

Written evidence submitted by Saferworld (INR0053)

Introduction

Saferworld welcomes the opportunity to feed into the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) inquiry into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict prevention and build safer lives in 20 countries around the world. This submission focuses on the gaps in current strategy, policy coherence and capabilities with regards to conflict policy. The submission's **key points** are:

- While some information has been released on the purpose and direction of the review there has been little information made available on the process for it or on possible consultation with stakeholders, including organisations working to address conflict and inequality overseas, in particular where the UK footprint may be small.
- Reflecting on past National Security Strategies, the failure to reference international security in the 2015 strategy is a step backwards. Given the negative impact of conflict and authoritarianism on global human well-being including: the enabling environment and/or support for violent movements; forced migration and displacement; interruption and co-option of humanitarian relief; and the diversion of resources away from services and livelihoods; and on UK interests including: national security; UK trade partnerships; and migration management; the promotion of just and lasting international peace and security should be the primary objective of national foreign, security and defence policy, towards which all foreign policy tools, including trade, development, diplomacy, military and stabilisation operations and other security initiatives contribute.
- The government needs to review its cross-departmental conflict prevention strategies and act on its commitment to open up national security strategies for priority themes and countries to public scrutiny.
- Despite mechanisms to ensure UK overseas engagements respect international human rights and humanitarian law and promote gender equality, the FCO's role in approving arms sales to conflict parties in Yemen and training to Libyan coastguards while also investing in conflict prevention underline the UK's failure to uphold the law and ensure the coherence of its efforts with peace and stabilisation goals. The UK should refrain from behaviour that reinforces abusive regimes and security forces. To ensure policy coherence, the Integrated Review should establish mechanisms to ensure coherent, consistent application of arms licensing criteria, human rights safeguards, and conflict sensitivity and gender mainstreaming tools.
- Just as the UK invests in standing military capabilities to respond to future crises, it must also invest in standing peace capabilities to address emerging conflict situations: mediation expertise, partnerships with local peacebuilders, and funding models that support flexibility and innovation in place of lengthy and bureaucratic procurement or grant cycles.

The Process of the Integrated Review

1. While some information has been released on the purpose and direction of the review, little information has been made available on the process for it or on possible stakeholder consultations.

Beyond announcing a Cabinet Office-based, cross government team led by the Prime Minister and outlining some of the aims,¹ the process for the review has not been clarified. The Secretary of State for Defence has laid out some of the workstreams taking place under his department² but it is unclear whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has done the same.

2. The government has stated an intention to consult with external stakeholders, among other things to elicit ‘constructive challenge to traditional Whitehall assumptions and thinking’.³ However, the government has not released details of how or with whom it will consult. The ability to shape international peace and security is not held by the UK Government alone:
 - Academics, businesses and think tanks have relevant expertise;
 - non-governmental organisations’ experience in fragile contexts drawn from humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work gives them special insight into locations, trends and processes that the government may lack in locations where the UK footprint may be small
 - these organisations will also play a vital role in measures to prevent and manage the covid-19 pandemic and its knock-on impacts on stability and development, assisting communities to survive and respond;⁴
 - Communities affected by conflict (including women and young people) often have the most sustainable solutions for addressing the conflicts around them. Their views are vital to informing the UK’s understanding of future challenges and what works in addressing them.

The government thus needs to understand the perspectives, grievances and aspirations of communities in fragile and COVID-affected contexts and those who work most closely with them to develop a more holistic and sustainable strategy for advancing UK national security in a deeply inter-connected world. To address some of the most salient threats to UK well being – such as pandemics, anti-democratic trends, inequality and climate change – the UK will need to understand how they affect societies around the world, and review options for tackling them in partnership with other societies and their governments. The UK thus needs a global perspective that takes into account the human security and development needs of people in the countries where it seeks to play a positive role, going well beyond the government’s initial commitment to engage non-governmental *UK-based* experts.

3. The FCO already has relationships with a range of overseas civil society organisations that it supports to contribute to peace, equality and rights which it could include in consultations on the UK’s foreign, security and development policy. Using the networks connected to the FCO’s human rights promotion grants and those engaged through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) the FCO could consult overseas civil society networks most affected by and crucial to addressing conflict. In order to ensure that the commitments taken in the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018-22 (UK NAP) are fulfilled,⁵ many of which are

¹ Johnson, B (2020), Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, Written statement - HCWS126, 26th February. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-02-26/HCWS126/> and Sugg, E (2020), Defence, Diplomacy and Development Policy, spoken contribution to debate, House of Lords, 30th January. See column 1602. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2020-01-30/debates/F5BAD536-C010-437B-AAF7-14F8D6DA64C7/DefenceDiplomacyAndDevelopmentPolicy?highlight=integrated%20review#contribution-93286DD2-C2AE-4957-BAD4-B12BBA71012E>

² Wallace, B (2020), Integrated Review, spoken contribution to debate, House of Commons, 16th March. See column 647. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-03-16/debates/CFA44CE2-22D9-45E1-A9C1-33FAA9DB49C7/IntegratedReview>

³ HM Government (2020), PM outlines new review to define Britain’s place in the world, Press Release, 26th February. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-new-review-to-define-britains-place-in-the-world>

⁴ For example: Saferworld (2020), COVID-19 in Yemen: Yemeni organisations on the frontline, 17th April. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/867-covid-19-in-yemen-yemeni-organisations-on-the-frontline>

⁵ HM Government (2018), UK National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security 2018-22, January.

also put forward in UNSC resolution 1325,⁶ the UK should ensure that it is meaningfully consulting women and men equally, as well as a wide range of women-led and women's rights organisations, not only on gender issues but on all themes. It should also consult groups working with other minorities in conflict-affected countries. The UK NAP provides a cross-government example in that it was:

'produced in collaboration with civil society and academics including the Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) network of UK-based NGOs and the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security and following in-country civil society consultations in Afghanistan, Burma, Somalia and Syria to ensure the voices of women in fragile and conflict-affected states were included'.⁷

Despite parliamentary questions from Lord Chidgey and Baroness Hodgson, the government has yet to commit to these types of engagements in the Integrated Review.⁸

- 4. The government should lay out a full process for the Integrated Review and plans to consult civil society networks with expertise in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, governance and rights promotion. The FCO should use its existing networks to consult with both UK expertise and with communities and organisations affected by and working to address conflict overseas.**

Strategy in UK foreign policy

5. Conflict, insecurity and authoritarianism:
 - are the leading cause of human suffering, human rights abuses and humanitarian crises
 - threaten economic growth in affected regions and therefore undermine UK economic interests
 - facilitate the activities of organised criminal organisations and violent movements that use terror tactics, to the detriment of UK and international security
 - drive forced displacement, and related humanitarian emergencies and migration crises
 - can lead to the UK and allies facing adversaries armed with British-made weapons;
 - curtail the rights of women and the prospects of gender equality
 - reduce the prospects for international cooperation to tackle transnational security challenges, such as climate change, inequality, migration and cyber insecurity
 - undermine the rules-based international order, and the potential for effective collective multilateral action – both of which are vital to the UK national interest.
6. Despite this, the prime importance of preventing and ending violent conflict and its effects on global and UK interests, at the highest levels of national security policy-making this aim appears to have been downgraded. The 2010 National Security Strategy articulated two core

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677586/CO1215-NAP-Women-Peace-Security-ONLINE_V2.pdf

⁶ United Nations Security Council (2000), S/RES 1325, 31st October. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

⁷ HM Government (2018), UK National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security 2018-22, January, p.3. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677586/CO1215-NAP-Women-Peace-Security-ONLINE_V2.pdf

⁸ Chidgey, D (2020), Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review, Written question – HL250, House of Lords, 9th January. Answered by Earl Howe, 20th January. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-01-09/HL250/> & Hodgson, F (2020), Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review: Written question - HL3694, House of Lords, 29th April. Answered by Lord Ahmad, 7th May. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-29/HL3694/>

objectives: 'ensuring a secure and resilient United Kingdom; and shaping a stable world', the 2009 National Security Strategy also connected UK and international security 'Protecting the United Kingdom and its interests, enabling its people to go about their daily lives freely and with confidence, in a more secure, stable, just and prosperous world'. However, by 2015, National Security Strategy objectives made no reference to international stability or security.

7. The failure to prioritise the promotion of just and lasting international peace and security in UK national security objectives creates a vacuum where strategic vision is required. It fosters a permissive environment, allowing incoherence to emerge between competing priorities, rather than supporting a clear hierarchy between priorities against which different options and trade offs can be considered, trialled, monitored and recalibrated. Clearer prioritisation of just and lasting peace would also prompt the UK to develop more coherent and holistic strategies for solving complex global challenges and responding to crises.
8. At present, the UK has allowed its national security strategy and apparatus to be driven by shorter term priorities, such as growing defence exports, stemming 'irregular migration' or combatting terrorism, often pursuing these at the expense of a more comprehensive engagement to solve the drivers underlying forced displacement and terror threats.⁹ The Foreign Affairs Committee previously questioned why the FCO re-prioritised addressing irregular migration as a national security threat to rank alongside terrorism and organised crime – rather than a challenge to be addressed alongside promoting human rights and the rule of law as it was framed in earlier single departmental plans.¹⁰ The Committee also criticised the UK's approach to training Libyan militias to counter migration as a consequence of this approach.¹¹
9. As noted, alongside violent conflict and anti-democratic trends there are other global challenges which the UK urgently needs to find ways to address more effectively and sustainably. Forced displacement, climate change, inequality and covid-19 all require international cooperation and a key role for diplomacy. The national security strategy should articulate these challenges and address the UK's role in taking an internationalist approach. As members of the Rethinking Security coalition argue, 'One way to address the tension between the UK's presumed national and transnational interests and those of individual humans and humanity at large would be to adopt 'shared security' as an underpinning value for our future security, defence and foreign policy. We are, after all, globally interdependent when it comes to security.'¹²
10. The UK's integrated review also needs to recognise the different ways in which conflict, violence and security are gendered: in their different impacts on women, men, girls and boys and those of diverse sexual and gender identities, in the profound role played by gender norms in shaping violence,¹³ in the importance of equal voices for women and men in shaping

⁹ See for example Saferworld (2017), Lessons on counter-terror and countering violent extremism, March.

<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1131-overview-lessons-on-counter-terror-and-countering-violent-extremism>

¹⁰ Foreign Affairs Committee (2019), Responses to irregular migration: a diplomatic route, final report, 4th November. Paras 33-37.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmfaaff/107/10702.htm>

¹¹ Ibid, paras 18-21.

¹² Cohen J, Dumasy T and Reeve R (2020), Shared security: Humans and humanity in national security policy, published by Oxfam and The Foreign Policy Centre, 3rd March.

<https://fpc.org.uk/shared-security-humans-and-humanity-in-national-security-policy/>

¹³ See for example: HM Government (2019), The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation: A Guide for Policy makers and Practitioners, March. Pp. 25-6.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784001/The_UK_Government_s_Approach_to_Stabilisation_A_guide_for_policy_makers_and_practitioners.pdf

decisions about peace, security, governance, human rights and development around the world.’¹⁴

11. The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review and National Security Strategy declares, ‘It is firmly in our national security interests to tackle the causes and to mitigate the effects of conflict’.¹⁵ To do this, the UK government requires a comprehensive, up to date cross-government strategy for conflict prevention and addressing the ongoing drivers of conflict. The Building Stability Overseas Strategy has not been updated since 2011 and it was not mentioned in the National Security Capability Review.¹⁶ While DFID has the Building Stability Framework, there is at present no cross-government equivalent. Considering the potential value of deploying FCO diplomatic assets, human rights promotion and CSSF more cogently in the service of conflict prevention, this is a missed opportunity.
12. By way of comparison, the USA’s Global Fragility Act mandates a ten-year Global Fragility Strategy that the administration must produce and submit to Congress. The strategy must guide government policy at a senior level, ensuring that policy of all federal departments and agencies are consistent with it and be produced through an inclusive process that includes not only US-based stakeholders but also the input of civil society and national and local governance entities in the countries/regions where the strategy is to be implemented. At least five priority countries/regions must be selected and at least two of them must be areas where preventing violent conflict and fragility is the focus rather than stabilising ongoing conflicts.¹⁷
13. For priority countries, and themes such as illegal migration and serious and organised crime, cross-government national security strategies already exist. Older strategies have been criticised for being too broad to give ‘a strategic framework’ for activities though improvements have been noted.¹⁸ At present these strategies are not in the public domain, despite the government repeatedly committing over the last two years to make public versions available.¹⁹ This shields the FCO’s strategy which informs engagement with abusive authoritarian regimes and security forces from due scrutiny, and means that CSSF partners are asked to work with the government in ignorance of the wider strategies to which they are asked to contribute.
- 14. The UK should prioritise the promotion of just and lasting international peace and security, alongside other objectives, as the primary goal of its foreign, security and defence policy**

¹⁴ See for example: Krause J, [Krause W](#) & [Bränfors P](#) (2018), ‘Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace’, *International Interactions*, Vol, 44 Issue 6, August. pp. 985-1016
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386>

¹⁵ HM Government (2015), National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015, p63.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf

¹⁶ HM Government (2018), National Security Capability Review, March.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705347/6.4391_CO_National-Security-Review_web.pdf

¹⁷ 116th US Congress (2020), Global Fragility Act of 2019, S 727, 18th July. See in particular sections 4-5.
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/727/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Global+Fragility+Act%22%5D%7D&r=3>

¹⁸ Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2018), The CSSF’s aid spending. p i. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-CSSFs-aid-spending-ICAI-review.pdf>

¹⁹ HM Government (2018), Capability Review of Cross Government Funds, March.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/695331/Capability_Review_of_the_Cross-Government_Funds_28032018.pdf And Letter from The Rt Hon David Lidington CBE MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Cabinet Office to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy, 14 January 2019
(<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/national-security-strategy-committee/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-annual-report-201718/written/94983.html>)

towards which all other aspects and tools of foreign policy including trade, development, diplomacy, military deployments, stabilisation efforts and other security initiatives need to be aligned and contribute.

- 15. The FCO should support the creation of a new cross-government conflict prevention strategy building on DFID's Building Stability Framework, focused on addressing the drivers of conflict. It should also work with the Cabinet Office to follow up on its commitments to making public versions of national security strategies available.**
- 16. The FAC should ask the FCO what conflict prevention strategies and policies are guiding current diplomatic and programmatic activities. It should also ask for an update on the release of the national security strategies for priority countries and themes.**

The FCO's resources and capabilities

17. The development sector, military and diplomats have a role to play in understanding conflict overseas and stemming threats to international peace and security. But as the government's stabilisation guidance makes clear, there are 'tensions between stabilisation actions to secure immediate security and reduce violent conflict and those activities designed to generate longer-term stability'.²⁰ Some of the contradictions that policy makers have confronted are mentioned above. Officials should be given clarity on what priority takes precedence, required to document why they decide on a particular trade-off, and have processes for revisiting decisions, publicly disclosing details where possible.
18. Through diplomatic activity and the CSSF the FCO has many tools to contribute to peace and security overseas. The Stabilisation Unit and CSSF represent greater attempts to join up government policy and maximise the impact of FCO expertise alongside that of DFID and other departments in addressing the causes of conflict. It also contributes to multilateral efforts to support peace, for example the UN peace fund.²¹ However, building peace takes time and flexibility to respond to rapidly evolving conflicts. Just as the UK invests in standing military capabilities to respond to future crises, it must also invest in standing peace capabilities to address emerging conflict situations: mediation expertise, partnerships with local stakeholders working for peaceful change, and funding models that support flexibility and innovation in between lengthy and bureaucratic procurement or grant cycles. Much of the FCO's support through the CSSF allows for continued conflict analysis and the ability to innovate in terms of flexible programme changes. However, this can be undermined by onerous reporting and contractual requirements even during a rapidly evolving crisis and short term programme cycles which curtail the ability to plan for complex, long term political changes.
- 19. The Integrated Review should recognise and address the UK's underinvestment in resources committed to addressing conflict, particularly the drivers of conflict. Just as it invests in standing military capabilities so it should invest in standing peace capabilities.**
20. The FCO also needs to ensure 'Projecting our Influence' does not undermine the UK's strong interest in alleviating conflict and promoting rights. UK interventions in Syria and the Sahel

²⁰ HM Government (2019), The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation: A Guide for Policy makers and Practitioners, March.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784001/The_UK_Government_s_Approach_to_Stabilisation_A_guide_for_policy_makers_and_practitioners.pdf

²¹ HM Government (2019), Peacebuilding programme: CSSF Programme Summary, 5th November.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-multilateral-programme-summaries-for-2019-to-2020>

have been criticised for being undertaken in order to impress the American²² and the French²³ governments respectively. In another example, Saferworld staff witnessed one FCO official tell overseas partner organisations that they were participating in the programme funded by the UK primarily to further UK objectives and strengthen the UK's relationship with their governments, rather than focusing on de-escalating tensions in a region where military conflict had occurred in the past, as the programme was designed to do.

21. The FCO contributes to and uses a number of complex tools which aim to stop projects from doing harm. These include:

- overseas Security and Justice Assessments which consider the risks of UK security assistance feeding into human rights violations;
- gender audits taken of CSSF programming which seek to ensure that projects mainstream the pursuit of gender equality and a conflict sensitivity marker is being developed;²⁴ and
- the eight criteria used by the Joint Export Control Unit to assess whether military equipment can be exported.

However, despite commitments to address the causes of conflict and fairly robust 'do-no-harm' tools, too often the FCO has taken decisions that undermine peace, security and ultimately the national interest. A 2016 review of strategic communications projects in Syria seen by Middle East Eye, in which the FCO was involved²⁵, revealed "fundamental shortcomings" including "no conflict analysis [and] no target audience analysis".²⁶ The FAC itself has documented the implication of UK and EU-trained Libyan coastguards in human rights violations.²⁷

22. In Yemen, the UK's humanitarian efforts and FCO-led peacebuilding initiatives²⁸ are gravely undermined by government-licensed arms sales to the Saudi-led coalition, prompting the Court of Appeal to order a halt to new arms licences pending a review. Despite a multitude of credible reports of violations of international humanitarian law through air attacks by the Saudi/UAE-led coalition in Yemen, and the UK supplying billions of pounds worth of the planes and bombs being used in that air campaign, the FCO continued to certify that the risk that these supplies might result in a serious violation of international humanitarian law was not clear. UK arms exports also continue to countries that are well known to be flouting the UN arms embargo on Libya – for example Jordan, Turkey and the UAE²⁹ – which is problematic according to Criterion 6 of the UK's consolidated criteria.

²² Cobain I and Ross Alice (2020), British propaganda efforts in Syria may have broken UK law, Middle East Eye, 11th May. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-british-propaganda-syria-war-opposition-illegal-internal-review>

²³ Watson A, Karlshøj-Pedersen M (2019), Fusion Doctrine in Five Steps: Lessons learned from remote warfare in Africa, Remote Warfare Programme, Nov. PP 20-21. <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3f898a3f-147f-441c-b663-a089d2f5d23d>

²⁴ On conflict sensitivity see: Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2019), ICAI follow-up of: The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's aid spending, p 2. July. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019-ICAI-Follow-up-CSSF.pdf> & on gender mainstreaming see: HM Government (2018), Conflict Stability and Security Fund: Annual Report 2017/8, July, pp. 9-11. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727383/CSSF_Annual_Report_2017_to_2018.pdf

²⁵ HM Government (2017), CSSF Programme Summary: Syria Cross Cutting. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/717652/Syria_Cross_Cutting_Programme_Summary.pdf

²⁶ Cobain, I and Ross Alice (2020), British propaganda efforts in Syria may have broken UK law, Middle East Eye, 11th May. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-british-propaganda-syria-war-opposition-illegal-internal-review>

²⁷ UK Foreign Affairs Committee (2019) First Report: Responding to irregular migration: a diplomatic route. HC 107, 4th November. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmfa/107/107.pdf>

²⁸ HM Government (2019), CSSF Programme Summary: Yemen Programme, 5th November. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conflict-stability-and-security-fund-programme-summaries-for-middle-east-and-north-africa-2019-to-2020>

²⁹ United Nations Security Council (2019), Final report of the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1973 (2011), S/2019/914, 9th December. <https://undocs.org/S/2019/914>

23. Where it is clear that such actions do not feed any strategy for long-term peace they must be halted. Too often, counter-terror, countering violent extremism and counter-migration efforts have empowered regimes and security forces whose corruption, exclusion and repression drive and perpetuate conflict, undermining long-term UK interests.³⁰
24. **To ensure policy coherence, the Integrated Review should assess and find ways to improve the consistent and coherent application of arms licensing criteria, human rights protection measures, conflict sensitivity and gender mainstreaming mechanisms. FCO teams focusing on gender and conflict sensitivity should be given greater support to mainstream their expertise across government.**
25. **The FCO and CSSF should re-examine the guidance they give officials on managing trade-offs between competing UK priorities (such as support to a problematic partner government where there is a risk of fuelling long term instability), ensure that trade-offs are made only based on explicit reasoning and require that such decisions are subject to regular review.**
26. **The FAC should assist the urgent reconvening of the Committees on Arms Export Controls in order to facilitate needed scrutiny of UK arms export controls.**

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³⁰ See for example Saferworld (2017), Lessons on counter-terror and countering violent extremism, March.
<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1131-overview-lessons-on-counter-terror-and-countering-violent-extremism>