of the aid budget.

Unfortunately, CSSF pulled out of Sudan—I think it was around 2021, so just before the outbreak of fighting between the RSF and the SAF. I think this is a case where the CSSF has to make difficult decisions, but this is arguably a case where, given the dynamism in that very tragic conflict and the risk that that conflict can expand within the country, taking in new groups and exacerbating ethnic tensions or spreading to other parts of the country, that should have been a case where the CSSF re-engaged and considered how it could better support those dynamic, very agile interventions. I think that would be one country for the Committee to look into.

Chair: Eva, do you have any thoughts?

Eva Tabbasam: The concern now would probably be the reduction that we are seeing in some ISF programming on women, peace and security in some regions. For example, in the Middle East, some of those have



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been reduced, which would suggest that they are no longer a priority. For us, for example, that would be a concern and aligns with concerns that the priority is shifting.

For example, in the first panel there was a mention about Syria. Members that we have within the network had funding for women's rights organisations programming in Syria. That has been significantly reduced. The reasons given were shifting priorities in Syria but also this no longer being a priority for the ISF.

Concerns about the selection of countries that the fund will be interested in and what that is tied to is up for question. The fund has an element of ODA. To think about why that is important, it is that it allows the fund to work on not only broader objectives related to development, but also ODA-eligible countries. That is something that we would be keen for the fund to retain so that it can continue to work in fragile, conflicted contexts and to continue some of the WRO work that we have been doing.

Q33 Tracy Gilbert: Supplementary to that, when was the timing of that for the project, the money being withdrawn from the women's project?

Eva Tabbasam: The project in Syria? That has happened in the last six months. There has been a reduction. That is one of many programmes on women's rights organisations funding. One of the reasons why that model is so great for CSSF or the ISF is because it is the ability to take that risk and fund directly to women's rights organisations. Syria is one example.

Other examples are in Libya. There was a women, peace and security programme that has come to an end. There were a lot of negotiations towards the last year of that project, stop and start reductions, constant negotiations so that we can continue to fund the women's rights organisations as part of that programme.

We at GAPS are part of a consortium on another ISF project focusing on women's rights organisations in Iraq. Again, that has seen a reduction that is specifically focused on funding for women's rights organisations and, alongside that, capacity building in terms of advocacy, technical support—again, supporting the work that they are doing on the ground in terms of what they are seeing as needs and priorities.

These are programmes that we are seeing being either reduced or not continuing. For us, that is a concern—what the new shape of the ISF will look like, and whether the fourth outcome of ISF at the minute, which is women, peace and security, will remain.

Q34 Sam Rushworth: Lewis, are there any countries where the fund has already been withdrawn that have experienced destabilisation?

Lewis Brooks: I mentioned Sudan as one a minute ago. I think that is one that was—again, it was an earlier withdrawal. That was during the CSSF area a few years ago. At the same time that portfolio was, if I



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remember rightly, a joint Sudan and South Sudan portfolio. Again, it pulled out of South Sudan as well.

There was some continuing support to some South Sudanese women's organisations through the gender portfolio within the fund. That particular project finished in March and that has not been renewed, despite it being a flagship programme for the fund.

There is another one there. Although it does not relate to the work of my organisation, I have heard from other NGOs that have had programmes not renewed in the Asia-Pacific region. They are telling me that the reason for that is that the India-Pacific portfolio has either ended or has been restructured. It sounds like there is—again, it is difficult to know because it is ongoing at the moment. As yet, the fund has not put its current allocation or portfolios in the public domain. However, my understanding is it sounds like there is either a restructuring or withdrawal from the India-Pacific region.

From time to time, given that it is an agile fund and it shifts its focus and its priorities, it will change where its thematic and geographic portfolios are. That is important. That is an important characteristic of the fund. When I say "restructuring", it might be that what they are doing is, rather than getting rid of the India-Pacific portfolio, merging that with another one and having a broader regional thing. I am just speculating here based on how the funds change from time to time.

Q35 Sam Rushworth: In terms of Sudan, what do you feel would need to happen to enable ISF programming to return to Sudan?

Lewis Brooks: In terms of conditions within the country for there to be a need for supporting peacebuilding and the reduction of violence or supporting different figures to prepare for a potential peace process, those conditions are there. The need for supporting that is already there. Certainly, our partners in Sudan are saying, "We are able to do peacebuilding and to stop that conflict from expanding further in certain sub-national regions of the country." So those conditions are met.

Sam Rushworth: Your on-the-ground partners are saying, "Look, we are ready, we can do this"?

Lewis Brooks: Yes. I think at the level of the fund itself, it basically needs to carry out an internal review and have a look at, first, whether it has the resources and, secondly, whether it agrees with our assessment and has the partners for delivery.

Q36 Sam Rushworth: Are there any other countries that you think are at risk of having ISF withdrawn?

Lewis Brooks: Again, it is difficult to tell because they have not put their current budget allocation in the public domain yet, if that is finalised for the coming spending review. Once that has happened, we will see. As I said, what my colleagues in other NGOs are hearing is that there is a



drawdown of programming in parts of Asia. I have heard that both demining programmes have been closed. I have also heard that some programmes relating to supporting particular peace processes have also had their funding not renewed as well.

Sam Rushworth: Are you able to say specifically which programme, do you think?

Lewis Brooks: I am not because it is not my programme, so I would not want to speak on that detail, but I can ask the NGOs concerned to follow up.

Sam Rushworth: I have heard similar. I have heard that about 3,000 people in demining have basically been put on notice.

Lewis Brooks: Sounds similar to the example I heard.

Sam Rushworth: Which would be quite catastrophic.

Lewis Brooks: Again it is part of the challenge with these impacts when the fund withdraws quite abruptly is that it is funding a whole variety of activities. Demining is just one, supporting a peace process is another, supporting women's rights organisations in an otherwise quite gender-unequal society while there are huge threats to women, but they are also playing a positive role in local peace mediation. Again, all that withdrawal of funding has quite a profound shock on that local conflict.

Q37 **Sam Rushworth:** If I may just ask one more question, where this funding gets withdrawn, obviously it is not just a programme that collapses that is delivering prevention work or whatever, but there are also people losing jobs, so there is a knock-on effect on a local economy. Is that something that you are seeing and examining the impact of?

Lewis Brooks: It is not a specific thing about the local economy. I have not tracked specifically. I think when we were looking at the combined impact of the UK and the US aid cuts across the board—so that would include ISF but a much bigger trend at the moment—in many countries what you are seeing is that the aid sector, those who are employed by it, are using that salary to support the rest of their families. That family is not necessarily a four, five-person family here but potentially cousins and a much wider family network. That will have an impact.

I think there are a range of other societal impacts that are also going to be felt. I would point this Committee back to one of your other witnesses, Anna Tazita Samuel, who gave evidence, I think, in the humanitarian access inquiry. When asked about the aid cuts, she was talking about how it was affecting the trust between her organisation and the local community. What was happening was they did not understand the series of events that would lead their organisation to turn up in the local community without the support that it had brought before. They were accusing her organisation of theft and they were questioning their version



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of events when she was pointing to the Trump Administration and its decisions.

I think it is worth pointing out that that particular partner was also a partner of one of the ISF funds that has recently been withdrawn as well. The lack of ISF funding in that particular example is only going to compound the problem that she had from the withdrawal of USAID. I think that is a big problem that we will see replicated in many other places.

Q38 Alice Macdonald: I want to ask a quick question on governance, because you said, "As 'they' restructure," and, "As 'they' make decisions". Who is making the ultimate decision on that?

Lewis Brooks: Within the integrated security fund, my understanding is it is a very similar structure to CSSF. You would have a Whitehall-based infrastructure that would be determining the different thematic and regional priorities. They would obviously go through a ministerial chain within the Cabinet Office, and then historically both the CSSF and the ISF would report ultimately up into the National Security Council and take a degree of steer from that. That would help to determine where the priorities of that fund would be.

When you get down into a more localised level, as Nic was telling you earlier, you then have ambassadors and high commissioners who can make some determination in that localised network that are able to call on that fund. It has a high-level national security architecture, followed then into that wider HMG footprint around the world.

Q39 Alice Macdonald: One quick question on Sudan: what was the reason given for the withdrawal?

Lewis Brooks: My understanding was it was part of the covid-era aid cuts. The portfolio, the number of countries they were working in, did shrink somewhat. I think there were other countries that were withdrawn from; I just cannot remember at this time.

Q40 James Naish: The ISF came into being around April 2024 I think it was. We then had the general election in July. What are your perspectives—both of you—on the objectives and the priorities of the ISF since the general election in 2024? Has there been a clear shift? Are the goals clearer than they were when it was initially established, less clear? What is your general perception of how the ISF is being thought about and evolving as a strategic entity?

Eva Tabbasam: At the time when it became ISF, it was also heavily linked to the integrated review refresh, so a lot of what was in the ISF announcement reflected the integrated review refresh, and that is something that we have seen along—so, this emphasis on national security; domestic and international priorities, how they are aligned.



Since then, and since the general election, we have been invited to conversations around national security and gender. It is very clear, with this current Government's vision on national security and that being a priority, that that will eventually influence this fund and what that looks like.

We have already seen changes within ISF. For example, what used to be the Gender, Peace and Security Portfolio is now the Gender and National Security Portfolio. That is telling us what we should be looking for and what we should be looking at.

We assume the national security strategy that will be coming in June will also be heavily influencing this fund. A lot of our work is making sure that we are making the case that, with women's rights organisations, the work that has been done on the fund as part of the CSSF, is still applicable to this new direction; if anything, it is more important. The evidence base that the CSSF has, the various evaluations on all the programming, the self-assessment tools that it has in place will tell them that women's rights organisations funding them, the work being done in WPS, is core to stability and security outcomes, not only for the UK's interest but as global partners in globalisation. For others, there are mutual interests. Working with WROs and CSOs, the work of Women, Peace and Security is really important.

That is what we are seeing as the shift in terms of being very much around national security. We are seeing that through our role, through the help desk. To give you some background on what that means, the Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk is essentially a facility where civil servants across Government Departments, across government, can request support on how they can implement gender or women, peace and security in their work or their programming.

In particular, it allows for non-traditional women, peace and security actors to be able to access that expert advice—counter-terrorism, state threats, serious organised crimes. They are able to access the support to be able to integrate women, peace and security. Because of the work that the CSSF has done around, for example, the GESI markers—which Lewis can go into a little bit more, and which is making sure that certain programming has as an element of mainstreaming gender or does stand-alone programming on gender—again, these non-traditional departments are able to integrate gender and look at women, peace, and security and consider it as a lens for some of their work.

Again, some of those actors that have been using the help desk suggests that it is around national security; it is around this transnational threat: climate, cyber-security, AI. These are the tasks that we are seeing coming through, and that indicates the shift in the fund.

Q41 James Naish: In summary, what you are saying is that the emphasis on conflict prevention, gender, and so on is being diluted, with national security and defence themes being prioritised.



Eva Tabbasam: I would not say that it is—the emphasis is on national security, but there is always a link back to prevention. I think for us, interacting via the help desk, or if we are programme partners, it is making that case that the work done on prevention is still part of national security. However, there is an emphasis on national security in itself and what that looks like.

Again, just on the national security strategy that will eventually influence this fund, there is not a definition at the minute that we are working to, and so again, reiterating some comments that were made on the first panel, it is about making sure that that definition is broad—which is why the fund works with ODA, because we can consider development objectives in the context of that broader understanding of what security means.

The women, peace and security agenda allows you to look at that national security definition through the lens of human security. At the end of the day, it is about communities; it is about making communities safe and resilient. We need to make sure that this fund, whatever it does look like in its next iteration, is considering that, because to do that job effectively, you have to consider people and communities.

James Naish: Lewis, just that broader point on focus since the general election for ISF.

Lewis Brooks: One of the things that has happened is that there is a lot of continuity between the ISF under this Government and the last Government. I would agree with Eva in that I think the changes that we were seeing within the funding—the CSSF to ISF transition—were more kicking off around the integrated review refresh in 2023.

Prior to that you had the 2015 national security strategy, which articulated that tackling conflict was a UK national security interest. Again, in the integrated review in 2021 you had the same thing and it set out objectives of tackling conflict as part of our national security framework—our objectives as a country for foreign policy, development policy and defence.

That articulation was there for most of CSSF's life. What it used to do was articulate national security strategy objectives, and it would articulate international development strategy objectives that would help to govern the ODA side of the fund. Over time, we saw that it stopped referring to specific international development objectives and it just focused on the national security ones. Then, come the integrated review refresh in 2023, there was not an articulation of that link between tackling conflict and our UK security interests.

It is not that the focus on national security is new—it has always been there. Rather, it is that the focus is narrowing. It is taking a narrow view of what constitutes a security threat to this country. Once upon a time, it would see that if you do not tackle conflict, then what you will find is that



it leaves a safe haven for armed groups, for organised crime. It causes huge amounts of displacement, which causes its own security headaches around the world. Of course, that also helps with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

That articulation used to be there at the heart of the fund and in the national security strategy. That is falling by the wayside. Hopefully, the new national security strategy that is under way will reassert that connection and either use the ISF or other Government tools to do something about it.

Q42 **Alice Macdonald:** Eva, coming back to you on women, peace and security, straightforwardly, would you say that women, peace and security has remained a priority for the ISF?

Eva Tabbasam: Yes. It is hard to determine that in terms of spend because at the minute we do not have that publicly available information. What we do see and what we have seen are calls for proposals coming out where women, peace and security is explicitly mentioned. There is an emphasis on making sure those programmes meet a certain requirement in terms of gender integrated. There is a lot of work being done; for example, a lot of collaboration with civil society.

I mentioned earlier this year we were invited to a conference that was by ISF looking at how gender relates to national security. I think there is a lot of effort to do the work on that and a lot of effort to build the evidence on why women, peace and security is important. I think we are at a critical junction now to make sure that we protect that work that has been done and that it continues with this new iteration of what ISF looks like.

In that sense, I would be hesitant to say that it will continue to be a priority, if I consider Baroness Chapman's remarks last week, which again is concerning for us as a network and beyond as a sector.

We need stand-alone gender and women, peace and security programming in addition to mainstreaming. We cannot get to effective mainstreaming if we are not doing the stand-alone work first. We need to build up towards that. That is one of the successes I would say from the CSSF/ISF model: the resources that they have in terms of the gender advisers, this help desk, this ability to provide that expertise on how across Government you can integrate gender or you can integrate women, peace and security into that work.

A lot of the time, with the nature of the civil service where you have policy generalists, that is not always easy. Some support and hand holding sometimes is what is needed. With the resources at the help desk and with this portfolio into the fund, it really does make a difference.

Q43 **Alice Macdonald:** To go back to the comments of Baroness Chapman last week and the suggestion that, certainly, stand-alone programming



for women and girls was less of a priority, what impact would that have on individual rights? There was a UN Women report last week about the impact of USAID funding, particularly on women's rights organisations. Could you just elaborate on what you think the impact will be if some of that programming is not protected?

Eva Tabbasam: Helpfully, you mentioned that UN Women programme, and it related to a question about the impact on community. That UN Women report was a rapid review survey of about 411 women's rights organisations; 90% of those that were surveyed have been hit, they are at breaking point; 47% of those are expected to shut down completely; 51% of those have been forced to suspend programming. Then three quarters of that total number have to lay off staff.

These are women's rights organisations that are on the frontlines of the work that we are doing around prevention of violence and conflict. What we know from their work is that there are real outcomes to community resilience. They are the ones who have the trust within their communities. They are the ones who are able to do that work. Not only with the cuts from the UK, but the US and globally, even with the cuts that are coming from, for example, the Netherlands, they will severely impact the grassroots organisations. They are the ones who are doing the work. They were already operating on a shoestring budget. It is abysmal now.

Q44 **Alice Macdonald:** I have one final question on the gender side of things. You mentioned the evidence base in terms of investing in women and girls, and obviously it is 25 years since Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, so this is a national commitment we have as well. You might have to write in follow-up, but what would the argument be that you would make about why investing in women, peace and security is important for our own national security?

Eva Tabbasam: Maybe we can follow this up in private or in a closed session, because we also know that, as I mentioned at the outset, there are evaluations done on programming around women's rights organisation that ISF does have, especially around the resource exchange programme, but we know that when you fund women's rights organisation, they do come with outcomes of prevention of violence, prevention of conflict, and that they are able to provide for their community's needs.

Sometimes we think about women's rights organisation as just women's issues. No, it is broader than that. It is about stability, it is about security. That ultimately is our interest. If that country is secure and stable, then eventually, ultimately, we will be, too. Again, it is thinking about mutual interests. It is not about us being a charity; as global partners, our interests are intrinsically linked. I think women's rights organisation is one way that is effectively proven that you can prevent violence and conflicts. You can support the work that they are doing, the



long-term work that they are doing, by giving them direct core flexible funding.

As well as their ability to pivot in times of crisis or conflict, they are constantly shifting and adapting to methods because they know their context best. They are the experts of their communities.

Q45 Alice Macdonald: Finally, Lewis, I have one quick question. Do you think there is a risk that with ODA reductions there will be more of a temptation to focus on quick wins and minimising programmes that are perhaps more riskier and take a longer time?

Lewis Brooks: Yes. There are a couple of different incentives at the moment, and there are a couple of different areas where programming is going to shift short or long term. I think, as both panellists have talked about, the ISF is not a long-term funder. That is not what it does. What it tries to do is have a catalytic, short-term impact by supporting these programmes and then across the board, whether you are talking about security programming or more development programming.

In some cases, as Nic mentioned earlier, what happens is the ISF gets drawn into standing up quite a longer-term military training programme, which is a longer-term thing. In others, the catalytic effect works and the ISF or its grant recipient is able to leverage other funds from other donors to continue some of the good work. Certainly, that has happened in some of our programmes.

In some cases it does not happen and, unfortunately, maybe that is a combination of different things. Maybe that is because that was never teed up to begin with. To clarify, the ISF is important as part of that long-term process but it is not necessarily a long-term funder.

What then needs to happen is, if that is the case, the FCDO needs to then—or it once was DFID—have its own mechanism for supporting long-term work. That might build off pilot programmes by the ISF, or it might need a way to connect its longer-term work with some of those shorter-term interventions. That needs to be part of the FCDO's calculus as well.

Whether the aid cuts changes the balance of that work, I am not sure. It might do. It could also have a positive impact if you are forcing people to make harder decisions and refocus on some of that preventative work as a more cost-effective intervention. Maybe it does.

I think some of the other dynamics at play here are our security focus. That tends to push for shorter-term interventions because people say, "We have to deal with this security threat in front of us," rather than use the longer-term work to say, "Let's stop the conditions that will give rise to the security threat of the future." So again, it is not just about budget cuts. It is about the policy architecture and the narrative around it as well.

Q46 David Taylor: Noting what you have said there about the fund's strength



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being that it was catalytic money that was short term and noting the point you made about long term, but just on that short-term funding that is there, at the moment it is being delivered through a cross-Government funding mechanism. It is under review at the moment, and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that that would become a direct FCDO function. Would that present any problems in terms of perhaps other things?

Lewis Brooks: I am not sure about the structure. I think what you need is still those attributes. It still will have to work in a cross-Government way, even if it is housed by the FCDO rather than the Cabinet Office, which is the current model. One of the ways in which you could do that is by having joined-up national security strategies for different priority countries and themes. I am not sure what the current structure is, but that certainly used to be the model that CSSF would be part of a mechanism for delivering on those strategies. Again, Nic talked about this earlier.

That might still work. You have a national security strategy for a particular country, and that would guide a whole range of interventions and British policy and engagement with that region and the stakeholders to that region, of which then a shorter-term funding mechanism and a longer-term funding mechanism might be part of that architecture. That would be good.

Again, I think it in part depends on what incentives you give to the officials who are running the different funding mechanism. I think that is why the national security strategy is vital, because what we have previously seen is that officials very much gear projects and programmes and monitoring frameworks and calls to tender around that national security narrative.

Because the conflict was not in the integrated review refresh, it tended to get less focus than when it was in the integrated review. There was some confusion as to whether we should be pointing at the integrated review or the integrated review refresh at the time.

At that moment, one of my colleagues came across a particular line in an invitation to tender, which said something along the lines of, "You need to be prepared to adjust this programme for future Government priorities." We said, "Well, okay, can you tell us what those priorities are going to be?" and they said, "No, not really." Which makes it quite difficult when you are talking about national security and you are trying to deliver a programme in a very tense environment, where key to what you do is your relationship between you and the community, you and other political actors, including the host Government, but not just them, and local security forces.

If suddenly you are having to pivot your entire programme for a new UK national security priority that you did not envisage, that is a very difficult conversation with those particular actors, who may, given where you are



working, be somewhat hostile towards the UK, or at least sceptical. I think that is a big challenge to make sure that the strategy, as I said earlier, articulates that link between conflict prevention, resolution, the reduction of violence, our security interests, and then that incentivises our work to be able to work on that sort of thing.

David Taylor: Eva, is there anything you want to add to that point?

Eva Tabbasam: On your question around if this fund could be under FCDO, the ability of ISF or CSSF to quickly disperse money and can the FCDO do that, I am not sure. Also that this fund is high risk. Funding WROs, it was not an easy thing that we got to. The fact that the CSSF/ISF were able to do that took risk. That is often what we are always told. We cannot directly fund organisations because of risk. This is something that we would want to maintain in a fund if it was taken by the FCDO. I am not sure if that is possible.

Q47 **David Taylor:** Lewis, you sort of answered the next question I had, which was whether or not the process of bidding has become easier to navigate since the transition to the ISF. Do either of you want to comment on that?

Lewis Brooks: I do not know if the process itself has changed much. I do not tend to do the bids myself. I have wonderful, fantastic colleagues who do most of that work.

I think what they have noticed, as we said earlier, is more calls for engaging in the UK national security interest, but that interest not necessarily being very well defined and being quite narrow. I think that is one thing that we have noticed.

Another thing that we have noticed is that some of the calls are for quite large projects. You might have something that is not a couple of million; you might have something that is tens if not hundreds of millions of pounds—tenders for quite large stabilisation programmes. Sometimes they are even multi-donor, so they will not just be the UK feeding in, and they are multi-year.

Certainly, in some of those we are seeing that it is basically only one or two companies who are capable of either winning those contracts or of bidding for them to begin with because they are so large, and it requires a huge start-up cost to be able to bid for contract or you have to create a very large consortium that becomes a bit unwieldy.

Our colleagues are starting to see that trend. I do not think it is unique to the ISF but because they often run these very large stabilisation programmes we have seen that trend creeping in. I think the IDC looked into that probably back in 2017, looking at the big private sector commercial providers. It is that dynamic we are seeing as well.

Q48 **David Taylor:** On a more positive note, what are the opportunities with the transition to the ISF? Do you see positive innovations coming out of



what they are planning to do? It is a question to both of you.

Lewis Brooks: I can jump in on that. I think Mike and Nic both spoke to this earlier, and that connection between the overseas and the domestic is an important one. Again, there are other charities out there that do work within the UK. Mine does not particularly. I think making those international to domestic connections, there are charities out there that look at, for example, identity-based violence and look at that here and overseas. I think that is important, so there is an opportunity there.

The other one, which Eva has spoken about at length, is gender mainstreaming. The CSSF and ISF have done good work to break new ground both in how they measure the gender mainstreaming across the fund but also then applying that to areas where it traditionally has not been applied before, so outside the development budget and looking at what is a gender analysis of state threats, or what is a gender analysis of how you should combat serious and organised crime.

That is important. To make that specific, there has been specific gender equality and social inclusion markers, which the ISF has developed, which are applied. One of the shames about that particular innovation is that they do not publish the spending levels against that marker, and it would be something that could appear in their annual report. They have never done that, even though they have been able to for some years.

Again, there is another shame, which is that women, peace and security programming is not being renewed at the scale it once was, but that gender mainstreaming I think is another positive in that wider security architecture.

Eva Tabbasam: Yes, pretty much what Lewis said; of course, the help desk again—these are all innovative ways and the flexible funding to WROs. The shift to national security should not be a surprise to us in the sense where we are seeing this globally. For us at least, for women's rights organisations, we are seeing a new security landscape. We are seeing them have to deal with co-ordinated attacks, online cyber-violence, cyber-bullying. We are seeing targeted attacks against women human rights defenders. We are seeing misinformation and disinformation. If the fund is heading towards this national security vision, it is still important to make the argument that these threats are gendered and that gender and women, peace and security still needs to be a key feature in addressing and responding to these threats.

What we would ask is that they retain the women, peace and security focus work, they continue to invest in the evidence. These new emerging threats that are quite new in terms of the discourse on women, peace and security globally—this is emerging evidence. One thing that the WPS portfolio of the ISF has done is contribute to that on an international level.



We have champions like Canada—women, peace and security champions—interested in this help desk. They want to know more about it. This help desk was reported in the multilateral UN Women, Peace and Security Humanitarian Action Compact reporting framework as good practice. This is good work. This is setting the UK up as penholder of the agenda, as the supposed leader of women, peace and security. This is all good for their role, and especially in the 25th anniversary it is important that that work continues.

Given the recent EU-UK trade agreement, where again women, peace and security was highlighted as a priority in its conflict, political security and defence, I am hoping that this means a good thing for the new iteration of the ISF and that woman, peace and security continues to remain a priority.

Q49 Tracy Gilbert: We were just thinking about the forthcoming strategic defence review, as you have both mentioned. What would you hope to see in it, first, and how might the outcomes of the review impact on your work in the organisations?

Lewis Brooks: We are not a defence organisation, so there is a whole heap of things that will be in that review that will be well outside of my organisation's mandate. There are some interesting things that blend, I think, with some of the experience of the CSSF. Again, I am going to talk about the civilian end here. Whether they fall within the strategic defence review or whether they fall within the national security strategy I am not sure, but it will take a view on the nature of geopolitical competition at the moment.

One of the things that the CSSF used to do was support high-level dialogue between India and Pakistan. Part of that was not necessarily the states but between different influential parties on both sides. It would be things like academics, think-tanks, retired people from the foreign policy and security establishment. The learning from that programme is so helpful for this geopolitical moment, where you have the ability to understand rivals, but also to be able to de-escalate tensions and to be able to prevent escalation is vital for strategic stability. I think that thinking is already under way within the ISF, but it would be great to see more of that commitment to being able to de-escalate tensions and to stop escalation in addition to obviously all that other defence stuff, which we are going to hear about. That is a particular aspect relevant to the ISF, as well as everything else that is going to come.

Eva Tabbasam: In terms of the SDR, maybe I can privately share with you in written evidence our submission on the SDR, but the MOD is jointly responsible for the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. There is lots of work that has been done on implementing WPS, and we would just say it is key to make sure that the SDR addresses root causes of human security, and women, peace and security is one way of doing that.



Q50 Tracy Gilbert: Lewis, in terms of the ISF funding to military support, how might a Ukraine ceasefire impact on the fund in supporting peacekeeping elsewhere, do you feel?

Lewis Brooks: It is difficult to say. Again, my organisation does not work on Ukraine, so it is harder for us to speculate about what might come down the line. I think, again as Nic was saying earlier, it depends on how much effort is required and whether that money comes from an MOD pot or an integrated security fund pot, or whether it comes from other parts of the aid budget, because suddenly there is a lot more developmental stuff you need to do.

Nic spoke a bit about the social fabric of the country as well as the political and military fabric of the country. It is difficult to tell, depending on whether you are talking about tens of millions for that activity or hundreds of millions for that activity, which would be—yes, it would have a massive impact in a billion pound fund if you are moving hundreds of millions around.

I think there is another point that is perhaps not about budgets, which is something else that our organisation researches, which is thinking about security force assistance. This is the training of other security forces, something that the ISF and CSSF have funded largely out of the non-ODA side of that project. There are quite a lot of risks of doing that in a fragile and conflict-affected country.

If you train a security force where the relationship between that security force and, to use Nic's example earlier, young men is not particularly good, and all you do is train that security force in coercive means, all you are going to do is exacerbate that tension between that security force and the local community.

There are plenty of ways of mitigating those risks—other kinds of training, support for civil society at the same time, making sure that conflict analysis is informing who you are training and how. I think one of the big things in this geopolitical moment is also learning all those mistakes from the past in terms of corruption, human rights abuses, and so on, and making sure that they are applied as the UK continues to train other security forces around the world.

Again, CSSF/ISF will probably be part of the mechanism—not the only one—in which that training takes place. I think that is another one that is less relevant to Ukraine specifically, but similar to that geopolitical moment.

Q51 Tracy Gilbert: That leads into my final point. Do you think there is much appetite for that training and support? What is the appetite globally for that input?

Lewis Brooks: Which, the coercive or the more human rights compliant?

Tracy Gilbert: Just the effectiveness of the military training impacts.



Lewis Brooks: I think it depends. Again, we will see what the strategic defence review says and the national security strategy. Obviously, there is a very large effort in Ukraine. There are continuing efforts to many countries. You can go through the published list of programmes that the CSSF and ISF put out, and you can find where some of these countries are; Africa, Middle East, some in Asia. I think that will continue, whether that will all be on the military side, whether it will be done for, say, counter-migration, which has been a problem area that I think the Foreign Affairs Committee and the IDC looked at back in 2019, or whether it will be for tackling serious and organised crime.

Then, with that, are we going to see support for human rights accountability within that framework? Are we going to see security sector reforms? Again, the good governance and the democratisation in the same countries, those are big questions. We will see what comes out of both the ISF and strategic defence review.

Chair: Our final question is from James.

Q52 **James Naish:** I have one very short question. Have either of you or organisations you are aware of been consulted by the Government at all about the future of the ISF in the context of the general spending review?

Eva Tabbasam: We were invited to the conference earlier on this year, but it seemed like the thematics had already been determined. It is after the fact. We recognise consultation. It is something that we do quite a lot around the Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan. We would have welcomed that; unfortunately, that was not the case.

I think the same for the national security strategy. I understand consultations took place, but they are limited. It limits how much we can then put in all this evidence that we have done, having worked with ISF on some of this work.

Unfortunately, I would say, no, we have not been effectively consulted. Not only us as INGOs in the network, but also importantly women's rights organisations and civil society organisations that ultimately will be impacted by these decisions.

Lewis Brooks: Our experience is probably more ad hoc in the last 12 months compared to previously. Again, I think my colleagues would have been at the conference that Eva mentioned. The help desk would have had some tasks. That is not quite the same as consultation, but we would have had some input provided through that help desk.

Under the CSSF, we had good relationships with the senior leadership and I think met with the Minister in the previous Government of the CSSF. That has not happened under the new Government; maybe it will at some point.

On the national security strategy, which as I said is crucial here, going back to the integrated review, under some pressure I think from the IDC



and the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees as well, the Government then announced quite an extensive amount of consultation, including the chance to put written submissions in. This national security strategy seems to be a much quicker affair, and there have been a few dialogues hosted by trusted academics and think-tanks, which is not quite the same as everyone can put evidence in across the country.

Again, to Eva's point, it is not just about the expertise within the UK across different sectors where national security is relevant or the ISF is relevant, but also thinking about those organisations from conflict-affected countries that might be not just affected by conflict, they might have the political relationship between two warring parties. They might be invested in mediation or dialogue, or they might be intimately involved in security sector reform. Getting their impressions of what they think the Brits are doing, both through the ISF and in national security more broadly, is quite crucial for us to then be able to go out and partner with them in that endeavour and in our mutual security interests. I have not had too much of that particular consultation under way in recent months.

Q53 James Naish: Finally, 60 seconds each maybe, but lessons from CSSF morphing into ISF when it comes to future funding and obviously the spending review around conflict resolution: what are the key messages you would want to leave to us as a Committee but also if you were speaking to a Minister, very briefly?

Eva Tabbasam: Pretty much the evidence given, in that for us it would be to maintain women, peace and security as a fund-level outcome. There is good evidence on that. It links back to prevention. It is an agenda that is cross-cutting so we would ask for a lot of that to be maintained through the next iteration of the ISF.

Lewis Brooks: I think, for me, to have the national security strategy articulate that link between preventing and resolving conflicts and our mutual security interests, both the UK and globally. Specific to conflict more broadly, it would be nice to have a conflict strategy of some kind. It has been probably a good seven years since the UK last had any conflict strategic framework. It would be nice to see that sitting below the national security strategy.

Specifically, I will finish on how I started my evidence, which was around that point on agility. Yes, the fund has good political agility. It would be nice to see the bureaucratic tendering and procurement process catch up with that strength.

Chair: Thank you both for your extensive evidence, which has been very valuable for our purposes. I now draw this session of the Committee to a close.