

## Written evidence submitted by the International Alert (INR0059)

International Alert has worked for more than 30 years in over 20 countries and disputed territories around the world on peacebuilding. This involves addressing underlying drivers of conflict, while building capacity to manage conflict peacefully. It takes a variety of forms, from working on community security, preventing violent extremism, to reconciliation, encouraging greater political inclusion at local and national levels, gender, peace and security, climate and security, better natural resource management and work with businesses. We work closely with the UK government including the FCO/CSSF and DFID in a number of conflict-affected contexts as well as providing research and analysis on policy and operational approaches to promoting peace and security at the global level.

### Executive summary

This submission speaks to five priorities for UK foreign policy over the next 10 years including: responding to the instability that will flow from the COVID-19 pandemic, framing conflict prevention and peacebuilding as a key pillar of any future strategy, as well as refreshing the UK's approach to dealing with Violent Extremism, Climate change and Gender Peace and Security.

It highlights the need for an FCO-led Conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategy as a key interface for its relationships with other ministries as well as specific roles it can play in advancing aid and security interests.

In the context of allies, it focuses in on the future relationship with the EU and concludes with an assessment of how the FCO can maximise value for money while remaining innovative in the peace and security policy space.

### Priorities for UK foreign policy strategy

#### COVID-19 & global instability

1. The COVID-19 pandemic poses both an immediate and also long-term threat to our shared global security. Pandemic preparedness and response will have to be a cross-cutting consideration if not a pillar of the UK's foreign policy in the next 5-10 years. The International Crisis Group<sup>1</sup> identifies five impacts that will have significant implications for UK foreign policy: 1. Vulnerability of conflict-affected populations and likely deepening of violence 2. Damage to international crisis management and conflict resolution mechanisms 3. Risks to social order, placing greater stress on political and economic systems 4. Political exploitation of the crisis (including by violent extremists as well right-wing nationalist political forces) 5. Intensification of great power infighting. We would add a sixth: the erosion of trust with citizens that is occurring as a result of perceived inadequate responses and violent securitised approaches some states are employing to enforce COVID-19 counter measures (see Alert's *May 2020 submission to the IDC Committee inquiry on Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus inquiry* for full details on impact on fragile and conflict-affected states).

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<sup>1</sup> International Crisis Group, COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch, March 2020 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb4-covid-19-and-conflict-seven-trends-watch>

2. Meanwhile, the Brookings Institute has said that the ‘the Middle East faces a potential moment of reckoning...a convulsion that will have cross-border implications and destabilize countries that have managed to keep conflicts outside of their borders... while expanding the reach of militias and other armed sub-state actors.’<sup>2</sup> There is no reason to expect different outcomes in other regions of strategic interest to the UK such as the Sahel and West Africa.
3. Thus, the UK must significantly invest in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation capabilities. Even prior to COVID-19 there was already a strong case to make these elements a pillar of UK foreign policy.

### **Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding**

4. Violent conflicts surged globally by two-thirds over the last decade, from an average of 93 between 2006 and 2008 to an average of 154 in 2016/17.<sup>3</sup> With this came soaring rates of human displacement, totalling 70.8 million people in 2019. Meanwhile, about half of all post-conflict countries relapsed into conflict within a decade<sup>4</sup>. Conflict helps criminal networks flourish, creates environments for violent extremist groups to grow, impacts trade opportunities and poses a grave threat to future generations (youth representing the majority of the population in most countries affected by armed conflicts). At the same time there has been an erosion of the multilateral system, growth in great power competition, domestic political polarisation and compounding factors such as climate change, the impact of technology and growing inequality and now a global pandemic.
5. In the face of this mounting global insecurity how should the UK position its foreign and security strategy to deliver **more durable security outcomes**? In sum, what gets us to sustainable, positive, peace in these contexts?
6. Achieving it requires **dealing with the root causes of conflict** - those things that drive both localised dynamics as well as more structural causes of conflict (e.g. political and economic exclusion) that create an environment for instability and violence. In short: peacebuilding. While the 2015 SDSR asserted the importance of addressing root causes, this did not translate into a more considered strategic approach. As noted later, an FCO-led HMG Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Strategy must be an output of the Integrated Review if the UK is to make headway in this space.
7. Peacebuilding is in many ways **still a latent capability** – its potential still not fully realised within the UK national security architecture. While both the FCO and DFID fund peacebuilding there is a question as to whether this kind of work is being delivered with the necessary prioritisation to achieve lasting impacts *at scale*, to tackle structural and in some cases regional drivers of conflict that cut to the core of contemporary security challenges. Peacebuilding must no longer be an add-on. To the contrary it is a useful framework that brings both foreign policy priorities and HMG responses together into a comprehensive approach.

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<sup>2</sup> Brookings Institute, COVID-19 will prolong conflict in the Middle East April 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/24/covid-19-will-prolong-conflict-in-the-middle-east/>

<sup>3</sup> ODI and IRC SDG Progress report, 2018 pg. 13

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, World Development Report 2011

8. The UK should **position itself as a global champion of peacebuilding** and conflict prevention, enabling a **shift away from a constant crisis footing** to one that delivers long-term durable security. This approach meshes most neatly with an overall **shared security lens**. As COVID-19, climate change, mass displacement and other transnational threats have shown us, those most secure are only as safe as the most vulnerable.

### **Rethinking responses to violent extremism**

9. The war on terror has dominated security and foreign policy considerations for the last two decades yet terrorist acts have actually increased, with eight of nine regions in the world having experienced increased terrorism since 2002<sup>5</sup>. The international coalition against ISIS eliminated territorial control in Iraq but displaced the threat rather than solving it. ISIS influence is growing in other states, particularly in North Africa and the Sahel. The 2019 Global Terrorism Index indicates that ‘the number of ISIL affiliates outside of Iraq and Syria continue to rise, as does the number of non-affiliate groups that have pledged allegiance to the group’<sup>6</sup>. An overemphasis on securitised approaches have in some cases exacerbated the situation. UNDP’s seminal 2017 piece of analysis ‘Journeys to extremism in Africa’ found that the majority of those inspired to join violent extremist groups did so as a result of abuses by the state.
10. There are reports that ISIS and Al Qaeda have used the cover of COVID-19 to expand their operations and influence. ICG has said that ‘it is almost certain that COVID-19 will handicap domestic security efforts and international counter-ISIS cooperation, allowing the jihadists to better prepare spectacular terror attacks and escalate campaigns of insurgent warfare on battlefields worldwide’<sup>7</sup>. We cannot revert to a standard counter terror response which has proved ineffective. Tackling the underlying drivers of conflict that terrorist groups leverage is the only path to a durable security outcome – returning the discussion to peacebuilding. As Lt. General John Allen, former leader of the International Coalition against ISIS, remarked, if we do not take this approach, we are destined to fight ISIS forever.

### **Tackling the climate crisis**

11. It is important to emphasise that we are seeing risks associated with the climate-security nexus materialise. They are not something of the future but of the now – and therefore it will be essential that addressing the climate emergency feature as pillar of the Integrated review and future foreign policy. In Nigeria, the farmer-herder conflict over land and resources is being compounded by changing climactic conditions, as is the case in Mali and other parts of the Sahel. As former US Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, puts it ‘Less arable land, less water, and more people are a recipe for a cycle of violence’.

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<sup>5</sup> 2017 Global Terrorism Index, Institute for Economics and Peace pg. 4 <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2017.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Global Terrorism Index, Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019 pg. 16

<sup>7</sup> International Crisis Group, Contending with ISIS in the time of Coronavirus March 2020 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/contending-isis-time-coronavirus>

12. In 2015, the UK and Germany commissioned a report for the G7 from a consortium of organisations that included International Alert on climate and security (*A new climate for peace*). It recommended that the G7 take concrete action to tackle climate-fragility risks identified by the report and increase the resilience of states and societies to them through scaling conflict prevention efforts. While the UK's leadership on climate as a whole has continued, illustrated by the fact it will host COP26 next year, its efforts to connect climate into security policy needs to be revitalised, especially given the decline of US leadership in this space.

### **Gender Peace and Security**

13. In the year of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, any UK foreign-policy strategy must ensure it pays adequate attention **to how the UK is operationalising its commitments to this agenda specifically, and the Gender Peace and Security agenda more broadly**. The latter relates to how associated gender norms and other identities interact to either prevent or promote violence. To this end it is essential that UK foreign policy is **underpinned by rigorous gender analysis**, considering the complex and nuanced ways in which conflict and gender intersect and the adverse effect of conflict on women and girls and other minority groups as well as on men and norms of masculinity.

### **The relationship of the FCO with the other UK Government Departments**

14. While the 2015 SDSR asserted the importance of addressing 'root causes', this did not translate into a more considered strategic approach. Similarly, the earlier, 2011 Building Stability Overseas (BSOS) strategy set out a vision but lacked the specificity and accountability framework to drive a more strategic approach that identified and tied together HMG's respective capabilities. This gap needs to be addressed through a **dedicated Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Strategy led by the FCO** and this needs to form a central outcome of the 2020 Integrated Review. This would represent a key interface between the FCO, DFID and MOD (See *pp 7 of Alert's submission to the Defence Committee review into the Integrated Review April 2020*, for some elements that may fall under this).

15. Unlike other areas of the UK's overseas efforts, there are **no reporting or accountability requirements around the UK's contribution to sustainable peace and security outcomes** or what might be termed the UK's collective 'peace impact'. A dedicated strategy will help set a base line for this. As a case in point, while DFID has committed to spend 50% of its budget in fragile and conflict affected states, it is unclear to what extent this is contributing to building peace or whether it is business as usual.

16. A dedicated strategy will also help ensure that **ministries do not work at cross purposes**. For example, counter terror operations can undermine efforts by other arms of UK government to build trust between citizens and the state to erode the appeal of violent armed groups. In this last respect the FCO has a role to play in **cross-institutional risk management**.

17. The FCO also has a comparative advantage in political analysis. It should be a **guardian of the recommendations of the Chilcot review**, in so far as they relate to assessing the downstream impact of UK interventions. Understanding the potential downstream

impact of UK interventions (military or otherwise) will help safeguard against investing in tactical success for strategic failure. International Alert's submission to the Defence inquiry into the Integrated review (April 2020) considers this issue in more detail.

18. A key reason **SDG16 has failed to deliver has been a lack of political strategy**. Almost exclusively driven forward by development agencies, SDG16 requires dedicated diplomatic efforts where national governments are intransigent in the face of political and economic exclusion that is driving conflict. This is a key area of collaboration with DFID. Further detail on the challenges SDG16 has encountered can be found in Alert's Submission to the IDC review on the effectiveness of UK aid (May 2020).
19. Finally, the FCO also has a role to play in conjunction with the MOD in **shaping security politics** in fragile or conflict-affected countries. As Alert's submission to the Defence Committee inquiry indicates, there is an untapped opportunity for the UK to be more forward leaning on shaping the institutional incentives and accountabilities of partner security forces. Moving beyond 'train and equip' is essential where security forces behaviour, in operational terms, is actively widening the gap between the state and citizens, negatively impacting national politics, or reinforcing conflict divides.
20. It is important to understand the complementarity between DFID and the FCO's foreign engagement in diplomatic terms. Government aid programmes are not purely altruistic or just a technical delivery mechanism. They generate influence and what are, in effect, diplomatic relationships with partner ministers and ministries (such as Finance, Interior, and the judicial system). They often help ride out difficulties within broader bilateral relationships through keeping channels of communication open. In many contexts, aid agencies are a symbol of the seriousness with which donors take partner government agendas, which in the vast majority of developing countries rank poverty alleviation in their top tier priorities.

### **UK allies, and how they shape or contribute to the FCO's strategy**

21. The UK, with the leadership of the FCO, should redouble its efforts to strengthen the multilateral system and global norms that are the foundation of international peace and security and champion institutions showing a genuine investment in scaling their work around conflict prevention and resolution.
22. At the same time, the UK needs to be cognisant of the **constraints of**, in particular, the **UN system**. The UNSC continues to be constrained by the politics of sovereignty, prioritising responding to impending crises rather than longer-term upstream conflict prevention. This gap is increasingly being filled by **regional organisations** and thus the UK must equip itself to collaborate with these institutions more fully. Lessons from Libya suggest that ad-hoc coalitions should be approached cautiously, particularly where little investment is made in assessing the downstream impact of interventions.
23. The UK's future **relationship with the EU** merits particular consideration. It will be important to maintain the UK's legacy. The UK worked hard to get peacebuilding and conflict prevention on the EU's agenda, particularly during the establishment of the European External Action Service. While now integrated into the EU's global strategy, that legacy is at risk. There is a growing gap between rhetoric and action as illustrated by the merger of peacebuilding and conflict prevention funding into a generic

instrument under the new EU multi-annual budget, and further highlighted by the emergence of a proposed European 'Peace' Facility which would allow the EU to support lethal force capability in foreign militaries.

24. While the UK has been working to increase its presence and engagement in contexts that it had, to a certain degree, delegated to the EU, it is still unlikely to match the scale of effort from the Commission and its delegations in these regions (for example, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia). It is vital that in the context of the UK's **NATO membership**, that it ensures that military efforts are adequately matched to civilian interventions, if it is to be the UK's principal avenue for multilateral security cooperation in Europe.
25. The UK also has a vested interest in developing channels for continuing policy dialogue and cooperation while **retaining some form of UK influence** over EU conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies globally and in the conflict-countries where the EU works.
26. To this end, a **UK-EU flagship partnership on peacebuilding and conflict prevention** could be a highly effective platform for addressing these issues. It will also help keep the UK at the table in certain conflict contexts. Both Canada and Australia understand the implications of being outside in-country EU diplomatic and development policy coordination mechanisms. Complimentary to this, the UK must remain open to participation in EU Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy Missions, which are, in part, currently supported by the CSSF.
27. Recognising that the UK will have competing priorities at this time, it could be funded with resources that would have otherwise been provided to the European Development Fund and help to leverage broader EU resources. The fund could also be a matching mechanism for some multilateral contributions, for example to the UN's Peacebuilding Fund. It would enable the continued use of EU delivery systems which have received consistently high ratings by DFID in its multilateral assessments.

## **Resource priorities, and areas that the FCO has deprioritised**

### **Vale for money**

28. In a world of shrinking resources brought on by COVID-19 there is an even greater need for the UK to consider what delivers value for money in its response to conflict. Conflict kills trade and investment opportunities for the UK and creates huge aid and reconstruction bills.
29. The cost of violence to the global economy is estimated at US\$14.3 trillion or 11 times all global Foreign Direct Investment<sup>8</sup>. It has been suggested that if civil war in northeast Nigeria were to break out, it could cost the UK economy £90–240 million per year.<sup>9</sup> Afghanistan has cost more to rebuild than Europe after the Second World War, while

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<sup>8</sup> Global Peace Index 2017 Institute for Economic and Peace pg. 54 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GPI-2017-Report-1.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> H. Mueller, The economic costs of conflict, International Growth Centre, Working Paper, 2013, p.32, <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Mueller-2013-Working-Paper2.pdf>

humanitarian assistance has more than doubled since 2006, from \$9.2 billion to \$27.3 billion. The UK, US, Germany, Japan and the EU, provide almost two thirds of this total humanitarian spend.

30. By contrast, for every \$1 invested in peacebuilding, \$16 is saved in the cost of conflict<sup>10</sup>. The 2018 Peace Perceptions Poll found that over 70 per cent of taxpayers in the UK agree that peacebuilding is vital to ending conflicts and over 60 per cent think we should be investing more in it – representing a ‘prevention is better than cure’ mentality. In making the business case for conflict prevention the World Bank found that countries that avoid civil war save around \$5 billion per year.<sup>11</sup>
31. The FCO can play a role in **mobilising resources and capabilities across government** to focus on peacebuilding through strategy, budget and NSC decision making processes. It can also play a key role in **leveraging other governments to up their investment**, exemplified by the proposed UK-EU partnership above. The FCO should also examine its own resources including **where it targets its diplomatic capabilities** but also its own operational funding.

### **Conflict Security and Stabilisation Fund (CSSF) & innovative financing**

32. Funding focused on conflict, with the malleability of blended non-ODA finance, is essential. But the FCO’s ability to effectively project peacebuilding impact is more limited than it might seem when it comes to its principal funding instrument, the CSSF.
33. While impressive, standing at £1.25 billion in 2018-19, 45 percent of this is non-discretionary spending on peacekeeping contributions and MOD operational funds. While both are important spending lines, they do not directly contribute to tackling underlying drivers of conflict. Of the remainder, the CSSF Annual report indicates that £59.3 million is spent on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. We would assess that this figure probably underrepresents the CSSF peacebuilding spend, as activities that tackle underlying drivers of conflict also fall into other areas of expenditure, such as, tackling violent extremism and governance and justice. Irrespective, CSSF resourcing for long-term peacebuilding still falls short of what is needed to genuinely tackle structural causes of conflict in one country let alone the 70 countries and 90 projects it is spread across. DFID also of course has a peacebuilding expenditure line but it is not as malleable as that of the CSSF.
34. The CSSF should prioritise a smaller set of countries and sub-regions (e.g. Sahel) where longer-term, multi-year investment is channelled, complimented with a more responsive window to account for shifting conflict dynamics, emerging priorities and catalytic funding for innovative interventions.
35. These proposals are reflective of developments in how resources are being mobilised to address conflict. The CSSF and its predecessor the Conflict pool were innovative in their

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<sup>10</sup> Global Peace Index 2017 Institute for Economic and Peace pg. 73

<sup>11</sup> Pathways for peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict 2018 World Bank <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>

time. The **CSSF, is however is set to be overtaken in spending and impact terms** by an initiative of the US Congress – the Global Fragility Act. This initiative will draw together State, DOD and USAID to develop a strategy and accompanying interventions for **dealing with the root causes of conflict** in ten countries over ten years. It underpins this effort with **clear metrics** to assess impact. The Act received bi-partisan support in both the House and the Senate and agencies have now moved into the design and implementation phase. The ten-year time horizon also represents a far more realistic timeframe in which to see progress on generating and sustaining peace. **This initiative is operationalising what the UK's 2015 SDSR promised but was unable to deliver** – a focus on the root cause of conflict underpinned by a clear strategy and a whole of government effort. Whether and how COVID-19 will affect this initiative is still unknown, but planning is continuing at this point. Irrespective, the UK needs to rediscover the source of such innovation that historically put it out in front of the pack.

36. Scaling resources for long-term peacebuilding within the CSSF will be difficult in the current economic climate and there is a negotiation to be had around the ODA window within the CSSF. As noted above, there may be scope to capitalise on funding streams returning from the EU system.

#### **Investment in preventative diplomacy capability**

37. Preventative diplomacy including shuttle diplomacy as well as short-term and long-term mediation between parties is a capability the FCO must retain and strengthen. There is however a broader and deeper role for the FCO to play in conflict prevention. This exists in focused and more robust diplomatic engagement with partner governments, where they persistently fail to address political and economic exclusion that is creating the potential for or driving conflict. This is essential to the effectiveness and sustainability of the UK's development and security interventions which will be undermined while a national government remains part of the problem rather than the solution. The FCO should be empowered to bring the UK's full suite of levers (aid, trade, defence cooperation) to bear under a broader NSC agreed peacebuilding strategy for specific contexts.

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