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NATION BUILDING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION: IMPROVING UK CAPABILITIES

Introduction

1. At the meeting on 9 January, Ministers agreed Britain should continue to pursue a values based and activist foreign policy; and that we needed a capacity to intervene to prevent conflict and build capacity after conflicts. This paper examines how to improve the UK civilian contribution to conflict management and prevention.

The Current Position

2. The UK is internationally recognised for the excellence of its military forces and development aid. The establishment of the Africa and Global Conflict Prevention Pools in 2001 brought together disparate funding and delivery streams from across Government and, with additional funding, provided a platform for a more coherent approach. Post-Iraq, the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) was established in 2004.

3. Particular successes include:

- **the UK has played a key role in gearing up international activity** on conflict prevention. This has contributed to a significant decline in global conflict over the last decade;
- **the tri-departmental nature of the Pools has enabled a greater sharing of knowledge** and approach to the UK programmes, addressing the long-term structural causes of conflict, and the management of regional and national tensions;

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- the African Conflict Prevention Pool (ACPP) has successfully supported the development of the **African Union's (AU) capacity**, and leveraged multilateral engagement;
- in **Sierra Leone**, the ACPP supported the peace process through the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT), and the Sierra Leone Security Sector Reform Programme (SILSEP), to allow a withdrawal of UK troops and the development of a 10-year strategy;

4. But there have been challenges, especially in identifying how to find funds for high priority and Ministerial endorsed policy objectives which cross the boundaries of existing responsibilities. Civilian activity in support of our policies in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused particular difficulties, including most recently how to fund the Basra Plan, the Afghan Counter-Narcotics Strategy, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) activities in Helmand and the Counter-Insurgency Strategy in Afghanistan. Those had to be negotiated across a range of departments and budget holders, with time consuming turf battles, diverting effort that would have been better employed on developing effective policies, and delaying delivering.

What do we need now?

5. We need to pursue a **range of interventions** to:
- **prevent conflict** by addressing its underlying causes, prevent failing states, and through timely interventions to prevent instability from tipping into violent conflict;
 - **manage conflict and its impact**, containing it to prevent higher intensity warfare or regional conflict, supporting peaceful negotiation and mediation, and providing relief to vulnerable populations;

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- **stabilise immediate post-conflict situations**, including delivering services to the population and quick impact projects to win hearts and minds, and kick-starting security, justice and economic reforms to address the underlying causes of conflict and lay the building blocks for longer-term development; and
- **consolidate longer-term stability and development;**

using a combination of hard and soft power.

Setting our Priorities

6. Currently, **conflict** prevention activities are **resourced in an ad-hoc fashion in and between departments**. There is limited transparency. At the moment, no-one knows how much HMG spends on conflict prevention activity as a whole, or even in each geographical area. Nor is there any existing mechanism which generates the analysis to support a process of setting strategic priorities or to inform balance of investment decisions.

7. As a result **we find it difficult to:**

- **prioritise (and re-prioritise) between our objectives**, or make decisions about the marginal utility of extra expenditure on one activity compared to another;
- **HMG activities in a country, or region, are not always transparent or well co-ordinated;** and
- **follow-through from inter-departmental decisions to departmental activity is variable.**

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8. We do not have the capacity to intervene at an equal level of intensity in every unstable or vulnerable country in the world; and if we spread resources too thinly we will not be effective. There **is broad agreement amongst departments that we should produce an annual conflict prevention strategy for Ministers to consider. This would include a mix of activity to deliver both short term benefits (e.g. in Iraq and Afghanistan) as well as longer term programmes to reduce instability, build capacity and to prevent future conflicts. The strategy would set the priorities for resource allocation.**

9. **The highest priority countries and regions might include:**

- the **Middle East** – Iraq and the Palestinian territories;
- **Asia** – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh; and
- **Africa** – the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and developing the capacity of the AU conflict architecture.

We might also want to develop a list of second order priorities (e.g. Caribbean, including Jamaica), which would be funded if resources were available.

10. This requires a decision **to strengthen our capacity to set strategic priorities; in priority countries or regions, to set strategy, drive integrated planning, assessment and implementation; and to re-invigorate the role of Cabinet Committees.**

Risk Mitigation

11. **Early warning systems are fragmented, and departments continue to develop separate systems, products and tools. In the Cabinet Office the Assessment Staff produces a 6-monthly survey of the risks of state failure**

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around the world; in the FCO, a small CRI team looks at some of the same issues; and 15 other products or tools are in use across Whitehall. There have been successes, such as the Bangladesh strategy (commissioned by the Foreign Policy Strategy Group), but in general the link between early warning signals and policy responses is weak.

12. Further work is needed to examine whether these activities could be brought together into a **single system**, with a **strong link into** the process for **setting strategic priorities and allocating resources**.

Planning and Delivery

13. There is a widespread sense that we need to create a civilian expeditionary capability to complement the contribution made by our Armed Forces. But delivering effective and coherent interventions in the **stabilisation phase** of conflict is particularly challenging. Over the last few years, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, we have developed a number of concepts and models to improve the co-ordination of planning and delivery, such as the military concept of a "Comprehensive Approach", the establishment of the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit, and PRTs in Afghanistan and Iraq to deliver international assistance on the ground. The US has established an Office of the Co-ordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization.

14. But there is a long way to go:

- **coherence** between military and other elements of the strategy and a lack of tried and trusted models and **mechanisms to identify interdependencies and resolve competing priorities (policy and resources)**, including at the initial stages of planning military operations as well as the implementation phase;

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- **readily redeployable people** with shortages of some key skills (eg police advisers).
- the difficulty in **insecure environments** of civilians operating effectively, and allies and international institutions being unwilling to expose themselves to risk.

15. To address these issues, **we need** to explore:

- putting a new Cabinet Sub-Committee on Conflict in charge;
- strengthening the planning, analytical and coordinating capacity in the Cabinet Office;
- **widening the remit of the PCRU** to improve the coherence of civilian and military planning, within strategic guidance provided by the Cabinet Sub-Committee and Cabinet Office;
- **increasing the pool of readily deployable civilian expertise** managed by PCRU;
- creating **capacity to deliver civilian expertise in insecure environments**, including examining expanding the role of the military; looking at "sponsored reserves"; creating a volunteer corps who would not be constrained by the obligations of the existing duty of care; and the role of third parties.
- enhancing international capacity, through coordination with and between the **EU, UN and NATO** in particular.

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Resources

16. PSX on 5 February agreed in principle on the need for a **cross-government PSA on conflict prevention**, supported by a published Delivery Agreement. Further work is needed, in the light of the discussion in this paper, on defining the PSA and the agreement for its delivery.

17. Experience in operating the conflict pools suggest that there is **scope for improving the forecasting of costs and the profiling of expenditure** in order to ensure the funds available are effectively utilised. **Finding resources to meet new priorities in-year** has also been unwieldy and time-consuming, requiring a **disproportionate level of senior official and ministerial time** to obtain agreement to expenditure of very small sums of money. Ministers and senior officials are insufficiently involved in the strategic setting of funding priorities.

18. There would therefore be significant advantages in **bringing conflict prevention related expenditure**, including the two conflict prevention pools and perhaps other funds which spend money on conflict related activities (e.g. the FCO's Global Opportunities Fund), **together to be managed as a single "budget"** across the wider range of interventions which are now needed, with allocations subject to collective Ministerial decision.

Next Steps

19. Ministers should consider whether:

- a) a **conflict prevention strategy** should be produced and reviewed annually;
- b) the strategy should be used to **determine priorities and resource allocations** for its delivery;

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- c) **early warning systems** should be reviewed with a view to bringing them together into a single system to underpin policy decisions;
- d) **the central government machinery at Ministerial and official level should be strengthened**, and Cabinet Office capacity increased.
- e) the role of the PCRU should be enhanced and widened;
- f) radical options to deliver civilian expertise in insecure environments should urgently be examined; and
- g) conflict prevention related funds should be brought together into a single "budget", and forecasting improved, to ensure maximum effect is delivered in support of HMG's objectives.

Cabinet Office
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