

APPG ON CONFLICT AND GLOBAL BRITAIN

**END OF YEAR DEBRIEF
DECEMBER 2021**



**Conflict
&
Global Britain**



The APPG for Action on Conflict and Global Britain has the objective of ensuring that the UK places Action on Conflict at the heart of its international strategy alongside climate change and COVID recovery. The Co-Chairs are Rushanara Ali MP and Anthony Mangnall MP. The secretariat is provided by the HALO Trust.



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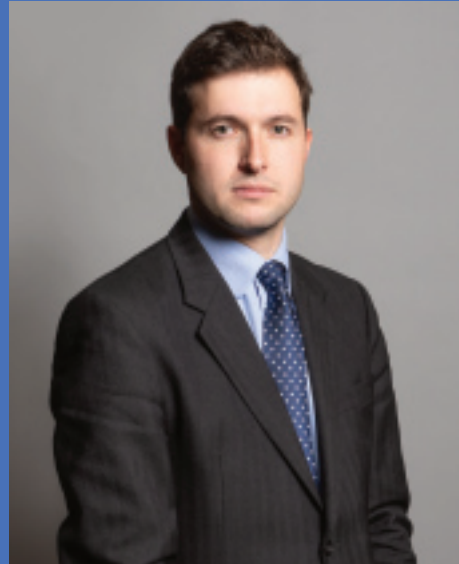
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FOREWORD BY RUSHANARA ALI MP AND ANTHONY MANGNALL MP

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Conflict and Global Britain was created to ensure that the UK places Action on Conflict at the heart of its international strategy, alongside climate change and Covid-19 recovery, with mounting pressure exacerbated by the fragmentation of the international community's collective will.

At its core, it seeks to inform and enhance debate and discussion on the UK's conflict strategy as well as helping to shape Global Britain's ambitions. From conflict resolution to broadening our development budget objectives to reaffirming the international rules-based order, this group offers on-the-ground insight and analysis to some of the most protracted and complex issues facing the international community, as well as seeking to steer the UK's domestic policy.

This End of Year debrief has been produced at a time when the global world order is not only shifting dramatically but being actively challenged. In 2020 the world saw its highest level of armed conflicts since the Second World War. The number of people living in proximity to conflict has doubled since 2007 and some 80 million people were displaced during 2019 alone. The projections for further conflicts and crises make for grim reading and should be of concern to every country and community across the globe.

This report brings together the member organisations of the APPG on Conflict and Global Britain to highlight their work and to offer recommendations to Government. Recommendations that are based on first-hand expertise and insight that can help develop our foreign, defence and development policy while also shaping the UK's international ambitions.

In this age of greater uncertainty and fragmentation, the UK needs to act both directly and indirectly, cross-departmentally with an integrated strategy that is based not just on the expertise from Whitehall departments but from civil society. Further to the integrated review, it must ensure that it includes the protection of civilians, human security, children in armed conflict and violence against women and girls to name just a few.

The West's withdrawal from Afghanistan will have long lasting implications both for the country itself but also the perception of the international community's ability to respond to conflict and crises. Such a view cannot be allowed to fester and the plurilateral systems that have for so long swung into action must be rejuvenated by strong and reaffirmed domestic policies through coalitions of democracies that adhere to the rules-based order.

Failure to act will only see our adversaries emboldened and those most in need left far behind. The UK has a long and proud record of support and assistance to the international community. That ethos and approach must be reborn.

Whatever the situation regarding the global pandemic it is highly likely that the increase in conflict and the impact of climate change will only make the world a more unstable place. If Global Britain can enhance its mechanisms of defence, diplomacy, development and trade and ensure that fragile states are supported, and agitators held to account then we will be able to provide a clear, concise and progressive conflict strategy that will safeguard those in need and protect us at home.

Rushanara Ali MP and Anthony Mangnall MP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This End of Year Debrief for the APPG on Conflict and Global Britain draws on written evidence from NGOs and the APPG's evidence gathered throughout the year to put forward recommendations to the Government on how the UK can deliver a coherent Conflict Strategy whilst realising its vision of Global Britain.

■ Global Context:

2020 saw the highest number of armed conflicts since the Second World War. The number of people living in proximity to conflict has nearly doubled since 2007. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 80 million people displaced during 2019, nearly seven times higher than in 2001. The Department for International Development (DFID) did not make conflict a priority for aid programming, despite it being explicitly stated in the 2015 DFID Strategy. The new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has a Director level position responsible for conflict resolution but, as yet, there is no clear strategy or budget attributed to it.

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the global economy into recession, creating the worst crisis since the Second World War. The full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not fully known, though it is likely to cause the greatest shock in sub-Saharan Africa and states or communities with lower levels of resilience. This poses an immediate threat to stability, conflict and the significant progress made to date in poverty reduction.

Trends in poverty are changing and are integrally linked to fragility and conflict. While the last two decades have seen a reduction in global poverty levels, the opposite is true in locations experiencing conflict and instability. The World Bank estimates that by 2030, up to two-thirds of the world's extreme poor will live in countries characterised by fragility, conflict, and violence. Without increased action to address conflict and fragility, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda's Goal 1 to 'End Poverty in all its forms' will not be met.





The 43 countries in the world with the highest poverty rates are in countries experiencing fragility and conflict. The Institute of Economics and Peace calculated the economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2019 at \$14.5 trillion, equivalent to 10.5% of the world's economic activity, or \$1,895 per person. Conflict and poverty must be viewed as interlinked global issues.

The current character of warfare is increasingly complex, urbanised, cross-border, and linked to the involvement of non-state groups with the routine violation of the human rights and international humanitarian law. It is also clear that the last decade for the UK has seen cautious distance from conflict, in contrast to the decade of irresponsible interventionism of the 2000s, and has exacerbated protracted conflict and a cycle of 'endless wars'.

Alongside ongoing challenges linked to international terrorism, the increasing tensions between the US and China, and voids of governance and stability in failed states will pose a key threat in the 21st Century. The UK and its allies need to provide an alternative stabilisation, economic and human rights 'offer' for otherwise ungoverned space.

Climate change is now a global threat and will disproportionately affect fragile and conflict affected states. 80% of all major armed conflicts between 1950 and 2000 took place directly in biodiversity hotspots that sustain around half the world's plants and many rare species of animals. 40% of internal armed conflicts in the last 60 years have been related to natural resources. 12 of the 20 countries which, according to the ND-GAIN Country Index, are the most vulnerable and least ready to adapt to climate change are also sites of armed conflict.

In August 2021 the UK and NATO allies withdrew from Afghanistan after 20 years of intervention. The withdrawal had led to a Taliban takeover of the country. There is a humanitarian crisis and hundreds of thousands of Afghans are on the move, the withdrawal of international aid and sanctions has caused an economic and liquidity crisis. Afghanistan's Healthcare system is broken and with winter arriving the threat posed by Covid-19, drought and malnutrition has increased.

■ UK International Strategy:

Domestic pressure to look inwards due to Brexit and COVID-19 is threatening Britain's ability to play a stronger role, as it has done in the recent past, on the international stage in a changing world. UK long-term resilience will depend on internationalism. The UK should adopt a new approach to statecraft, a clear strategy to deliver the 'Global Britain' concept, and greater fusion between defence, development, diplomacy and trade strategy. As a middle power, the UK should invest in core skills and 'centres of excellence', like conflict response.

The Integrated Review promised greater fusion and complementarity between development, diplomacy and defence. It has not delivered on this aspiration, particularly when it comes to conflict and instability. There is a laudable focus on conflict prevention and diplomatic resolution, but an omission of response, stabilisation and recovery.

The current approach to conflict outlined in 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age' must be strengthened to address the current wars of this century, with an equal focus on conflict response. The UK should be proactively combining the expertise of its defence, diplomacy and world-class aid NGOs to address conflict. We also need a pre-emptive approach to prevent conflict and suffering to end cycles of conflict. It is too late to act when we see a new conflict erupt. The suffering and damage has already happened.

2020 saw the creation of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), formed through the merger of the former Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. This merger needs to be completed quickly so the 'Global Britain' agenda can progress. The UK Government's decision to cut the foreign aid budget at the same time as the merger is regrettable. It will slash billions from UK aid which funds programmes that help some of the poorest people, including in fragile and conflict-affected parts of the world.

The end of year debrief seeks to dive into these issues and questions and offer realistic and pragmatic advice to the government and policy makers on how the UK can play a positive role in tackling conflict across the world and realise the vision of Global Britain.



WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM NGOS ON THE APPG SESSION “THE UK CONFLICT STRATEGY”

The APPG on Conflict and Global Britain recently held a virtual evidence session with some of the UK’s leading NGOs and Think Tanks to hear evidence focused on two questions relating to the UK conflict strategy.

1. What do you want to see in the new UK conflict strategy?
2. How should the government implement the new UK conflict strategy?

This section of the End of Year Debrief contains written evidence providing the perspective and recommendations of organisations in relation to the two questions.

■ Background on organisations who have provided evidence:



Save the Children is one of the world’s leading independent organisations for children, established more than 100 years ago in Britain. Today they operate in 120 countries, including on the frontline in some of the world’s most challenging conflict and humanitarian situations. Their staff and programmes provide a range of support to children and their families, all with the aim of ensuring that every child can survive, learn, and be protected. They work closely with the FCDO and Ministry of Defense (MoD), as well as at the United Nations (UN) and through other multilateral institutions, to help shape and uphold the norms and standards that put children off limits in war.



War Child is a registered charity established in 1993 which helps children in areas experiencing and recovering from conflict with the aim to reach children as early as possible when conflict breaks out and to stay to support them through their recovery. The organisation provides education, protection and support with food security and livelihoods to children, their families and communities. War Child also campaigns for changes to policies and practices and has produced research examining in detail the UK’s record with regards to children’s rights in conflict and has formulated recommendations to increase UK political commitment to this agenda.



The HALO Trust is the world’s leading NGO addressing landmines, unexploded ordnance and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). They are active in 28 countries. They employ 10,000 staff globally, of whom over 98% are recruited and trained from the communities in which they work. HALO seeks to empower women and men alike; with training and a living wage, so that they can take control of their destiny.



Saferworld is an independent organisation that works to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives in multiple countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East. They also share conflict prevention policy expertise on everything from conflict sensitive aid delivery to the risks of security interventions and arms export controls across Washington, London, Brussels, Vienna and Beijing.



Mercy Corps is a global organisation working in more than 40 countries around the world responding to conflict, crisis and fragility. From Syria to South Sudan, Iraq, to Somalia, they work with some of the 1.5 billion people whose lives are currently riven by conflict and violence, addressing both the devastating impact and the root causes of conflict and fragility. In FY2021, Mercy Corps reached 50 million people with vital, lifesaving support.



International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) is leading British research institute in the area of international affairs. It was founded in 1958, with its original focus being on nuclear deterrence and arms control.



Airwars is a not-for-profit international monitoring organisation focused on reducing battlefield civilian casualties. They track, document, and archive airpower-dominated military actions and local reports of civilian harm, including US-led Coalition action against ISIS in Syria and Iraq since 2014. The UK has consistently been the second most active partner, following behind only the US.



Search for Common Ground is one of the world's largest and oldest dedicated peacebuilding organisations. They have about 1000 staff across 50 offices around the world and work in America and in Europe on issues that divide white and black political religious lines. They work primarily in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and are a close partner to the UK Government and the UK.

EVIDENCE ON, WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE NEW UK CONFLICT STRATEGY?

■ Save the Children and War Child joint evidence:

The Conflict Strategy provides an opportunity to elevate important agendas that were not mentioned in the Integrated Review, specifically the children in armed conflict and human security agenda which will be highlighted in this submission.

Children and Armed Conflict:

The UK must commit to being a global leader in protecting and supporting children affected by conflict. Almost 200 million children globally are living in the world's deadliest conflict zones. In 2020 the UN reported the highest-ever number of verified "grave violations" of children's rights in conflict. Since the UN started recording in 2005, more than 250,000 violations against children have been verified. Each one of these represents a child killed, maimed, recruited, abducted or sexually abused, or large groups of children denied aid or whose schools and hospitals have come under attack. There is an extensive international legal and policy framework, including child rights treaties, political commitments, and United Nations resolutions, designed to protect children. Yet perpetrators of grave violations typically enjoy total or near-total impunity.

Turning the tide on these trends is both a moral and a strategic imperative, and the UK has the influence and responsibility to make a difference.

The new conflict strategy must elevate the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda to the level of priority it deserves and ensure that it is embedded across the UK's foreign policy and military engagement. It should set out how the UK will use the full range of diplomatic, political, legal, and financial levers at its disposal to hold perpetrators of grave violations to account. This includes committing to resourcing international investigative mechanisms and maintaining its funding to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on CAAC. Its approach must apply consistently to all parties to conflict, including UK allies.

The strategy should also set out how the UK will not only uphold, but proactively advance at a global level, norms and standards that put children off limits in war. This includes galvanizing support for, and strengthening the effective implementation of, the Safe Schools Declaration and other key instruments for protecting children in conflict, such as the Paris Principles and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The Government should commit to promoting and supporting child and youth participation, including those with disabilities, in peace processes, as well as ensuring mechanisms for children to make their voices heard in national and international forums including the UN Security Council. Partnered military relationships and human security:



In 2019, military support, whether in the form of training or education, partnered operations, contributions to peacekeeping missions, arms transfers or other, was provided in almost all of the 19 country situations in which the UN verified patterns of grave violations against children by the UK government. In at least eight, (including Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria and Yemen), the UK provided training, assistance and advice as well as kinetic support to forces in these countries which were all together responsible for at least 3,000 violations.¹

According to the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, British Armed Forces will be deployed overseas “*more often and for longer periods of time, to train, exercise and operate alongside allies and partners across all our priority regions.*” Yet the Integrated Review acknowledges the reality that the UK will “*work with a variety of partners who do not necessarily share the same values*”. Building the capacity of partner military forces, without appropriate efforts to make sure that the capacity is used in accordance with international law and best practice, places children’s lives and well-being at risk. Security assistance risks increasing the coercive capability of forces with poor respect for human rights or sending a political message of endorsement for abusive authorities. Military support relationships offer scope for ensuring respect for child rights by such forces and can thereby also contribute to the UK’s ambition to act as a “force for good” in the world.

The new strategy should contain a commitment to prioritise child protection in complex security and military partner relationships with civilian and military institutions, taking into account compliance not only with International Humanitarian Law, but also with International Human Rights Law, political commitments on CAAC and other best practice.

All military assistance (other than training on the application international standards) should be contingent on partner forces commitment and performance on child protection and respect for international law, and robust, dynamic risk assessment processes put in place to assess and monitor this. Where there are credible allegations of violations against children by forces in receipt of UK military support, assistance should be withheld pending effective measures to prevent and end such abuses.

¹ Being ‘A Force For Good’ Report (warchild.org.uk)

■ The HALO Trust evidence:

HALO will look at three strategic factors that the new conflict strategy must relate to: trade, security and the UK's international posture.

Most of all, the Conflict Strategy must be genuinely integrated across Whitehall departments, UK capability and the full range of UK international engagement. And I want to underline the points made by others that it is a missed opportunity to not draw on UK NGO and academic expertise.

Trade

Conflict costs the global economy over \$14tr dollars. That's around £1,500 pounds for each and every person on the planet. With conflict, manufacturing ceases. Supply chains collapse. The UK cannot trade with countries that are fragile and conflict affected. Economies don't grow in the face of fragility because people don't invest. There is capital flight, and flight of people with the skills and leadership needed.

If the UK wants global trading partners in emerging markets, addressing conflict and fragility is an essential investment. We simply can't trade with collapsed states where there is no infrastructure, systems and expertise to work with. So the conflict strategy must be linked to trade.

Security

If you look at where conventional terrorist threats to the UK emanate from, it is overwhelmingly from countries that are in conflict, or collapsed or failing as a result of it. Conflict leads to ungoverned or semi-governed space, porous borders, the illicit markets in people, narcotics, arms and endangered wildlife. All of these things are bad news for security abroad and at home.

The illicit economy won't go away when people profit from it. In fact, if you leave it alone it metastasises, small issues spread and become fatal, and then they destabilise whole regions.

UK foreign policy needs to be smarter about this and the conflict strategy must be a key part of it. The UK can't simply stand back because it is scared of getting dragged in. What is needed is a new balance for the UK which addresses conflict and fragility for a middle power.

So the UK's conflict response must be relevant to our wider security. That will only be achievable when the UK strategy is relevant to current trends in conflict. And if it considers conflict not just through prevention, but mitigation and response to prevent perpetual cycles of violence.

Influence

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reports a ten-year high in interventionism. Not by the West, which has pulled back, as we have seen in Afghanistan, but by regional powers such as Turkey, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Iran, in addition to China and Russia. Many of those who are investing in the space we previously occupied don't share our values.

Meanwhile, China is expanding its influence into the service economy, beyond its traditional infrastructure investment, extractive finance and 'belt and road'. Its influence is directly relevant to our supply chain security and desire to achieve sustainable and equitable economies.

■ Saferworld evidence:

Addressing the root causes and issues driving conflict

To be effective, whatever form this new ‘conflict strategy’ takes, the UK approach needs to shift the emphasis from reacting to and containing the fallout from conflict to supporting efforts to prevent it. Building on the UK’s track record of analysis and programming, the Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review is clear that the UK needs to address the root causes of and issues that drive conflict including grievances, political marginalisation and criminal economies.² Poor governance is another driver of conflict the UK must address.³ Conflicts in Somalia, Yemen and Mali⁴ have their roots and continue to be driven by these dynamics. This approach needs to be the central core of the conflict strategic framework and the framework should answer how the UK will address these drivers. It must also outline how the UK will work with other countries to achieve this approach.

Being clear about the UK’s priorities and trade offs

The UK also needs to present either a hierarchy of its priorities or a sense of how it will prioritise objectives in different environments across the world. The UK needs to set out how conflict prevention is prioritised vis-à-vis other interests such as trade or short-term security needs.

Conflict prevention should be given considerable prominence to avoid incoherence which gravely undermines the national interest. Where there are trade-offs between competing interests, officials need clear guidance and the government should be transparent with parliament. The cross-government strategies for different regions and themes mentioned by the Prime Minister in announcing the creation of the FCDO are crucial for articulating this prioritisation.⁵ The UK should live up to its 2019 commitment to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy and release public versions of these strategies.⁶

² HM Government (2021), Global Britain in A Competitive Age: Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review, 16 March, p 79.

³ Attree L (2013), ‘The whole shebang? Why achieving development and security means working on governance’, Saferworld, January, (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/96-the-whole-shebang-why-achieving-development-and-security-means-working-on-governance>)

⁴ Crouch J (2018), ‘Counter-terror and the logic of violence in Somalia’s civil war’, Saferworld, November (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1191-counter-terror-and-the-logic-of-violence-in-somaliaas-civil-war-time-for-a-new-approach>); Attree L (2016), ‘Blown Back: lessons from counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding in Yemen’, Saferworld, February (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1033-blown-back>) ; Waugh L (2021), How not to lose the Sahel: Community perspectives on insecurity and international interventions in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, Saferworld, forthcoming.

⁵ Johnson B (2020), Global Britain, Volume 677: debated on Tuesday 16 June 2020, Column 667 (<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-16/debates/20061637000001/GlobalBritain>)

⁶ See Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (2021), The UK’s national security machinery First Report of Session 2021–22, 13 September, p 46.

Rebalancing the UK's conflict prevention toolkit to invest in peacebuilding

To ensure that the UK is able to follow through with its conflict framework it needs to rebalance the UK's toolkit for addressing and for preventing conflict. Even prior to the 2020 and 2021 cuts to the UK aid budget there was a decline in the amount of money spent on civilian peacebuilding and conflict prevention from around 4% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2016 to just 2% of ODA in 2019.⁷ The 2015 the Strategic Defence and Security Review set a target of spending 50% of DFID's budget in fragile states.⁸ This was useful for showing the UK's commitment to where it was investing ODA. But the UK should consider a headline target on minimum spend on the proportion of ODA spent on conflict prevention and peacebuilding to address the declining share of ODA spent in this area and crucially to address the drivers of conflict stressed in the Integrated Review.

Rebalancing the UK's conflict prevention toolkit away from security force assistance

The other side of rebalancing the UK's conflict prevention toolbox is to try and move away from the training of security forces overseas in the absence of a robust human rights framework and in isolation from a broader long-term peace strategy. States bear heavy responsibility for violence including against civilians: in the decade 2010 to 2019, 76% of the conflict deaths recorded by Uppsala Conflict Data Programme resulted from state-based violence. Specific examples are of concern for the UK: in 2020, Malian state forces killed more civilians than jihadist militant groups and committed more human rights abuses in three of the four quarters of the year according to ACLED.⁹ The UK approach of training and equipping overseas security forces comes with risks for peace and rights and exacerbating issues driving conflicts. As Saferworld research outlines, these risks include violations of IHL committed by those other security forces through to those security forces pursuing alternative political agendas to the UK's objectives (for example, the different regional aspirations of the anti-ISIS coalition).¹⁰ The UK needs to rebalance its approach from the risky use of 'train and equip' towards the more sustainable investment in civilian peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

⁷ Saferworld analysis of spending based on OECD (2020), Query Wizard for International Development data, accessed 20/08/2021
<https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/#?x=1&y=6&f=2:262,4:1,7:1,9:85,3:258,5:3,8:83&q=2:262+4:1+7:1+9:85+3:51,258,60,61+5:3+8:85,83+1:1,2,26,12,16,21,23,24+6:2015,2016,2017,2018,2019,2020>

⁸ HM Government (2015), 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom', November, p 64
(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/555607/2015_Strategic_Defence_and_Security_Review.pdf)

⁹ Nsaibia H and Duhamel J (2021), 'Sahel 2021: Communal wars, broken ceasefires, and shifting frontlines', ACLED, 17 June (<https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/sahel-2021-communal-wars-broken-ceasefires-and-shifting-frontlines>)

¹⁰ Brooks L (2021), Playing with matches? UK security assistance and its conflict risks, Saferworld, (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1374-playing-with-matches-uk-security-assistance-and-its-conflict-risks>)

■ Coalition for Global Prosperity evidence:

The new UK conflict strategy must ensure that we build in a strong role for development alongside that of the UK's armed forces and civil society to help prevent future conflicts. The conflict strategy needs to be written in close partnership with the upcoming development strategy to ensure that we have a unified foreign policy that makes the best use possible of UK expertise across Whitehall and beyond.

■ Mercy Corps evidence:

The forthcoming Conflict Strategic Framework (CSF) and recent FCO-DFID merger offer an opportunity to more effectively align government efforts behind ending chronic crises and addressing the root causes of conflict and instability. As climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic continue to exacerbate conflict drivers and increase global fragility, addressing both the long term drivers and immediate triggers of conflict is more critical than ever before.

Accordingly, the CSF should:

Take a whole-of-government approach that aligns diplomacy, defence, and programmatic assistance and puts conflict prevention and peacebuilding at its centre. The CSF must avoid taking a reactive approach to conflict that primarily focuses on treating its symptoms, including violence, and instead prioritise a preventive approach that seeks to ameliorate the drivers of conflict before they precipitate violence as well as prioritising longer term peacebuilding. Research has shown that every \$1 spent on peacebuilding would reduce the costs of conflict by \$16.

Appoint a Minister for Conflict to maintain the UK's leadership and ensure cross-government efforts towards conflict prevention. The UK has been a global leader in conflict prevention having been a key champion of SDG16 and, co-chairing The International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), and pushing OECD countries to have difficult conversations about tackling the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Yet the conflict portfolio was recently demoted to permanent under-secretary. Appointing a Minister for Conflict would signal the UK's ongoing commitment, increase the likelihood of cross FCDO and cross-Whitehall support and global influence. In addition, conflict prevention should be reinstated as an explicit priority of the Foreign Secretary.

Build on the UK's expertise and capacity in effective conflict prevention. This includes DFID's highly regarded and evidence based 'Building Stability Framework' (BSF) that should inform how aid can best help communities, states and regions transition from fragility to stability. The BSF was based on rigorous evidence, extensive consultation with experts and field testing, and set out a clear approach not only to managing the impact of conflict but to addressing the key drivers of conflict and violence. Regrettably, it lacked the necessary political and cross-government buy-in to realise its potential. The CSF provides an opportunity to put more of its thinking into practice.

Prioritise research and apply lessons-learned: There is much we do not yet know that must be better understood to support conflict transformation and violence prevention as the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSF is a moment to restate the commitment to evidence-based approaches to conflict that work, including those targeting good governance, improving state-society relations, and protecting human rights, particularly among marginalised communities. It should also instigate new partnerships with research entities to develop a comprehensive learning agenda.



Help (re)focus UK Aid on fragile and conflict affected states. The UK government has failed to reconfirm its previous commitment to spend 50% of ODA in Fragile and Conflict Affected states (FCAS). This goes against the UK's historic commitment to protect the most vulnerable, particularly in places affected by war and instability. The CSF should not only help make the case to recommit, but that funding to FCAS should be earmarked for work on conflict drivers.

Fully embrace the peace strand of the humanitarian, development and peace 'triple' nexus. We recommend: ensuring all humanitarian action is conflict sensitive; supporting violence reduction and prevention activities that counter proximate conflict drivers; and investing in longer-term development and peacebuilding interventions that address the underlying causes of conflict. (Please see Mercy Corps' 'Advancing Peace in Complex Crises Framework' for further details).

Ensure all ODA programmes and strategies are conflict sensitive and based on gender and conflict analyses. The effectiveness of aid in fragile and conflict affected contexts should be a strategic priority in the International Development Strategy.

Integrate conflict prevention into the UK's broader COVID-19 response. This includes building social cohesion and promoting democracy and human rights. As our research demonstrates, COVID-19, and responses to it, are exacerbating drivers of conflict by diminishing trust in government leaders and institutions; increasing economic hardship and resource scarcity; and disrupting, and often eroding, social cohesion.

Help move violent extremism away from being largely in the domain of security and state-based actors and more into the hands of development practitioners, and the broader international community. An over-emphasis on counter terrorism and state-led countering violent extremism work is undermining longer-term work that gets ahead of some violent conflict and potential extremism problems. Ensure that all prevention of violent extremism work seeks to reduce grievances driving support for political violence and violent extremism, and/or increases individual and community resilience to violent extremism by providing viable alternatives, particularly to youth.

Double-down on key and emerging thematic priorities:

Invest in interventions at the nexus of conflict and climate change: Shortly before the FCO-DFID merger, DFID had begun to examine more closely the links between conflict and climate change, and identify interventions that would effectively address the compounding effects of both.

Understand and counter the weaponization of social media: Social media is transforming conflict around the world. From disinformation campaigns to electoral manipulation and online recruitment by violent extremist organisations, digital technologies exacerbate conflict drivers, open new avenues for malign actors, and increase polarisation, complicating efforts to prevent or counter violent conflict. We need to identify solutions to build resilience to digital conflict drivers.

Strengthen social cohesion within and between communities by (re)building relationships between conflicting groups, whether between ethno-religious or political groups, or communities and the government. Create opportunities for cooperation over shared interests, such as natural resources, basic service provision, and economic development. With cohesive relationships, people are more able to ensure that rumours, misunderstandings, and smaller disputes do not escalate into violence. Support development initiatives that prevent conflict by addressing underlying grievances.

Grievances driving conflict are overwhelmingly rooted in experiences of injustice, such as discrimination, corruption, and abuse by security forces. Armed groups prey upon young people's political, economic and social grievances, and promise to fulfil unmet expectations to gain acceptance, and new recruits.





■ International Institute for Strategic Studies evidence:

The starting point is the current complexity of armed conflict and the fundamental changes that conflicts have undergone.

Nature of conflict is the same: Wars are still fought over a mix of factors and grievances, including justice, representation and inclusion, access to resources, power, ideology, economic incentives.

But the landscape on which conflicts take place has changed (as well as the technology and modes of war). There are now novel and obviously intertwined factors and drivers, including:

Domestic drivers and dynamics:

- Technological advances and demographic changes driving social changes: (Unmet) aspirations by technologically-connected young population and rising middle class
- Growing incomes, but Political and economic elites concentrate power and benefits, driving rising inequalities
- Environmental degradation and climate change leading to strains on livelihoods, new patterns of resource competition and migration
- Rise on NSAGs as states do not control or even retreat from peripheries.

Factors related to the International environment and current unstable global order, include:

- Political violence of radical Islam
- Geopolitical competition, where there is:
- Less cooperation / divided UNSC; more foreign interference into armed conflicts by rising middle powers; more assertive China's role; US shift of focus; Undermining of global norms
- Transnational criminal enterprises, illicit flows and trafficking. Rise of Private Military Contractors.
- Covid, presenting challenges to debt and public spending among poorest countries, and potentially driving political instability.

With greater complexity, conflicts are now more protracted and – as a result – intractable, as well as indefinite and of difficult classification:

In the volume Armed Conflict Survey 2021, we show how Conflicts today:

- lasts longer since the Cold War
- increasingly recur: between 1989-2018 nearly half of all conflicts recurred and most of the time around the same grievance
- move between war and peace, violence/non-violence in a non-linear fashion;
- Conflict onset, and especially termination are harder to identify
- No phase approach, but war-to-peace transition where phases are not clear cut and transition is not linear, but there are blurred lines war-peace

According to our research, persistent conflicts are the main source of conflict fatalities

That being said, active conflict and post-conflict situations overlap as post-conflict interventions to support peacebuilding increasingly start while a country is at war.

Post-Cold War Trajectory: Post-conflict interventions' modern incarnation originate from the end of the Cold War, which opened the way for resolution of conflicts trapped into proxy wars, and for a further advancement of liberal democracy via a commitment to liberal internationalism by Western powers. This included:

- a new normative framework around Responsibility to Protect Doctrine and Human Security, and its application in the Bosnia, Kosovo, Timor-Leste etc.
- a commitment to post-conflict reconstruction following conflict resolution, and its successful application to conflict countries (e.g. Cambodia, Namibia, El Salvador)
- This was possible thanks to great powers' cooperation in the UNSC, comprehensive peace agreements, massive DDR programs, strong security guarantees, and economic investments

In the Post-9/11, post-conflict intervention became more complicated and after 2011 conflicts increased exponentially (i.e. non-state armed groups 3rd party intervention in civil wars):

- Terrorism and VE became the primary prism through which to look at Conflict and per capita income (PCI), e.g. with the Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq

Bottom line, the Conditions for post-conflict intervention no longer exist; and although anachronistic, we are largely still referring to a 1990s PCI framework (albeit a bit expanded and updated), and we are basing our benchmark of success on some of these cases.

■ **Airwars evidence:**

The UK has been one of the most transparent international actors operating in both Iraq and Syria in declaring its military actions. However, this alone is insufficient and when it comes to accountability for civilian harm, the UK falls far behind allies, with the Ministry of Defence seemingly incapable of detecting civilian casualties from its own actions.

For too long, significant incidents of alleged civilian harm have been ignored by the UK Ministry of Defence and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. A gap has developed between what the UK concedes publicly regarding the level of civilian harm caused by British actions and the findings of these external monitors and investigators, like Airwars.

There have been few developments in increasing the UK Parliament's ability to provide oversight on UK actions and to fulfill the recommendations from the Chilcot Report, "to make every reasonable effort to identify and understand" the effects of its military actions on civilians. Although the 2020 policy on the Approach to the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict offers several improvements on its predecessor, the 2010 policy, committing, for instance to "investigate any credible reports that the UK actions may have caused civilian harm", there has yet to be any evidence of how the FCDO and the MoD will meet these commitments.

In fact, the UK still maintains that it has evidence of just one civilian casualty from its participation in the US-led Coalition, despite thousands of declared strikes and its involvement in extremely deadly urban battles, such as those of Raqqa and Mosul in 2017. Our own independent monitoring indicates that at least 8,300 civilians have been killed by the US-led Coalition. Our investigation, Europe's Shame, showed at least 21 civilians among credible Coalition incidents were killed by the UK and European allies.

We believe that this can be rectified through an overhaul of civilian harm monitoring practices and primary legislation, following the approaches taken by the UK's allies including the US and the Netherlands. These improvements will help to improve UK military strategy, tactics and outcomes as a whole and should be an integral part of the new conflict strategy.

Improved conflict strategy:

To improve the Ministry of Defence's current systems to assess civilian casualties, Airwars recommends the following to be included in the strategy:

The UK should create a strong accountability framework with a specific minister, who should be assigned to deliver this framework, with shared cross – governmental responsibility for the implementation.

The UK should establish civilian casualty mitigation teams for all future conflicts, and adopt a civilian casualty tracking policy with senior military officers in charge of implementation of such policy.

The Ministry of Defence approach to civilian harm should report on both past and present allegations and maintain direct contact with victims or their families, in addition to organisations and local media involved in recording or covering incidents.

The strategy should clearly indicate support for the political process around restricting and reviewing the use of explosive weapons - the process aimed towards development and adoption of the UN political declaration against the use of explosive weapons in urban areas, expected to be negotiated in early 2022. Around 90% of those killed in urban areas are civilians.

Both the MoD and FCDO should work with civil society to improve accountability and internal policies in relation to better protection of civilians.

■ Search for Common Ground evidence:

The UK plays a unique role from a global perspective on peace and conflict. The UK's diplomatic footprint, and the UK's role in multilateral and bilateral relationships. From the perspective of colleagues around the world, one of the things we particularly value about the UK and our relationship, and why we attach so much importance to that relationship, is that the UK is a long term partner on these issues. As we look around the world there are very few international actors who have the ability in almost every complex and protracted emergency to move things forward for the better and to drive positive change. So that set of networks, power and influence gives the UK an important and unique perspective.

The second point, is that we are at a moment of crisis when it comes to international peace and conflict. The international system of making peace is just fundamentally broken. One in three peace agreements are never implemented, and the majority fail within 12 years. Currently, the UN has more peacekeepers deployed in Africa than the entire South African armed forces. And it's been that way for 20 years. Even though peacekeeping is designed to be short term. These have become very long and chronic crises, and so we are at a crucial moment for rethinking. As the UK builds a new strategy to re-envision its global leadership on these issues, we would love to see a real articulation of a whole of government approach.

So, for example, we've had a partnership for many years with FCDO in the Democratic Republic of Congo, training the Congolese security forces. We've trained 2500 soldiers, more than 60,000 Congolese police and security forces that are, known for their very grievous human rights abuses, and through that process of using a peacebuilding approach and putting civilians first, we saw that people's confidence in the performance of the security forces improved from 46 to 61%, and almost 3/4 of local people at the end felt themselves safer.

That sort of UK assistance is what people in communities around the world are looking for, where there is a deliberate and direct impact on their own security. So if we are going to look towards an off ramp from chronic use of UN peacekeeping forces, we need these kinds of programs that give people confidence, civilian driven ways to drive up people's own sense of safety, security, and confidence in the national security forces, so that countries themselves can shoulder more and more of the work of providing their own security.

So alongside the decreasing reliance on a broken international system, and taking a whole of Government approach from HMG, the third thing we want to see in the strategy is a whole of society approach to peace and security, listening to and building from and working with the communities most directly impacted by conflict, violence and instability.

EVIDENCE ON, HOW SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENT THE NEW UK CONFLICT STRATEGY?

■ Save the Children and War Child joint evidence:

There needs to be an integrated cross-government approach to implementing the new conflict strategy, including the CAAC agenda. This includes more effective partnership and coordination not only between the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Ministry of Defence (MoD), but also across other international departments such as the Department for International Trade, ensuring that the UK's arms export controls regime reflects the priorities and values of the new strategy. It also needs to be clear how the conflict strategy will align with the new International Development Strategy and how it will utilise the development expertise that exists within the FCDO at both a capital and country level.

Political leadership will be a vital ingredient for success, so there needs to be clear ministerial oversight and ownership of the new conflict strategy and centre.

The implementation of the strategy should include embedding minimum standards and awareness of CAAC issues across priority geographic and thematic desks within the FCDO. There should also be detailed, practical training on child protection standards embedded into all overseas military training. Such training should form part of and reinforce broader child protection strategies that support institutional capacity-building designed to give effect to training and to support partner forces to fulfil their obligations under child rights standards.

The Government should establish processes for meaningful engagement and dialogue with civil society experts working with conflict-affected populations, both in the development of strategies and policies relevant to child protection, and to ensure a full analysis of human security environments. There should also be a mechanism for the FCDO to draw on real-time information and recommendations that can be provided by NGOs, and ideally where possible local civil society organisations, during conflicts and crises.

■ The HALO Trust evidence:

The UK government simply needs to do what it set out in the Integrated Review, fund it and deliver it. Key to this must be greater integration between government departments. The MOD can't be left out any more – they are key stakeholders. The strategy must leverage development aid, but also diplomacy, trade and the UK's multilateral capability. And it must be relevant to national security, green agendas and supply chain security.

There needs to be a sensible and refreshed conversation about trade and aid and its relationship to conflict. And the UK must measure conflict not in terms of what it costs to intervene or manage, but in terms of the cost of inaction, which are far higher for people, planet and economics.

Most importantly, the government and FCDO leadership, notably Jonny Hall as FCDO's Director for Conflict and Stabilisation, will be missing a serious trick if it doesn't draw on leading British NGOs and expertise. The government will miss out on vital information and insight if it doesn't listen to NGOs with on-the-ground experience.

■ Saferworld evidence:

Ensuring cross-government coherence

The UK should ensure it delivers cross-government coherence in addressing conflict. There are multiple dimensions to this. The UK needs to halt arms sales driving conflict such as those transferred to Saudi Arabia used in what the UN described as a pattern of violations of IHL in Yemen.¹ Another area is for the conflict strategy is to help shape the International Development Strategy, particularly in terms of conflict sensitivity, making sure that UK aid does no harm and is responsive to the political factors driving conflict where aid is delivered. The conflict strategy also needs to be linked to the UK's National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security – giving prominence to the role of gender inequality in driving conflict² and the role of women in achieving peace.

Supporting locally led peace

Crucial to supporting conflict prevention sustainably is ensuring ownership over the ways and means to bring about peace to those within a conflict-affected location. Too often, organisations from conflict-affected countries are treated as mere 'implementers' or 'subcontractors' of internationally-driven aid agendas, forced to accept priorities and capacity building support imposed from elsewhere. However, there are plenty of good examples of how aid can do much better in supporting communities and civil societies to respond effectively to local priorities and drive the lasting changes they believe are needed in their own societies.³ The conflict strategic framework should shift UK aid programming and conflict analysis to reflect more of the priorities of conflict-affected communities themselves.

¹ UN HRC (2020), Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014: Report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, 28 September, p 5 (<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/2020-09-09-report.pdf>)

² HM Government (2019), The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation, March, p 26 (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)

³ Stephen M, Martini A (2020), 'Turning the Tables: Insights from locally-led humanitarian partnerships in conflict situations', Save the Children Sweden and Saferworld, May (<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1253-turning-the-tables-insights-from-locally-led-humanitarian-partnerships-in-conflict-situations>)

■ **Mercy Corps evidence:**

The CSF should be used to organise cross-departmental UK conflict prevention efforts, whilst also helping the UK monitor cumulative investment towards SDG16. It must therefore include an accountability framework which will drive a more strategic approach that identifies and coordinates ministries' respective capabilities whilst also robustly engaging with civil society.

In line with its Grand Bargain commitments, the CSF should help enable locally led, participatory approaches by supporting capacity sharing, and the meaningful engagement of local and national NGOs. This includes engaging young people and youth-led organisations and ensuring women's participation in all conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. There should also be meaningful consultation with and support of local communities through participatory, locally led programmes, drawing on local knowledge and expertise, and ensuring that those most affected by deteriorating security conditions are able to inform and help lead efforts to prevent conflict and build resilience. Funding models should be embraced that permit greater flexibility and innovation to allow necessary adaptations to conflict resolution, prevention and peacebuilding interventions in the COVID-19 context. This includes support to local peacebuilding in order to manage community-level tensions and direct funding to local organisations for community level engagement.

■ **International Institute for Strategic Studies evidence:**

To address protracted and complex armed conflicts, the current framework of post-conflict interventions suffers from several conceptual and policy-related dilemmas. Addressing the post-conflict environment needs an updated approach that reflects the current landscape of armed conflict.

Since 9/11, the increasing protractedness of armed conflicts has been met with a parallel expansion in the mandates, roles and competences of international actors working in conflict-affected settings, including bilateral and multilateral organisations, international financial institutions, and the private sector. Over the years, international development actors like the World Bank, for example, have increasingly honed approaches to improve the impact of development policies and programs in conflict-affected countries. Among others, World Bank's modes of engagement in this space have included dedicated financing mechanisms, convening power on the international arena, and participation in post-conflict reconstruction operations from recovery of infrastructure and basic services to institution-building to reintegration schemes for former combatants.

On the diplomatic and security sides, United Nations (UN) peace operations – including peacekeeping operations, special political missions, good offices and mediation initiatives – sensibly expanded their roles and mandates to support peace outcomes. Interventions became increasingly complex. Not only peacekeeping operations included security sector reform, governance and institutional strengthening functions; but also, they started deploying in settings with either active conflict or volatile settlements, to perform combat operations (so called 'peace enforcement') in places where there was no peace to keep (e.g. the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC] and Somalia). Some of these operations suffered from a lack of time-bound goals and clear definitions. Protracted deployment of UN peace operations has also negative consequences. For example, the current UN peacekeeping operation in South Sudan exhibited diminishing returns over time by remaining entangled in stalemate war dynamics. And while this trend persists to this day, an influential UN High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) recommended interventions to have flexible mandates, be clear and realistic about prospective goals, and to adopt a gradual approach made of fewer tasks to be developed over time.

A critical contribution from the HIPPO report is the consideration around the primacy of politics. UN peace operations – the report argues – have shied away from dealing with unstable and unpredictable politics at national and local levels, or they have proven unable to do so. Emphasizing technical and programmatic aspects of peace support, which nonetheless are instrumental to peace outcomes, derailed efforts to properly understand and flexibly respond to constantly-changing conflict dynamics. The technocratic model was successful in presence of an inclusive political settlement; otherwise it is largely insufficient.

The primacy of politics is highly problematic though. As an independent organisation of member states deploying peacekeeping operations that are subject to sovereignty concerns, the UN performs a mandate that supports peace goals, but which necessarily avoids a direct involvement in domestic politics. As a matter of fact, when deploying blue helmets in a highly unstable or fragile environment, UN peace operations are a de facto conflict party from a security standpoint. Operationally, this inherent contradiction needs to be ironed out.

More broadly, there is a misalignment between international actors' vision of peace and strategy to pursue it and domestic actors' understanding of peace. Countries suffering from armed conflict often have violent contestation of power, politicization of identity markers like ethnicity, fractured social fabric, low levels of trust and state legitimacy, and complex political economy dynamics. Further, security may be fragmented with non-state armed groups controlling sub-regions and/or peripheries. In many cases like the DRC, such circumstances co-exist with full engagement by the international community in the form of peace operations, humanitarian efforts and development initiatives. And while international actors in these realms share (and sometimes, even articulate) a coherent assessment of a country's needs to transition toward peace, domestic elites and policymakers often fail to articulate their own pathway for peace. There are also unintended consequences that external aid and international engagement exercise on domestic elites in conflict-affected countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Local elites, as well as the public perception, may treat aid and peacebuilding engagement by international actors as an opportunity for resource extraction and maximisation of political power. Domestic elites are often even deaf to and/or largely separated from the country's own domestic civil society's calls for setting a common framework for peace.

The lack of a cohesive and coherent vision for peace by domestic actors is the symptom of the chronic absence of a viable political settlement among main groups in society, or its inherent weakness. Chronically fractious domestic politics has reverberations on centre-periphery tensions too, where peripheral regions suffer from socio-economic marginalisation and neglect by the centre and its elites. Among other lessons, the collapse of the Western-backed government in Afghanistan dramatically displayed the disjointed nature between local politics in Kabul and political and war dynamics in rural areas.



The international-local conundrum may be smoothed out by building and/or reinforcing country's agency to define its own pathway and parameters for peace. Placing greater responsibility on domestic actors for implementing peace needs nevertheless a system for accountability of domestic actors toward resources coming from bilateral and multilateral donors and institutions – a system that nonetheless should reconcile with sovereignty concerns.

A final area to be clarified is the dualism between military and civil components of post-conflict interventions, which is a specific aspect of the broader contradiction between war making versus peace support, and of the overlap between active conflict and post-conflict environment. In highly insecure areas like the Sahel and Somalia, for example, multilateral military intervention and development initiatives take place simultaneously. While there is a compelling argument for development actors' presence (i.e. their early engagement in conflict situations is critical to sustain basic services and people's livelihoods, among others), nonetheless the overlap with internationally-led military operations is problematic. Especially when multilateral forces engage in combat operations that go beyond traditional peacekeeping functions, international actors find themselves sucked into war politics and struggle to maintain cohesiveness between military and civil aspects of peacebuilding, in addition to potentially compromising their domestic legitimacy.

■ Search for Common Ground Evidence:

As we build this new strategy, we need also to bring in the corporate perspective, the investment perspective. Thinking through how the UK encourages responsible business through initiatives like the Voluntary Principles on securing human rights, how it encourages innovative financing for peace efforts, how to encourages British business interests to become more engaged in supporting wealth creation and addressing inequality in some of these places. If we look at the UN COP on climate change that your society is leading right now, up in up in Scotland, we know 70% of the world's cobalt is central to batteries, 70% of the world's cobalt. It comes from Congo. So how is the UK using its leadership in the mineral space to really drive not only what's good for business and climate but for societies?

As we look towards the execution of the new conflict strategy, we need to ensure that there's the capacity to address the root causes, as people have said, but also the ability for rapid response. There's a stitch in time that saves nine and UK embassies we've seen play very pivotal roles in providing that immediate response in crises, in Myanmar, for example, also recently in Afghanistan, providing assistance directly via civil society groups at crisis points, to prevent a bad situation from becoming worse.

AFGHANISTAN

The NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan has precipitated a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans are on the move, the withdrawal of international aid and the imposition of sanctions has caused an economic and liquidity crisis. Afghanistan's Healthcare system is broken and with winter arriving the threat posed by Covid-19, drought and malnutrition increases. Eight million people in the country are at risk of starvation over the harsh winter months. This year the APPG on Conflict and Global Britain has heard from NGO staff operating on the ground in Afghanistan delivering lifesaving humanitarian aid. We also heard directly from them and others what the situation on the ground in Afghanistan looks like. This section is based on those testimonials and the briefs that the APPG has produced this year to give a picture of Afghanistan at the end of 2021.

■ Afghanistan's refugee and displacement crisis

Since the beginning of the year, more than half a million women, children and men have fled their homes due to escalating violence. Being displaced puts them at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse, with women and girls at greater risk of gender-based violence including sexual violence, early marriage and trafficking. They urgently need food, water and essential health-care services. But most importantly, they seek safety and stability.

More than 5 million people have been in protracted displacement across Afghanistan since 2012.¹ 500,000 people could flee Afghanistan by the years end.²

Currently 2.9 million Afghans already internally displaced³ and there has been a 73% rise in internal displacement since June.⁴ At least 80% of those displaced internally are believed to be women and children.⁵

¹ <https://www.unocha.org/story/daily-noon-briefing-highlights-afghanistan-ethiopia-syria#:~:text=Nearly%20635%2C000%20people%20have%20been,in%20protracted%20displacement%20since%202012.>

² <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14620.doc.htm>

³ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9296/#:~:text=At%20the%20end%20of%202020,the%20displacement%20is%20largely%20internal.%E2%80%9D>

⁴ <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-internal-displacement-afghanistan-has-soared-73-june>

⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/briefing/2021/8/611617c55/unhcr-warns-afghanistans-conflict-taking-heaviest-toll-displaced-women.html>



■ The economic and liquidity crisis

Afghanistan is in economic crisis due to the imposition of sanctions marked by the sudden withdrawal of large-scale development assistance, lack of access to cash, and reduced overseas remittances. 40% of Afghanistan's GDP⁶ and 75% of government expenditure was made up of international aid.⁷ Markets are still functioning, but prices are soaring. As more than 22.8 million people are facing acute food insecurity, these poor families are now selling their belongings and borrowing money to buy food.⁸

Limited supplies of cash are also making it difficult for humanitarian organisation to pay salaries on time, procure critical humanitarian supplies and provide rapid assistance.

The US has frozen \$9-10bn of assets⁹ belonging to the Afghan Central Bank. This has caused a liquidity crisis in a cash-reliant society where in 2020, 85% of the adult population did not have a bank account.¹⁰ Discussions are continuing to set up an alternative central bank in Afghanistan to move cash in.

Finding solutions to facilitate the flow of money into Afghanistan without breaking sanctions is critical to prevent an economic breakdown and to ensure aid organisations can continue addressing urgent needs.

⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1>

⁷ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/696491564082281122/pdf/Afghanistan-Public-Expenditure-Update.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.wfp.org/countries/afghanistan>

⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/afghan-central-banks-10-billion-stash-not-all-within-reach-taliban-2021-08-17/>

¹⁰ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9343/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%2085%25%20of%20the,a%20decline%20in%20foreign%20trade.>



■ Collapse of the healthcare system

Millions of people in Afghanistan have lost access to basic services such as vaccinations and treatment for malnourished children and pregnant women.

Medicines, medical supplies and fuel are running out across the country. Cold chains for vaccines are compromised. Nurses and doctors are not being paid. Only 17% of the 2,300 health facilities of the World Bank-funded Sehatmandi Project remain fully functional.¹¹ Two thirds have run out of essential medicines.¹² The main hospital in Kabul just cut down 300 trees in its grounds to burn for heating and cooking.¹³

On 22 September, UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths released \$45 million from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund to help prevent Afghanistan's health-care system from falling apart. But much more support is needed.¹⁴

■ Education in Afghanistan

In September, secondary schools reopened in Afghanistan following months of pandemic-related closures. Only boys were allowed to attend.¹⁵

Education in Afghanistan has progressed significantly over the past two decades. In 2001, barely any of the country's girls were enrolled in school. But by 2021, the number of schools had tripled and 9.5 million children were enrolled in school, 4 million of whom were girls.¹⁶

Missing out on education will affect children's lives, well-being and future. Girls out of school are at greater risk of early and forced marriage, and they face life-threatening health complications from teenage pregnancies.

¹¹ <https://www.unocha.org/story/daily-noon-briefing-highlights-afghanistan-ethiopia-1>

¹² <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1101742>

¹³ <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-175554>

¹⁴ <https://www.unocha.org/story/afghanistan-erc-griffiths-releases-45m-un-cerf-life-saving-support>

¹⁵ <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/unicef-welcomes-reopening-of-secondary-schools-in-afghanistan-stresses-that-girls-must-not-be-left-out/>

¹⁶ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1100262>

■ Human Rights and the rights of women, girls and minorities

The recent crisis has affected everyone in Afghanistan, but women and girls bear the consequences the most.

Their rights and freedom of movement have been curtailed, and women's rights, including to education, work and holding public office, are in danger of being rolled back.¹⁷

Women's full participation in all aspects of life is essential, not only for their empowerment but also for advancing all of society.

Restricting women's involvement in the workforce, including in humanitarian activities, will directly impact the ability of women and girls to access critical services.

Their experience, capacities and leadership are invaluable for peace and security in Afghanistan.

■ Covid-19

Afghanistan has just emerged from the peak of a third wave of COVID-19, in which rates surged. Before August of this year, 2.2 million people had been vaccinated against COVID-19. Afghanistan received 5.24 million vaccine doses, but only 3 million of those have been administered and 1.6 million could expire if not used quickly.¹⁸

Nine of the country's 37 COVID-19 hospitals have already closed and all aspects of the pandemic response have slowed down, including surveillance, testing and vaccinations.¹⁹

If the vaccination drive doesn't resume soon, the country is at risk of a more intense fourth wave amid critical gaps in the health system's medical supplies, personnel and equipment. It is a perfect storm that could lead to a health crisis and cause more deaths.

■ Drought and Malnutrition

Afghanistan is facing its second drought in four years, affecting one third of the country. 70% of all Afghans live in rural areas and rely on agriculture for food and income. This has pushed poor families to rely on child labour, early and forced marriage, and risky irregular migration. The current drought also led to a water scarcity crisis and lack of drinking water. This will further increase sanitation and hygiene needs.

Today, 9 million people in Afghanistan need access to clean water, basic toilets and hygiene. This severe drought will worsen water shortages. Waterborne diseases and cases of acute diarrhoea are on the rise.²⁰

¹⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27466&LangID=E>

¹⁸ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1100652>

¹⁹ <https://www.who.int>

²⁰ <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/wash-water-sanitation-and-hygiene>



■ Humanitarian activity

In Afghanistan there are over 167 National and International NGOs currently employing over 31,000 humanitarian staff, providing support to more than 45,880,133 people across different sectors and all provinces of Afghanistan.²¹

After cutting aid to Afghanistan the UK will increase aid in response to the crisis in Afghanistan to £286 million. However, this is still less than 2019 when the UK gave £292 million in aid.²²

The “Afghan citizens’ resettlement scheme,” run by the Home Office, will accept 5,000 refugees in its first year and 20,000 overall.²³ However, there is concern for those who were subcontracted, rather than directly employed by the British government, as they were not eligible under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy. The Taliban does not recognize differences in the employment status of Afghans who worked for the UK.

The Foreign Secretary recently gave evidence on the UK’s handling of the evacuation from Afghanistan, following claims from those who worked at the Foreign Office at the time, that the government’s response to the crisis was chaotic and dysfunctional. The chairman of the cross-party foreign affairs committee, Tom Tugendhat, said the emergency response to the Taliban takeover in August left Afghans “abandoned”.²⁴

■ Terrorism

Following the Taliban takeover IS-KP have become the main terrorist threat within Afghanistan. They are active in Jalalabad, Kunduz, Kandahar and Kabul. Recently they have been weakened and 650 fighters have surrendered to the Taliban. However, they continue to plant bombs in Shia mosques and communities, killing 150 people in November in an effort to drum up sectarian tensions. The Taliban recently launched operations against IS-KP in Kandahar.

²¹ <https://www.acbar.org/>

²² <https://www.devex.com/news/uk-to-double-aid-to-afghanistan-but-still-giving-less-than-2019-100634>

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme>

²⁴ <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1465/government-policy-on-afghanistan/>

MAJ GEN JAMES COWAN CEO THE HALO TRUST ON

“What has the impact been of UK’s recent exit from Afghanistan and what effect has this had on organisations in receipt of UK aid operating in Afghanistan?”

The withdrawal from Afghanistan created a political crisis. That has transformed rapidly into an economic crisis that is fuelling a humanitarian catastrophe. The financial system has collapsed and the resulting lack of liquidity could cause 500,000 Afghan citizens to leave Afghanistan by the end of the year.

The UK now needs to make some hard decisions that will inevitably be unpleasant to stomach. But doing nothing is not a viable option.

I have seen Afghanistan from the perspective of a soldier and a humanitarian. I commanded Task Force Helmand between 2009 to 2010, a period that saw some of the hardest fighting of the war. I now run the largest demining organisation in the world, and the biggest British humanitarian NGO operating in Afghanistan.



Maj Gen James Cowan
CEO The HALO Trust

Afghanistan is where HALO was formed in 1988, and we have operated there continually since then including under the Taliban. It has been our ability to adapt that has enabled us to stay the course, even in the face of an attack on my staff in June 2021 by IS-KP that left 12 dead and more injured. But this has not affected our dedication to removing landmines, IEDs and unexploded bombs that continue to plague Afghanistan. What we now need is a coherent UK policy on Afghanistan that enables us to continue our work.

HALO’s work is relatively straightforward: by clearing IEDs and other explosive hazards we stop people from being killed and wounded. We allow other Aid agencies unimpeded access to remote areas that were previously cut off by IED belts to deliver essential medical and food aid. We give jobs to many young men of fighting age and thereby give them a peaceful future. We are also an essential platform to find common ground with the Taliban and thereby draw them towards a peaceful and responsible future.

HALO is now in a position where we are needed now more than ever in the country. We are being asked to operate in new areas, which for the last 20 years have been unreachable. We now have the potential to be anywhere at any time. Every day, we have hundreds of Afghan citizens coming to us, looking for employment. We have an opportunity to employ thousands more staff, providing dignified livelihoods to support peacebuilding. Our only limiting factor in doing these things is lack of funding.



The past 30 years of being in Afghanistan has meant that HALO has been able to adapt to this seismic national shift, allowing our work to continue amongst the turmoil. We have worked for the last 20 years under areas of Taliban control, building trust and a functioning relationship.

Yet I know other NGOs are struggling and have had a very different experience of the UK's exit from Afghanistan. Some are almost completely unable to work, while others are restricted by donor regulations on certain costs that are essential for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile many more have no access to cash to fund operations and pay staff wages. As with nearly all things in Afghanistan, the problem is more complex than it initially appears.

The UK needs to make some hard decisions that will inevitably be difficult to face. Ignoring Afghanistan, however, is not one of these. To do so will deny the aid will encourage a return to Warlordism and radicalise young men who whom will be pushed towards IS-KP. We will therefore inflict upon Afghanistan a catastrophe that will follow the initial disaster.

The UK government must accept a realist middle ground, where the UK and allies work with the moderate wing of the Taliban who reject international terrorism and who want a peaceful if conservative country. There may not be complete alignment with Western values, but it will be better than the extremism of the Taliban government we saw between 1996 and 2001.

There is a very short window of opportunity to make this happen. The decisions the government makes on how international and UK aid reaches Afghanistan will inform relations with this wing of the Taliban and influence their perspective on the wider world.

Working with the Taliban to ensure effective delivery of humanitarian aid is the only realistic opportunity available in the face of economic collapse. A moderate Taliban regime could be comparable to that which rules Saudi Arabia, who are an ally. This could pave the way to allowing women to have employment, girls to go to school and promote stabilisation in the wider region.

With 3,000 staff on the ground, the HALO Trust is the UK's largest NGO in Afghanistan and yet it receives zero support from the UK Government. When it comes to the aid budget, the UK should distribute the remaining £236 million of the £296 million pledged to Afghanistan in 2021 bilaterally. Supporting trusted NGOs like HALO can ensure aid money is used immediately, achieving humanitarian impact on the ground. Most UK NGOs have gone through extensive FCDO due diligence and so should be an obvious place to start.

There are some tough and difficult decisions to be made on Afghanistan by the UK, but they should be based on a new stabilisation offer. We should measure our pride and engage with the Taliban and encourage moderation. The funding of UK humanitarian NGOs will help the people of Afghanistan, not the Taliban. That is what the UK should now focus on.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of the UK's involvement in tackling conflict across the world, whether directly or indirectly, is subject to the strength of the UK's Conflict Strategy. Without a clear, cross-departmental, integrated strategy that is informed by a rigorous foreign policy baseline, inconsistencies will continue to have devastating consequences.

There has too often been an over-emphasis on countering traditional threats and an over-reliance on military force when responding to the challenge of conflict, also illustrated by the significant mismatch between the ambitions, commitments and resourcing of the MOD and FCDO. The Conflict Directorate now has the opportunity to draw resources and expertise from other departments and Civil Society and elevate important agendas omitted from the Integrated Review, such as the protection of civilians, human security and the children in armed conflict agenda.

■ Recommendations:

- 1 The Government should establish processes for meaningful engagement and dialogue with civil society experts working with conflict-affected populations, both in the development of strategies and policies, to ensure a full analysis of human security environments. There should also be a mechanism for the FCDO to draw on real-time information and recommendations that can be provided by NGOs, and ideally where possible local civil society organisations, during conflicts and crises.
- 2 There needs to be consultation at all levels to truly have an integrated approach. The UK Conflict Strategy should be informed from the bottom up. This means consultation on the ground, at local and regional level. It also means that detailed evidence driven local and regional strategies need to be developed.



- 3** The UK should return to the legal commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas development aid (ODA) before the end of this parliament. The UK should commit to providing substantial funding through bilateral aid in fragile and conflict affected states and on conflict prevention, mitigation/response and resolution. It should work with leading UK NGOs to achieve this.
- 4** The FCDO and International Development Committee should review the ODA spending through multilateral means and identify where bilateral alternatives could achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency to the UK taxpayer.
- 5** The UK must develop a new culture within the UK Aid community, based on partnership, accountability and constructive challenges between UK NGOs and the UK government. Create a forward-looking relationship between the NGO community and the government to ensure that the UK can continue to be a centre of excellence in development, conflict and environment issues.
- 6** The UK Conflict Strategy should advocate for programming that will break the cycle of endless wars by supporting conflict recovery, stabilisation and response. It must also address drivers of conflict and violence, notably proliferation of small arms and light weapons, inequality, poverty, crime, climate change and resource scarcity.
- 7** The UK should take a greater leadership role in coalitions seeking to mitigate conflict and its impact, including through its permanent membership of the UN Security Council.
- 8** The FCDO should ensure that the new Conflict Centre is integrated with broader defence and diplomacy and adequately resourced with clarity over budgetary decision making and oversight. The new aid strategy should commit to spending 50% of aid on prevention, resolution, response and recovery from conflict.
- 9** The FCDO should increase the priority afforded to disarmament diplomacy, especially through diplomatic missions in Geneva, Vienna and New York, to play a more prominent and leading role in addressing the instability and harm caused by conventional arms.
- 10** The FCDO and MOD should develop an integrated disarmament strategy, including policy and programming that addresses poverty, promotes stabilisation and delivers on the UK's international commitments.
- 11** The FCDO should establish and proactively demonstrates closer links between its multilateral engagement on environmental issues, and engagement on good governance and rule of law, disarmament and human rights.
- 12** The FCDO should make mainstreaming of environmental issues a requirement of all UK aid partnerships, but particularly in initiatives focusing on rule of law, prosperity and engagement with communities.
- 13** Realise the importance of international trade based on open societies, human rights and transparency. The UK Conflict Strategy should reflect this and reverse a reluctance in previous strategies to embrace equitable prosperity strategies as a key part of stabilisation and poverty reduction.
- 14** The Conflict Strategy should outline clear plans for sustainable prosperity and encourage greater investment and economic growth in the UK's development partner countries. It should enable stronger partnerships between FCDO and other government departments, notably the Department for International Trade and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.



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