

Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Israeli Palestinian Conflict

Written evidence submitted by Dr Giuditta Fontana and Professor Stefan Wolff (IPC0104)

Introduction

1. **Giuditta Fontana** is Associate Professor in International Security. As a political scientist specialising in war-to-peace transitions, she has a long-standing interest and expertise in the politics of the Middle East, particularly Lebanon, on which she has published extensively. She holds an MA in Mediterranean Studies from King's College London and worked with the European Commission Delegation to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 2009. Giuditta convenes the Conflict and Peace Processes Research Group at the University of Birmingham, co-convenes the Political Studies Association's Specialist Group on Ethnopolitics, and is associate editor of *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, a leading academic journal in her field. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8874-9213>
2. **Stefan Wolff** is Professor of International Security and Head of the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham. His work focuses on international conflict management, especially in the context of geopolitics and great power rivalries. He is a Trustee and Honorary Treasurer of the Political Studies Association of the UK, a Senior Research Fellow at the Foreign Policy Centre, and the founding editor of *Ethnopolitics*, a leading academic journal. He published over 80 journal articles and book chapters, as well as over 20 books, notably *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective* (Oxford University Press 2007). Wolff is also a regular international affairs contributor to *The Conversation*. He holds degrees from the University of Leipzig (Erstes Staatsexamen), the University of Cambridge (M.Phil.), and the LSE (Ph.D.). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9931-5309>
3. This submission addresses the question 'How can the UK assure the resilience of efforts to bring about a lasting peace at a time of uncertainty caused by conflicts elsewhere and changes in leadership in the international community?'. To address this issue, we draw on the findings from our co-directed project 'Learning from Failure: Tackling war recurrence in protracted peace processes', as well as our long-standing collaborative research on conflict management and resolution.¹

Summary

4. The UK can make a difference to individual peace processes globally, including peace processes in the Middle East because of the UK's role as a member of the P5, its prominent position in a variety of regional and global organisations (including the OSCE and NATO), and long-standing contributions to peacekeeping missions around the globe. However, in the Middle East there is very little space and appetite for unilateral UK initiatives, due to a range of factors, including the UK's colonial past, its role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and its diplomatic stances over conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon since 2023, and Yemen since 2015.
5. We recommend employing peace negotiations and more specifically the crafting of peace settlements as a leverage point to bring about sustainable peace, while preserving a UK influence in the region. This could take the form of supporting conflict settlement negotiations and national dialogue processes as a whole or specific parties within them by offering good offices, facilities, and capacity building.

¹ For a summary, see: *Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence*, University of Birmingham College of Social Sciences Policy Hub, May 2024, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/policy-briefs/giuditta-fontana-learning-from-failure-how-to-prevent-civil-war-recurrence.pdf>

6. Evidence from our research suggests that the UK can help in designing resilient peace processes by (a) embedding and financing mechanisms for dialogue; and (b) by promoting inclusive war-to-peace transitions.
7. To make a mark, it is crucial to recognise that peacebuilding is an iterative and non-linear process that requires monitoring, adaptation, evolution, and reform, as well as resources.² In the spirit of progressive realism, the UK should carefully choose in which contexts to involve itself, and be prepared for long-term, adaptive, and consistent engagement with individual societies and governments. At the same time, the UK should make use of its broader international role to consider the bigger picture of the dynamics within the region and extra-regional influences to identify synergies between individual peace processes, as well as to contribute to proactive “spoiler management”.³

Recommendations

8. Based on our combined research, we present four sets of recommendations on how the UK can assure the resilience of efforts to bring about a lasting peace at a time of uncertainty caused by conflicts elsewhere and changes in leadership in the international community. The evidence for these recommendations is presented in detail in paragraphs 12-22 below.
 - ❖ First, embed mechanisms for dialogue into formal peace agreements (including ceasefire agreements).
 - ❖ Second, facilitate the inclusion of a plurality of great powers and/or regional powers in peace processes.
 - ❖ Third, facilitate the inclusion of a variety of societal actors, such as women, in the peace process.
 - ❖ Fourth, facilitate the inclusion of as many warring parties as possible in the political settlement.

Key Findings

Embedding mechanisms for dialogue into formal peace pacts (including ceasefire pacts).

9. Mechanisms for dialogue help mitigate the risk of peace processes relapsing into violence. Mechanisms for dialogue are “provisions in peace agreements that enable the belligerent parties to continue engaging with each other beyond the signature ceremony”.⁴ They encompass platforms for engagement (such as plans for future national and regional peace conferences), implementation reviews (such as the creation of joint implementation review commissions), and dispute resolution provisions (through mapping specific courses of action to tackle potential disputes). Our research on protracted peace processes around the globe has shown that they benefitted from mechanisms for dialogue, as “contingency plans that help to keep parties engaged and continue negotiating until and after the signing of an agreement”.⁵ The 1993 Oslo

² Kartsonaki, A., G. Fontana and S. Wolff (2022) *Mechanisms for Dialogue: A Means to Prevent Civil War Recurrence*, Discussion paper for the United States Institute of Peace, November 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/mechanisms-dialogue-contribution-preventing-civil-war-recurrence>

³ Pushkina, D., Siewert, M. B., & Wolff, S. (2022). Mission (im)possible? UN military peacekeeping operations in civil wars. *European Journal of International Relations*, 28(1), 158-186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661211046602>

⁴ Kartsonaki, A., G. Fontana and S. Wolff (2022) *Mechanisms for Dialogue: A Means to Prevent Civil War Recurrence*, Discussion paper for the United States Institute of Peace, November 2022, p.5, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/mechanisms-dialogue-contribution-preventing-civil-war-recurrence>

⁵ Kartsonaki, A., G. Fontana and S. Wolff (2022) *Mechanisms for Dialogue: A Means to Prevent Civil War Recurrence*, Discussion paper for the United States Institute of Peace, November 2022, p.3, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/mechanisms-dialogue-contribution-preventing-civil-war-recurrence>

Accords are a good example of a settlement embedding mechanisms for dialogue. Phase III of the 2003 Roadmap for Peace also mapped future conferences and opportunities for continuing engagement between warring parties.

Facilitating the inclusion of a plurality of great powers and/or regional powers in peace processes.

10. Our research on protracted peace processes found that negotiations are more likely to bring about lasting peace when they are led by the UN. The UK can facilitate the inclusion of a variety of great powers in peace processes, by prioritising multilateral fora for the negotiation and conclusion of settlements.
11. We specifically found that the multilateral mandate of UN mediators allows for the deployment of ‘muscles’ in support for a peace process (in terms of symbolic, financial, and military resources) that deters or appeases potential spoilers in the short- and long-term.⁶ The declining resources and dynamism of UN mediation is problematic and may represent a relevant stumbling block. It is particularly visible in the Middle East, where regional actors (such as Qatar) have been able to muster more significant financial and diplomatic resources in support of mediation efforts. A relevant example is the 2008 Lebanese National Dialogue process, which concluded with the Doha Agreement, as well as the current negotiations between Hamas and Israel.
12. Beyond working through multilateral institutions, the UK should act to strengthen the image of the UN and other organisations as impartial and competent in relevant conflict-affected settings. This is particularly important because our research conclusively demonstrates that domestic consent to, and cooperation with, UN peacekeeping missions is an “important ingredient for the success of military PKOs (peacekeeping operations)”.⁷
13. The inclusion of relevant regional powers and great powers is also important because it can facilitate the management of spoilers. In our research we found that “there are no successful military PKOs in the presence of external support in form of in-country combat units and cross-border raids, or if sanctuary, lethal equipment, training, and advisors are provided by external parties”.⁸ The UK should use its convening power as a P5 member of the Security Council to bring together relevant regional and great powers under the aegis of the UN (such as Turkey, Egypt, Qatar, Iran, Saudi Arabia, etc.). This would help avoid the proliferation of multiple negotiation formats with different participant configurations which may increase the risk of creating or incentivising potential spoilers seeking to undermine agreements reached in formats they are not part of. If multiple formats cannot be avoided, the UK should, at a minimum, work towards their effective coordination.

Facilitating the inclusion of a variety of societal actors, such as women, in the peace process.

14. Our research finds that the socioeconomic inclusion of women is particularly important in preventing relapses into violence after the conclusion of a peace agreement. This is because it enables the needs and experiences of previously marginalised groups to be heard, acknowledged and addressed, fostering local ownership of the peace process and the dissemination of both information and the benefits of peace.⁹

⁶ Fontana, G., A. Kartsonaki, N.S. Neudorfer and S. Wolff (2024). Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence, University of Birmingham, Policy Brief. March 2024. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/policy-briefs/learning-from-failure-how-to-prevent-civil-war-recurrence.docx>

⁷ Pushkina, D., Siewert, M. B., & Wolff, S. (2022). Mission (im)possible? UN military peacekeeping operations in civil wars. *European Journal of International Relations*, 28(1), 174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661211046602>

⁸ Pushkina, D., Siewert, M. B., & Wolff, S. (2022). Mission (im)possible? UN military peacekeeping operations in civil wars. *European Journal of International Relations*, 28(1), 173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661211046602>

15. Women inclusion can occur during formal peace negotiations (such as with the inclusion of the Women’s Coalition during peace negotiations in Northern Ireland). More commonly, it occurs through parallel conferences and fora, which may feed into formal peace negotiations through position papers, declarations, and direct lobbying of mediators and negotiators (as was the case with the peace processes in Liberia and Sierra Leone). The Women’s Advisory Board to the UN Special Envoy to Syria and the Yemeni Women’s Pact for Peace and Security are perhaps the best-known examples from the Middle East, but they have been criticised for prioritising the nominal representation of women, at the expense of their meaningful participation.
16. The UK is particularly well placed to advance the inclusion of women in peace processes because of its role as the WPS penholder in the UN Security Council and because of its long-term commitment to a gender-sensitive foreign and development policy. For example, through the Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth (WMC) network, the UK is in an excellent position to train and advance women in peace negotiations. The network could be expanded to include more women mediators and civil society representatives from the Middle East, or at least more female mediators who speak regional languages (Arabic, Farsi, Hebrew, etc...). The Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan’s commitment to gender-sensitive humanitarian interventions and development policies is particularly conducive to interventions to improve the resilience of peace processes.

Facilitating the inclusion of as many warring parties as possible in the political settlement.

17. Depending on the strategic and political dynamics at play, this may be accomplished through forms of liberal consociational powersharing. In contrast to the corporate consociational powersharing variety, implemented in post-1989 Lebanon, liberal consociational powersharing provides all relevant conflict parties with a stake in post-conflict politics, whilst also allowing for adaptation to changing demographic, strategic and political dynamics.¹⁰
18. Where powersharing is not feasible, the recognition and accommodation of the culture and heritage of warring groups may help pave the way for a resilient settlement.¹¹ This can occur – inter alia – through education reform combined with forms of territorial or non-territorial autonomy.¹² For example, the educational autonomy for different Lebanese communities has been essential to the survival and legitimacy of Lebanon’s powersharing arrangements since 1989, but also key to the stability of Iraqi Kurdistan. In our own research, we have found that different forms of territorial self-governance can be a particularly effective means to accommodate different groups in diverse societies.¹³ In particular, we have found that “the combination of territorial self-governance with a PR electoral system in basically open regimes is most effective at reducing the risk of territory-centred intrastate violence”.¹⁴

⁹ Fontana, G., A. Kartsonaki, N.S. Neudorfer and S. Wolff (2024). Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence, University of Birmingham, Policy Brief. March 2024. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/policy-briefs/learning-from-failure-how-to-prevent-civil-war-recurrence.docx>

¹⁰ Wolff, S. (2013b). Consociationalism: Power sharing and self-governance. *Conflict Management in Divided Societies*. Eds. S. Wolff and C. Yakinthou. London: Taylor & Francis: 23-56, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203803004>; Wolff, S. (2011). "Post-Conflict State Building: the debate on institutional choice." *Third World Quarterly* 32(10): 1777-1802, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2011.610574>.

¹¹ Fontana, G. and I. Masiero (2023). Beyond Reassurance: The Reputational Effect of Cultural Reforms in Peace Agreements. *Government and Opposition*. 58(4):702-724. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.62>

¹² Fontana, G., M.B. Siewert and C. Yakinthou (2020) “Managing War-to-Peace Transitions after Intra-State Conflicts: Configurations of Successful Peace Processes”, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 15:1, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17502977.2020.1770479>

¹³ Wolff, S. et al. (2020). Subnational Governance and Conflict: The Merits of Subnational Governance as a Catalyst for Peace. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/34436>

¹⁴ Neudorfer, N. S., et al. (2022). "Territorial self-governance and proportional representation: reducing the risk of

19. The UK is very well placed for devising different forms of powersharing and cultural accommodation because of its own experience. In particular, the conflict in Northern Ireland is well known in the region, and exchanges between civil society groups (in Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, etc.) with the intent of learning from others' experiences have occurred for decades. Beyond Northern Ireland, the experience of the UK's flexible, asymmetric, and evolving system of devolution offers a model of territorial self-governance that has broader relevance for post-conflict state-building efforts,¹⁵ for example in Syria.¹⁶ The UK could boost these activities through earmarked funding for training, peer-learning, and other forms of engagement with elites in the Middle East.

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territory-centred intrastate violence." *Territory, Politics, Governance* 10(4): 504-526, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2020.1773920>.

¹⁵ Wolff, S. (2013a). "Conflict Management in Divided Societies: The Many Uses of Territorial Self-Governance." *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 20(1): 27-50, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-02001003>.

¹⁶ Lucas, S. et al. (2016). "Syria: Laying the Foundations for a Credible and Sustainable Transition." *The RUSI Journal* 161(3): 22-32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2016.1193353>.

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