

Conflict prevention and the future of 'intervention'

Saferworld submission to the Defence Committee's inquiry on the future of the UK's intervention strategy, October 2013

Introduction

1. Saferworld welcomes the Defence Committee's inquiry into the future of the UK's approach to intervention as part of a broader inquiry towards the next Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). As a conflict prevention and peacebuilding organisation with more than 20 years' experience working on conflict issues and programmes in around 20 conflict-affected and fragile contexts, we have focused this submission on the areas of inquiry related to Saferworld's expertise. As such, this submission focuses on the role of conflict prevention activities as part of an overall approach to 'intervention' in conflict-affected or fragile contexts that aims to help societies manage conflict more peacefully.
2. UK intervention does not necessarily take the form of 'boots on the ground' in support of military action such as operations in Afghanistan or Iraq. Indeed, as the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has outlined in the International Defence Engagement Strategy (IDES),¹ the UK's thinking already recognises that military action represents only one form of intervention amid a much broader UK toolkit for promoting long-term peace and stability.
3. Recent resistance to UK military intervention in Syria has further highlighted the limitations of military interventionist options for resolving complex security challenges, as well as decreasing appetite for traditional hard security interventions as part of the UK's response.
4. Britain's interests in the world and at home are closely tied to more stable societies overseas. As such, the last SDSR outlined the UK's ambition to improve its capacity to prevent and address overseas conflict, leading to a cross-departmental conflict prevention strategy in the Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS), with a vision of 'structural stability' based on citizen consent at its core². This cross-government strategic vision for addressing conflict points to the connections between defence, diplomacy and development interventions and shifts towards a more people-centred concept of 'stability'. This requires the articulation of a clear and distinct role for defence actors (taken to mean UK Government defence actors throughout) in supporting a developmental approach to addressing conflict further 'upstream', with a focus on the needs of the people directly affected by conflict and instability.
5. This submission explores potential roles for defence actors in activities related to conflict prevention within a whole-of-government approach to interventions in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.
6. It also briefly touches upon wider UK policies that relate to intervention, such as conventional arms transfers and the use of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).
7. A focus on the needs of those affected by conflict and instability must be at the heart of the UK's approach to intervention if it is to be effective in the long run. The UK already plays an important part in promoting peace and security overseas, providing military training, supporting police reform, working with civil society

¹ Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *International Defence Engagement Strategy* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/73171/defence_engagement_strategy.pdf

² The UK's Building Stability Overseas Strategy (2011) outlines an approach to 'stability' that is "characterised in terms of political systems which are representative and legitimate, capable of managing conflict and change peacefully, and societies in which human rights and rule of law are respected, basic needs are met, security established and opportunities for social and economic development are open to all. This type of 'structural stability', which is built on the consent of the population, is resilient and flexible in the face of shocks, and can evolve over time as the context changes." p.5 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67475/Building-stability-overseas-strategy.pdf

to promote people's security and livelihoods, and promoting international arms transfer controls and human rights through diplomatic channels. By drawing on the distinct expertise of defence, development and diplomatic actors within an overall framework for conflict prevention, the UK can continue to invest in long-term peace and stability, protecting Britain's interests at home in an increasingly interconnected world.

Taking the context first

8. Even where military intervention is being considered, there is no blueprint for how this might be pursued. While approaches like the doctrine of the 'responsibility to protect' (or 'R2P') have attempted to provide overall guidelines for interventions for the purposes of humanitarian protection - with a sliding scale of atrocities and a list of the various criteria to be considered - interventions must be led by context as well as principle.
9. Saferworld welcomed the publication of a cross-departmental conflict analysis methodology in the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS), which is intended to inform the UK's interventions in conflict-affected states. A well-informed approach based on the unique challenges of the context is an essential starting point for planning any intervention. Saferworld would argue that taking the context first also means putting local people affected by conflict at the core of analysis, something we have focused on in our programming approach.
10. In order for this analysis to be useful for conflict prevention purposes, it must be used to inform planning, be regularly updated, and take into account the perceptions of the people who are affected by conflict and instability, including women, men, boys and girls. Taking the combined expertise of DFID's in-depth programming knowledge, the FCO's political insights, the MoD's knowledge of the defence context, while ensuring that assumptions are informed by local perceptions, provides a much stronger starting point for designing and coordinating interventions than any one department acting on its own.
11. However, implementing such an approach in practice is challenging given different departmental objectives and priorities. Strong political will and dynamic leadership is needed to turn shared analysis into a shared vision and plan for practical action to see through the vision for 'stability' outlined in the BSOS.

People's perspectives matter

12. The UK cannot simply 'provide' long-term security through its interventions – it requires the active consent, participation and ownership of national authorities, security providers and local people in order to achieve lasting peace and security. However, in many cases local people have little opportunity to play a part in decisions that affect them.
13. This does not mean that defence actors themselves should carry out public perception surveys or work with local communities to identify and address their security and development needs. Support from the UK for civil society and others to carry out this work should be a key element of UK 'intervention' to inform and validate the efforts of defence actors and others engaged in delivering other aspects of the UK's engagement.
14. In this way, security issues identified at a local level can also inform broader security objectives at national and regional levels. For example, a problem with small arms proliferation and misuse that is affecting communities at a local level might need to be addressed at a national level through engagement with authorities and security actors to support civilian disarmament, weapons collection and stockpile management. In these cases, by linking a 'developmental approach' to security with the unique capabilities of defence actors to support these objectives where it is appropriate, broader security issues can be addressed.

Upstream conflict prevention and the role for defence

15. The BSOS recognises that violent conflict is often caused by underlying tensions built up over time. It commits the UK to investing in a more forward-looking 'upstream' conflict prevention approach to interventions overseas. This is not to say that in times of crisis other types of intervention may not take precedence. However, when considering short-term military intervention for the purposes of addressing the symptoms (armed violence) of conflict, it is important to recognise that this must be complemented by a coherent and long-term approach to promoting the development of more resilient, peaceful societies by tackling conflict 'upstream'.
16. At times rapid military action to prevent violence spreading or diplomatic crisis response to prevent tensions from escalating into violence is necessary. The UK rightly maintains the capability to respond in this way. However, the issues that cause conflict and instability are nearly always present before tensions result in

violence. As such, there are a range of intervention options available to UK actors that seek to address this. Some of these options are best pursued by development actors, such as grassroots peacebuilding within communities and ensuring that development assistance is conflict-sensitive, while others require the unique expertise and access of defence actors, including:

- 16.1. Supporting the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants back into society. After violence has ceased and a peace settlement been agreed, ex-combatants present a unique challenge for securing long-lasting peace. Although often conducted under the auspices of the UN, UK defence actors can offer a wide range of capabilities to the military component of a peacekeeping operation and any related DDR process. As outlined in the UN's Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, this could include: providing security, including security of weapons and ammunition handed in during a disarmament process; information gathering and reporting on the locations, strengths and intentions of former combatants who may or will become part of a DDR programme; distributing information on a DDR programme to potential participants and the local population; offering technical expertise on the safe collection and destruction of weapons; providing logistical support to different elements of the programme.
 - 16.2. Assisting with the transformation of defence assets towards civilian control and oversight of the armed forces. When armed conflict ends the excessive level of military spending often needs to be reduced to a more appropriate level and the role of security actors within society brought under civilian control. Defence transformation, which involves significant and long-lasting changes in the structure and functioning of a country's defence sector, is a critical element of broader post-conflict intervention. Defence actors can play a key role in advising on defence policy and force structure and the coherence and coordination of defence transformation efforts, among other roles.
 - 16.3. Providing support for reform of the security and justice sectors such as the police or judiciary for example through defence diplomacy and training (see sections 19-23 below)
 - 16.4. Assisting with measures to control the illicit trade in small arms, including support for weapons marking and tracing, removal of anti-personnel landmines and other explosive remnants of war, and stockpile management
 - 16.5. Supporting the UK's arms transfer control regime (a role currently played by defence attaches), including pre-licensing risk assessment and end-use verification and monitoring where appropriate
17. This list is not exhaustive. The current inquiry represents an opportunity for defence actors to further explore and articulate how they can contribute to peace and security objectives where it suits the strengths and capabilities of UK defence actors. In addition to direct military intervention there is a clear and distinct role for defence actors to play in interventions to promote peace and stability, working to compliment development and diplomatic efforts.
18. However, as previously stated, the causes of conflict are not the same in every situation and there is no template for peace and stability. What works in Afghanistan might not necessarily work in Somalia or Yemen so it is important to develop a shared understanding of what needs to change in any given context, what role the UK can play in supporting that change and what role there is for defence actors in support of it.

Supporting reform and development of the security sector

19. A common form of intervention by defence and other UK actors in conflict-affected and fragile contexts is support for the security sector. The UK is well-placed to provide this support in many contexts, whether this is in technical expertise, providing human rights training for security actors, or support for reform of the police services. Much of this support is also provided in direct material or financial support to security services.
20. Security sector reform (SSR) offers a valuable avenue to improve the security situation for people within conflict-affected states. However, support for the security sector must move beyond a focus on supporting the equipment and training needs of a state's military and police forces. "Train and equip" models can actually cause further destabilisation if they are not informed by an understanding of the social and political context in which they are based. This support might also unintentionally reinforce the power of abusive institutions if they do not measure outcomes for individuals and communities (including marginalised groups). For example, simply relying on counting the numbers of police officers that have been trained without evaluating how they are serving their communities risks supporting forces that are abusive and contributing to community grievances, which may lead to further instability.

21. Implementing a protection, human rights-compliant and service-oriented SSR model is a key component in contributing to longer-term peace. While we recognise the need to build up the capacity of security services, including through the provision of equipment, it is important that this is complemented with robust accountability mechanisms and a service delivery model that is focused on delivering the security services that people actually need in addition to national/state security. This means thinking about support for the security sector as a bottom-up process as well as a top-down one, keeping in mind how international support for the security sector creates links of accountability to international actors that can supplant what limited accountability might exist to communities. Therefore it is particularly important to build in local accountability measures when providing security sector support, to ensure that accountability to donors strengthens local accountability as far as possible.
22. Whether the UK's support is technical, material or otherwise, it is also important to consider the political context in which the military or other security actors operate, including who benefits from these interventions (and who 'loses'). Operationalising the JACS to inform support for the security sector as part of a whole of government approach, including the multidiscipline expertise of the tri-departmental Stabilisation Unit, is crucial in this respect. A strong understanding of the political economy of the security sector - including the military or security forces' role as political and economic actors - is essential in order to avoid exacerbating negative conflict dynamics when providing support. Understanding this context can help the UK structure interventions in such a way that they protect and benefit the wider civilian population. This must also take into account the impact of counter-terrorism rhetoric in legitimising indiscriminate or disproportionate use of force by government actors.³
23. For example, in Yemen, a divided society with deep disagreement over what constitutes the national interest, international support to the security sector, including from European actors and the United States, has in the past focused largely on providing military training and equipment for counter-terrorism purposes. This has fed into elite patronage networks that operated as militias providing security for the regime elites against citizens, rather than providing security for citizens themselves. Pursuing counterterrorism in the absence of the rule of law risks perpetuating undemocratic governance of the security sector and undermining statebuilding efforts.

Preventing sexual violence

24. The UK's role in preventing sexual violence in conflict-affected states has become increasingly prominent over the past year. The Foreign Minister's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), the new UN Security Council Resolution 2106 on sexual violence in conflict⁴, declarations at the G8 and UN levels on stopping sexual violence, along with the deployment of a team of experts to several conflict-affected states, demonstrates the huge UK push on this issue. This is highly commendable. Saferworld believes that in order for this work to be sustainable and effective it should be integrated into the wider conflict prevention agenda, including SSR interventions as discussed in Sections 19-23.
25. Interventions to support the security sector in conflict-affected states present specific opportunities to help to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In many instances, security providers themselves, including international peacekeeping forces as well as national forces and police, in addition to militant groups, are perpetrators of sexual violence. For example in Somalia, where very high levels of sexual violence have been reported, particularly in camps for the internally-displaced, Saferworld consultations with civil society ahead of the 2013 Somalia conference in London highlighted ongoing concerns about a lack of command and control as well as accountability mechanisms in preventing the armed forces and militias from committing acts of sexual and gender-based violence.⁵ Participants noted the failure of the police and judiciary to investigate and punish perpetrators and linked this to poor governance and leadership, resulting in weak institutions and a structural inability to deal with cases of SGBV within those institutions. This problem has been recognised by the President of Somalia, and at the London conference, a joint UN/Somali communiqué was signed that includes commitments to vetting, codes of conduct, and prevention strategies to try and address this issue.⁶ However, there has been little progress on the ground, and it is crucial that UK interventions to support security providers in Somalia or security sector reform contribute to preventing SGBV, take a gender-sensitive approach, and ensure the vetting of individuals to ensure that those suspected of committing abuses are not incorporated into national forces pending

³ Sayigh, Y. "Fixing Broken Windows": Security Sector Reform in Palestine, Lebanon, and Yemen, (2009), Carnegie Middle East Centre, available http://carnegiemiddwest.org/files/security_sector_reform.pdf

⁴ For Saferworld's analysis of this new resolution see *Turning gender rhetoric into action*, (2013), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/news-and-views/comment/98>

⁵ See Saferworld, *Civil society voices: recommendations for the May 2013 London conference on Somalia*, (2013), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/734> p 6

⁶ Joint Communiqué of the Federal Republic of Somalia and the United Nations on the prevention of Sexual Violence 7 May 2013, <http://unpos.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=sl1uGop6Bc8%3d&tabid=11461&language=en-US>

investigations. Within the UK's support for AMISOM troops operating in Somalia, such as through teams like the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG), there is an opportunity to ensure that training addresses the need for gender sensitivity and that internal structures are in place to address allegations of sexual violence and ensure effective investigations into abuses.

26. Saferworld believes that developing capable, accountable and responsive security and justice systems through a gender-sensitive approach can have a 'multiplier effect' on preventing sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict by improving access to justice for survivors, tackling impunity and preventing abuses by security and justice providers. Helping to prevent abuses also supports a wider conflict prevention agenda.⁷

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs or drones)

27. The use of weapons technology such as drones has a potentially profound implication for the UK's approach to intervention. The Defence Committee's parallel inquiry on the use of remotely-piloted air systems is therefore both welcome and necessary, not only given questions around the legitimacy and legality of their use, but also for their unintended impacts.
28. Understanding the context and the UK's potential role in creating and perpetuating grievances and driving insecurity should be prioritised when considering any intervention. The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones) raises questions about the consistency of the UK's approach to conflict prevention. Rather than stabilising the country, the negative impact of drone use on the lives and livelihoods of the local population may directly undermine the legitimacy of state actors in the eyes of their people and set the stage for further conflict and instability.
29. Various actors have raised concerns about the likely psychological and negative developmental impacts that drones have on local populations, particularly through their ability to loiter over areas for prolonged periods of time. Their on-going presence is blamed for causing severe mental trauma and causing unwillingness on behalf of parents to send their children to school or of farmers to work their land.⁸ A solid understanding of the extent of these different impacts and how they interact may prove very important, but at the moment this appears to be a severely under-researched field. The UK should carefully consider its use of this technology not only in relation to international law, but also against its stated longer-term objectives to create a more peaceful and stable world.

Controlling arms transfers

30. Another aspect of 'intervention' relates to international transfers of conventional arms and ammunition and the regimes that control them. Saferworld believes there is a role for UK defence actors in support of transfer control regimes such as the newly agreed Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and in the application of the UK's own controls. This can take the form of defence diplomacy - to encourage signature and ratification of the ATT in countries with which the UK has defence cooperation arrangements - and contributions to the UK's transfer control process such as pre-licensing risk assessment and post-export end-use monitoring conducted by defence attaches.
31. Another role played by UK defence actors that warrants scrutiny is that of defence export promotion. The Committee might question how the desire to promote UK defence exports through defence engagement as stated in the IDES and SDSR can be properly balanced against commitments to the role of defence engagement in conflict prevention, including through "increasing arms control engagement so as to promote regional stabilisation and reduce the risk of conflict"⁹ particularly in light of concerns about exports to countries on the FCO's list of countries of human rights concern.¹⁰

Conclusion

32. UK defence actors have a distinct role to play in contributing to international peace and security, responding to the modern threat environment and protecting Britain at home and overseas. Experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya have informed thinking on the strengths and limitations of direct military intervention, and UK conflict prevention as outlined in the BSOS and SDSR draws on a far broader UK

⁷ For more on how the UK should approach gender, peace and security issues from a conflict prevention perspective, see Saferworld, *Promoting Long-term Peace Overseas*, (2013), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/promoting-long-term-peace-overseas-web.pdf> p 4,5

⁸ For example, see testimony from a US Senate Judiciary committee hearing on the impact of US drone strikes in Yemen, Reuters, *Yemeni at U.S. hearing describes drone strike on his village*, (April 2013), <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/04/23/uk-usa-security-drones-hearing-idUKBRE93M1J120130423>

⁹ UK Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, (2010), p 44-45

¹⁰ As outlined in the Committees on Arms Export Controls 2013 annual report, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmquad/205/205.pdf>

toolkit. The whole-of-government approach to conflict prevention requires defence actors to play a distinct role within civilian-led, people-focused interventions that are informed by a robust and nuanced understanding of the context and a long-term vision for peace and security. This submission offers some examples of how UK defence actors can fulfil that role using their unique capabilities to support upstream conflict prevention efforts such as security sector reform and defence transformation. Inquiries such as this offer an opportunity to further explore and articulate ways in which defence actors can contribute to conflict prevention and ensure the consistent application of the core principles laid out in the BSOS as part of the UK's strategic approach to intervention.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and Europe.

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