

FUSION DOCTRINE IN FIVE STEPS:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM REMOTE WARFARE IN AFRICA



Abigail Watson

Megan Karlshøj-Pedersen

This report has been written by staff at the **Oxford Research Group's Remote Warfare Programme**, formerly known as the Remote Control Project. We were set up in 2014 to examine changes in military engagement, with a focus on remote warfare. This is the trend in which countries like the United Kingdom choose to support local and regional forces on the front lines rather than deploying large numbers of their own troops.

Abigail Watson, Research Manager

Megan Karlshøj-Pedersen, Research and Policy Officer

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Alphabetically: Alastair Masser, Abdullahi Hassan, Andrew Tchie, Ben Lovelock, Bréma Ely Dicko, Charlie Stagg, Daniel Mahanty, Delina Goxho, Dusko Frost, Eleanor Beevor, Eleanor Pavey, Emmanuel Vignet, Ibrahim Maiga, Jonathan Fisher, Jack Watling, Josh Arnold-Forster, Julien Joly, Louise Wiuff Moe, Lucy Scott, Liam O'Shea, Paul Williams, Peter Albrecht, Marwa Baabbad, Matt Cann, Marie Sandnes, Nina Wilén, Olivier Guiryanan, Olayinka Ajala, Øystein H. Rolandsen, Paul Rogers, Rubrick Biegong, Steve Little, Tom Watts, and Zoë Gorman.

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Remote Warfare Programme
The Green House
244-254 Cambridge Heath Road
London E2 9DA
United Kingdom

Charity no. 299436
Company no. 2260840
org@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk
<http://oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk>

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List of abbreviations

- African Union (AU)
- African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)
- Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS)
- Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF)
- Department for International Development (DFID)
- European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali)
- Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC)
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)
- International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT),
- Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)
- International Defence Engagement Strategy (IDES)
- Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS)
- Joint Committee on National Security Strategy (JCNSS)
- Ministry of Defence (MoD)
- Modernising Defence Programme (MDP)
- National Security and Capability Review (NSCR)
- National Security Council (NSC)
- National Security Secretariat (NSS)
- National Security Strategy Implementation Groups (NSSIG)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD)
- Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)
- Security Sector Development (SSD)
- Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)
- Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)
- Somali National Army (SNA)
- Stabilisation Unit (SU)
- Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR)
- Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR)
- Strategic Peacebuilding Programme (SSP)
- US Africa Command (AFRICOM)

Executive Summary

Since the 1990s, the UK government has worked to bring different departments together to respond as one when addressing instability and threats abroad. Fusion Doctrine, which was announced in the 2018 National Security Capability Review (NSCR), is the latest attempt to build on and improve these efforts for a more coherent British foreign policy. Yet despite impressive progress, some enduring challenges remain. While the UK has proven its ability to mobilise in times of crisis, it is much less adept at creating routine fusion that systematically brings departments together when the threat is less pronounced. Additionally, most efforts to fuse UK activities have focussed on bringing together UK officials. However, for fusion to work (and last) there must be routine engagement with other key stakeholders, particularly other international actors, host governments and civil society (both in the UK and in-country).

Such challenges to effective fusion are especially evident when it comes to remote warfare, where the UK engages abroad by training, equipping and advising local and regional forces to do the bulk of frontline fighting rather than deploying large numbers of their own forces. The Sahel and the Horn of Africa are congested spaces for such activity. The UK and a variety of other international actors often engage in these activities without sufficient coordination or consideration of regional peace and stability. Fusion Doctrine offers an opportunity for the UK to address these issues and improve its contribution to host governments, international partners and local populations on the continent. However, there are remaining barriers that must be addressed for this to happen.

Based on field research in Kenya and Mali (and with UK soldiers rotating out of Nigeria and Somalia), expert interviews and roundtables in London, this report explores such barriers. It lays out a five-step approach to creating routine fusion and working more effectively towards peace and security in places where the UK intervenes.

1. Fusion in Whitehall

While progress has been made to implement fusion in Whitehall, there remain problems in bridging the different languages, cultures, and planning processes across departments. To address this, the government should:

- Encourage staff in all departments (and at all levels) to work effectively when participating in cross-departmental teams through, for instance, embedding soldiers in other departments.
- Provide additional funding and staff to the Stabilisation Unit (SU), to improve its capacity to bring key stakeholders across different departments together in creating Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) assessments.

2. UK Fusion abroad

Despite improvements in empowering those on the ground, enduring problems with the feedback loop between Whitehall and UK personnel in-country creates a key barrier to effective fusion. To address this:

- Whitehall must provide clear and direct instructions to deployed personnel on what they are being tasked to achieve.
- The UK government must also provide the remit and resources required to these personnel so they can deliver more united, country-specific lessons for policymakers in Whitehall.

In achieving both of these tasks, it would be beneficial to create a new in-country coordinator (whether a new country-level Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) position or an ambassador) who could be held personally responsible for improved coordination at country level.

3. International Fusion

The UK's attempts to be more internationally focussed are promising but are undermined by the fact that it often prioritises national influence and reputation over uniting international efforts. To address this, the UK should:

- Adapt its approach to international relationships to focus on how to improve long-term peace and security and be realistic about how the UK can contribute

to efforts that are already being undertaken.

- Engage with other international actors early on in programme development, and throughout programme implementation, to ensure effective coordination.

4. Fusion that sticks

The UK has acknowledged the need to have a meaningful dialogue with local actors to assess the true needs of our partners in Africa. Yet this is often undermined as the UK presents its strategy to partners too late in the process and focusses on providing limited tactical training courses, which cannot ever address underlying political problems.

To address this, the UK should:

- Involve regional partners at the beginning of programme design and throughout implementation; for instance, by engaging in shared monitoring and evaluation assessments.
- Use established relationships with (and assistance to) host governments to push for broader institutional change, including:
 - Reducing destabilising and destructive behaviour among security forces.
 - Encouraging transparent and accountable political and security institutions.

5. Fusion that works

The UK government has acknowledged that greater engagement with the UK Parliament and civil society (both in the UK and in-country) is required to fill the gaps in the UK's own knowledge and capability; however, the level of engagement can be variable and often insufficient. To address this, the UK should:

- Ensure there is a government-wide system for routinely consulting civil society.
- Release declassified versions of National Security Council (NSC) country strategies.
- Give members of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

(JCNSS) the same level of security clearance as members of the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) so the JCNSS can truly scrutinise the UK's national security strategy.

Introduction

In August 2018, then-Prime Minister Theresa May visited South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. While there, she announced the UK's long-term strategy for engagement with partners on the continent: "I want to create a new partnership between the UK and our friends in Africa, one built around our shared prosperity and shared security ... Delivering such long-term success will not be quick or easy. But I am committed to Africa, and committed to using every lever of the British government to support the partnerships and ideas that will bring benefits for generations to come."¹ This speech reflects a growing commitment from the UK to improve its contribution to partners in Africa. For instance, the March 2018 NSCR outlined how British activities on the continent "will change and expand."²

These statements were also made in the context of a broader pledge to achieve a more consolidated and coherent foreign policy. The latest iteration of this commitment came in the form of Fusion Doctrine (see Textbox 2). Announced in the 2018 NSCR, this doctrine is meant to "ensure that in defending our national security we make better use of all of our capabilities."³ Sir Mark Sedwill, the UK National Security Adviser, and others in government have been positive about the impact of Fusion Doctrine,

especially in times of emergency. British officials have noted that, with a changing geo-political landscape and a refocus on near-peer competitors like Russia, changes under Fusion will allow the UK to mobilise more effectively in the face of national security threats.⁴

However, while Fusion Doctrine may unite departments when facing imminent threats to national security, it is likely to be less effective at creating routine fusion when the threat is less pronounced – for example, in remote warfare (see Textbox 1). In these engagements, the UK and others refrain from deploying large numbers of their own troops and instead support local and regional allies to do the bulk of frontline fighting against groups like Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. In theory, this allows the UK to act in the face of credible (but non-existential) threats and, at the same time, build the regional capacity of partners to act more autonomously in the future.⁵ However, there are a number of military, political and legal implications of remote warfare that are often misunderstood.⁶

These are particularly evident in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa which are congested spaces for this sort of activity, with multiple overlapping unilateral, bilateral and multilateral efforts aimed at building stability, countering terrorist activity and building the capacity of local partners.⁷ Despite

Textbox 1: Remote Warfare

Following the costly military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, placing comparable numbers of Western boots on the ground in new conflicts (except in the case of a direct threat to state survival) remains unlikely. Yet while Western governments remain reluctant to deploy their own troops, they continue to be concerned about terrorist activity in the world's ungoverned or weakly-governed places. As a result, states like the UK engage increasingly in what we refer to as "remote warfare".

At its most basic, remote warfare refers to the countering of threats at a distance, without the deployment of large military forces. In this sense, the remoteness comes from a country's military being one step removed from the frontline fighting – which tends to be carried out by local groups or regional coalitions. Security sector reform and defence engagement play a pivotal role in these activities, as countries like the UK focus on providing training, air support, intelligence and equipment to local and regional forces who undertake the bulk of frontline fighting. This allows the UK to engage abroad while minimising risks to their own forces and, potentially, build regional capacity to address these threats more autonomously in the future. However, as we have argued elsewhere, it is rarely this straightforward and, in many cases, risks have simply been shifted on to partner forces and civilians at a disproportionate cost.⁸

significant and increasing resources being provided to UK partners in these regions, barriers remain to creating fusion between key stakeholders. Instead, it appears that remote warfare is feeding a continued disconnect between the bold aims set by the UK government and the complex realities in the places the UK is engaged.

To understand these changes, the Remote Warfare Programme (based at the Oxford Research Group) conducted field research in Mali and Kenya in September 2018, interviewing senior British and international soldiers, ranked from Major to Brigadier. We also interviewed British soldiers rotating out of Nigeria and Somalia (both over the phone and face-to-face) from October 2016 to October 2018. While we accept that soldiers are unlikely to know every detail of British strategy, they can highlight a disconnect between strategy-making in Whitehall and realities on the ground. Additionally, we conducted a series of interviews and closed-door roundtables with British and international experts from academia, government, the military and civil society (including local experts from the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa) between March and September 2019. This research highlighted the opportunities and challenges facing the

UK as it seeks to implement Fusion Doctrine, to deliver for its partners in Africa and fulfil UK objectives.

As Fusion Doctrine is rolled out, this provides a chance to address some of these enduring challenges and exploit these opportunities. To achieve this, we suggest a five-step approach to making Fusion Doctrine work:

1. Whole of government thinking in Whitehall.
2. Implementation of this approach in the countries the UK engages in.
3. Coordinating effectively with other international efforts.
4. Establishing a meaningful dialogue with the host country.
5. Creating a meaningful dialogue with the UK Parliament and civil society (in the UK and in-country).

While current efforts to deliver Fusion Doctrine tend to focus on Step 1 and Step 2, this report argues that the UK must look beyond the impressive institutional changes already being made in Whitehall, to ask how the same level of coordination can be applied and improved in each step.

Textbox 2: Fusion Doctrine: A New Approach or a Rebranding Exercise?

Fusion Doctrine is not the first attempt by the UK government to institutionalise coordination among departments. In fact, it is only the latest iteration of an approach that was launched by then-Prime Minister Tony Blair as a part of his 1997 “joined-up government” policy.⁹ This was followed by “the Comprehensive Approach, through the Integrated Approach, to the Full Spectrum Approach”.¹⁰ Each iteration has brought some improvement through reforms, new institutions as well as increased focus on a unified approach to foreign policy. For instance, the Comprehensive Approach of the early 2010s saw the creation of the NSC and the National Security Secretariat (NSS), the increased funding to the SU and improvements to cross-department funding with the Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).

Whether Fusion Doctrine represents an improved approach to coordination between agencies or simply a rebranding exercise remains a topic of debate. Some experts interviewed for this report lamented that it is merely a new term for an old concept, one which continues to lack clarity. Some have also criticised the labelling of Fusion Doctrine, emphasising that it is neither an attempt to fuse nor a doctrine but, at best, an emerging concept. Others, such as Sir Mark (largely recognised as the creator of Fusion Doctrine), have been more positive about what it will achieve, arguing that Fusion Doctrine will “build on previous progress” and that it has already demonstrated its utility during the UK’s reaction to the Salisbury attack. Whether or not it will stand out from previous attempts at coordination remains to be seen and will depend largely – as emphasised in this report – on tackling some of the problems that plagued other efforts, such as clashing departmental cultures, and recognising that success often lays beyond Whitehall.

This will be essential in making sure that Fusion Doctrine is more than just the latest buzzword on whole of government thinking and instead paves the way for meaningful change in UK foreign policy.

UK engagement in Africa

In an effort to improve its response to increasingly complex, contemporary conflicts the UK has developed a new approach to stabilisation, which includes an increased focus on security sector reform (SSR) and defence engagement (now a third of CSSF spending).¹¹

This shift has meant a change in focus for the British military. The Ministry of Defence's (MoD) 2017 International Defence Engagement Strategy (IDES) detailed how non-kinetic uses of force would be fundamental in delivering UK objectives by “develop[ing] understanding of national security requirements; prevent[ing] conflict; develop[ing] capability, capacity and interoperability; promot[ing] prosperity; and build[ing] and maintain[ing] access and influence.” This also led to the creation of the Specialised Infantry Group, which focusses specifically on persistent engagement to build UK influence and knowledge (this is discussed in more detail in our report *Remote Warfare: Lessons Learned from contemporary theatres*).¹² The new Integrated Operating Concept promises to place “equal emphasis on warfighting and operations below the threshold of armed conflict.”¹³

These shifts have been particularly noticeable on the African continent. When announcing the UK's new approach in Cape Town, May was keen to highlight the increasing role the British military had already been playing in helping its partners in the region:

“The UK is already providing support for African governments that are meeting this challenge [of terrorism] head-on. Nigerian troops on the frontline against Boko Haram have received specialist training from Britain. Counter-terror operations in Mali are being supported by British Chinook helicopters. British troops in Kenya have trained African Union peacekeepers heading for Somalia,

Defining Key Terms

Defence Engagement is “the use of [MoD] people and assets to prevent conflict, build stability and gain influence. It is a major component of making defence international by design.”¹⁶

Security Sector Reform (SSR) is the “training, mentoring and the provision of equipment” to security forces, with the aim of building effective, accountable and legitimate security forces who can provide their own security more autonomously in the long term.¹⁷

while also working with international partners to reform the Somalian security forces for the long-term.”¹⁴

However, May acknowledged that these operations alone would not deal with the threats facing partners on the continent, stating “the answer to security challenges is not purely military or operational – it is also political.” Consequently, she emphasised that the UK would focus on “working with African leaders who are driving progress, taking on the political challenges and vested interests to ensure that benefits flow to all their people [as well as]...building strong institutions, and helping to build trust between those institutions and the people who are governed by them.”¹⁸

To achieve these ambitious aims, May argued the UK would focus on five new strategic priorities for the continent:

- Addressing the root causes of conflict and fragility.
- Tackling cross-border threats.
- Promoting the rules-based international order.
- Building markets in frontier economies.
- Geographically focusing on the Sahel region of Africa and the new “frontier markets” such as Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal.

The UK government has emphasised that to accomplish these priorities, UK government

departments, private companies and investment needs to be mobilised behind united goals. There is already evidence that this is happening. For example, almost 30% of all countries with CSSF funded activity in 2017/ 2018 were African (see Textbox 3).¹⁹

The MoD has an important role to play in this. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) recently wrote in evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) that “the UK’s training partnerships with...countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia... enable us to further our objectives for peace and security in Africa.”²⁰ Certainly, the MoD has been keen to demonstrate its added value for the UK in the region; for instance, it has been developing its own Africa strategy which assesses how it can deliver on NSC objectives on the continent and the 2018 report on the Modernising Defence Programme (MDP) argued that the British military’s presence in forty African countries “gives us a platform to help develop the institutions that will deliver peace and security in the region.”²¹

In September 2018, when staff from the Remote Warfare Programme travelled to Kenya and Mali, we were told by a number of soldiers that budgets were on the rise and the UK was doing its best to support its partners across the continent. Yet, despite the significant and increasing commitments outlined above, there are continued barriers

to achieving fusion of remote warfare in Africa. Certainly, for anyone hoping that increased political attention would lead to clear prioritisation of military activities, clarity of strategic objectives or meaningful engagement with key stakeholders, the initial feedback is not encouraging. As was neatly summarised by one soldier, the British approach to security partnerships in Africa could be described as one where “we just throw some men here and some men there.”²²

When addressing the complex problems facing partners in Africa, such a strategy is unlikely to work. As will be discussed in the remainder of the report, the problems facing the continent are varied, complex and multifaceted. Some regions boast growing economies, strong markets for emerging entrepreneurs and increasing opportunities for international investment.

But others remain embroiled in conflict – the consequences of which are deeply troubling. As Paul D. Williams noted in his 2011 book:

“Africa’s wars have cost the continent dear in many respects: they have killed many millions of people, most through the effects of disease and malnutrition exacerbated by displacement; they have left in their wake traumatised generations of children and young adults; they have broken bonds of trust among and across local communities



Prime Minister Theresa May on a visit to Kenya (Image Credit: Number 10 / Flickr Creative Commons).

*that will be immensely difficult to repair; they have shattered education and healthcare systems; they have done untold damage to the continents ecology...In financial terms, one estimate suggested that these wars have cost Africa well over \$700 billion in damages since 2000 alone.*²³

Eight years on from Williams' assessment, the prospects for peace in many areas remain poor. Engrained interests, corruption, under-resourced state institutions, predatory state forces and the disenfranchisement of civilian populations all pose significant obstacles to peace. In such environments, as the UK government notes, foreign policy decisions require "the conscious identification and acknowledgement of policy trade-offs"²⁴ – as difficult decisions rarely result in perfect solutions for all stakeholders. However, addressing some of the enduring problems with fusion may provide the means to unite departments more thoroughly behind these difficult and necessary choices.

Problems in Africa are also complicated by international intervention which has often risked doing more harm than good, with overlapping, duplicated and contradictory efforts. The UK government must look beyond Whitehall when bringing together the key deciders of success. For Fusion Doctrine to be truly effective there must be a meaningful dialogue with the host nation, civil society and external experts. As such, while Steps 1 and 2 examine progress being made as part of the implementation of Fusion Doctrine, Steps 3 to 5 go beyond its current remit and argue for a broader conversation about how, and who, we engage behind a shared goal of global peace and security.

Textbox 3: Global Reach of UK CSSF activity

This map charts (in dark blue) areas receiving some CSSF funding. The areas highlighted in other colours describe more than just CSSF activity and will be dealt with in more detail in this report.

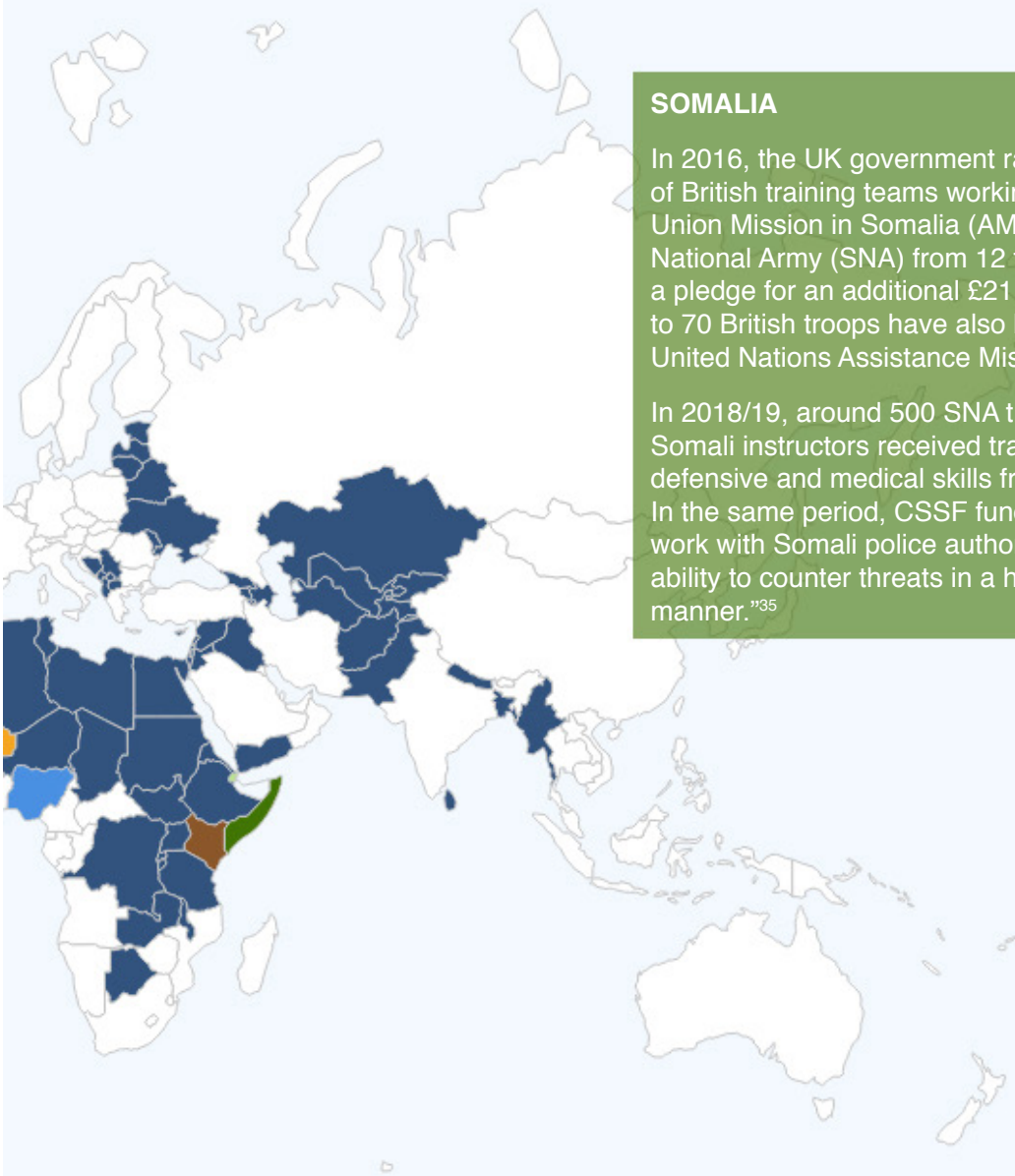
MALI AND THE 'PIVOT TO THE SAHEL'

The UK has promised to “pivot UK resources towards Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania, which are areas of long-term instability and extreme poverty.”²⁵ In July 2018, “[t]hree Royal Air Force Chinook helicopters... supported by around 90 British troops”, arrived to support the French counter-terrorism operation in Mali, Operation Barkhane.²⁶

The UK will deploy “a long-range reconnaissance task group of 250 personnel in 2020” to support the United Nations multidimensional integrated stabilisation mission in Mali (on top of £49.5 million already pledged to the mission as part of the UK’s regular contributions to UN peacekeeping missions).²⁷ UK soldiers are also training local forces as part of the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM-M).²⁸

NIGERIA

In March 2019, Harriett Baldwin, then Minister for Africa, said “[t]otal UK spending on development in Nigeria, bringing together all the different Departments...is £319 million.”²⁹ The UK has trained over 30 000 Nigerian forces.³⁰ For instance, the British Military Assistance Training Team in Nigeria has been supporting “the Nigerian Armed Forces through building operational capability, enabling more effective operations, and encouraging long-term reform”.³¹ It also coordinates Short Term Training Teams, who undertake “capacity building training, in – for instance – pre-deployment and special forces training.”³² Added to this, multinational operations with French, U.S. and German counterparts, include “adviser teams” and a “counter-IED support package.”³³



SOMALIA

In 2016, the UK government raised the number of British training teams working with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army (SNA) from 12 to 30 accompanied by a pledge for an additional £21 million of funding.³⁴ Up to 70 British troops have also been deployed under United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia.

In 2018/19, around 500 SNA troops, including 18 Somali instructors received training on leadership, defensive and medical skills from the British Army. In the same period, CSSF funded “capacity building work with Somali police authorities, developing their ability to counter threats in a human rights compliant manner.”³⁵

KENYA

The British Peace Support Team Africa (based near Nairobi) trains regional troops participating in peacekeeping missions. For instance, it has trained – among others – over 700 Zambian and 6000 Ugandan peacekeepers for UN and African Union (AU) deployments to the Central African Republic and Somalia.³⁶ In 2017, it widened its geographic mandate from East Africa to cover the whole continent.³⁷

Five steps to making Fusion Doctrine work

As the UK looks to increase the fusion of its international activities, it is not enough that it can mobilise in times of crisis. It must also look to integrate routine fusion into UK strategy making. That is, systems which enable departments to work together – and with other key stakeholders – wherever the UK is engaged, even when the challenges that are being addressed do not pose a direct, imminent threat to the UK’s national security. This is especially important when it comes to remote warfare, which often lacks the same level of consistent political and economic support as direct threats to national security.

This is clear in the UK’s activities in Africa which, despite increased efforts, remain relatively limited and, as a result, lack the level of engagement that benefit priority areas. Yet, relatively small or not, poorly planned or poorly coordinated activities can still have a lasting and detrimental impact on peace and stability. Thus, creating processes for systematic fusion is essential.

To understand the enduring problems and contribute to a discussion about how to address them, this report calls for a five-step approach to making Fusion Doctrine work. In doing so, it will provide a lens through which to examine the progress the UK has already made in achieving routine fusion

and assess the problems and barriers which remain. It charts efforts to bring together key stakeholders within Whitehall and in UK embassies abroad. It then argues that for fusion to be truly effective the UK will also have to engage with other international actors operating in the region, host nations, local, national and international civil society groups and external experts – who all play an important role in deciding the success of UK activity.

Step 1: Fusion in Whitehall

Progress so far

“The quest for coordination is in many respects the twentieth-century equivalent of the medieval search for the philosopher’s stone.”

Harold Seidman and Robert Gilmour, 1986³⁸

Creating fusion within Whitehall has arguably received the greatest focus from policymakers. As noted in Textbox 2, this began well before the latest announcement of the Fusion Doctrine. For instance, the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) said that addressing the threat of terrorism required “an integrated approach that brings together our diplomatic, development, defence and intelligence resources.”³⁹ Moreover, the 2010



Whitehall, a street in London lined with government departments and ministries (Image Credit: Christophe Lesimple / Flickr Creative Commons).

SDSR came at a time when a number of substantive changes to improve joined-up thinking within Whitehall were happening.

Perhaps the most discussed of these has been the creation of the NSC and NSS, which have been championed as ways to bring the different strands of government together to debate and discuss UK engagement.⁴⁰ As well as bringing together key departments through NSC meetings, the NSS also ensures that much coordination happens below the NSC level.⁴¹

Additionally, a desire to create a shared language and sense of shared purpose among departments led to the creation of the SU. Its predecessor, the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit, was established in December 2004 with three core tasks: “facilitate[ing] integrated government assessment and planning; provid[ing] civilians to work in hostile stabilisation environments; and identify[ing] lessons and share best practice.”⁴² Jointly owned by the Department for International Development (DFID), the FCO and the MoD, it drew staff from across Whitehall, the military and the private sector. In 2007, it was renamed the SU and, following two reviews in 2008 and 2009, it doubled in size to become a “one stop shop” for stabilisation planning, deployments of civilians and cross-government conflict lessons.⁴³

In 2011, the Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS) announced the creation of the JACS framework. These bring together a range of UK government officials to establish a “shared understanding” of the key issues and risks in places the UK is engaging around the world through joint assessment.⁴⁴ The SU assists in the planning and execution of these JACS, which are also available to all British personnel deployed abroad. Many we spoke to, including government officials and those with experience of UK conflict planning, felt that this had been an important step forward.

The increase in joint working groups has also allowed departments to formally and informally increase their sense of shared understanding. This was something pushed as part of Blair’s “joined-up government” policy. A 2010 Royal United Services

Institute (RUSI) Whitehall Paper concluded that some joint working groups “have been genuinely cross-departmental, with all departments investing in their staff and funding, and working to a common aim.”⁴⁵ This reflected our own conversations undertaken for this report. For example, one roundtable participant said that “just getting [officials] out of their own isolated office” and forcing them to interact is an important step.⁴⁶ When announcing a joint Africa unit, Harriet Mathews (Director for Africa at the FCO) noted that this unit “incorporates people from across the different departments” for shared working.⁴⁷

These changes have clearly had an impact. In late 2017, one expert we spoke to said that “every major country in the world is trying to do a whole of government approach and ours is comparatively quite good.”⁴⁸ Another expert told us this year that: “From what I have witnessed, the UK has done a good job in getting the different departments to speak together.”⁴⁹

In the 2018 NSCR, Fusion Doctrine was announced as a way to build on and consolidate some of these improvements.⁵⁰ Sir Mark set out three elements to this approach in evidence to the Defence Committee:

*“...[1] strategy-led design of policy and planning; [2] cross-government mechanisms to implement, including senior officials at the three-star level leading cross-government teams to implement the decisions of the National Security Council; and [3] a link between that and capability, through the annual posture reviews and the five-yearly cycle of SDSRs.”*⁵¹

In particular, Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) positions have been created to make one individual accountable for each NSC objective and “[b]uilding a culture of common purpose across departments” in its delivery.⁵² These new SRO positions are drawn from relevant departments and agencies across government and are “personally accountable” to the NSC for delivering its priorities.⁵³ They are supported by the National Security Strategy and Implementation Groups (NSSIGs) which they chair. These NSSIGs bring together key stakeholders to “support the delivery of

national security priority programmes.”⁵⁴ The JCNSS said in a July 2019 report “[t]here are currently 16 NSSIGs”; although our own conversations indicate that the activity of these groups varies significantly, with some – such as those focussed on Russia – meeting more regularly than others.⁵⁵

In spite of the significant progress, our research indicates that there remain significant challenges to making Fusion Doctrine effective.

Enduring problems

“...far harder [than establishing new bodies within Whitehall is] to alter the way officers, officials and ministers think.”

RUSI Whitehall Paper, 2010⁵⁶

In spite of the many points of progress described above, the JCNSS stated in a recent report that: “The government has become accustomed to talking a better game than it plays on national security, despite efforts to improve how it makes and delivers strategy.”⁵⁷ These concerns reflected the views of experts that spoke to the committee and worried Fusion Doctrine would face many of the same problems as previous efforts to achieve whole of government policy making (explored in Textbox 2). While departments are increasingly being brought into the same room, this has not led to a bridging of departmental cultures, language and/or understanding.

In an April 2018 debate over the new Fusion Doctrine, Lord Stirrup said that if it “is to be successful, and not just the whim of the year, it will require a fundamental shift in culture, as the security capability review itself acknowledges. However, a change of culture is one of the most difficult things to achieve.”⁵⁸ When this quote was put to Sir Mark in an evidence session with the Defence Committee a year later, he was optimistic steps that were in place to overcome these more challenging obstacles to effective rollout of Fusion Doctrine.⁵⁹

However, we heard that differences in planning procedures have led to difficulties in

shared working. For instance, it often meant that the MoD had developed a strategy long before other departments. This led to frustration from the MoD, as it waited for others to catch up, while other departments felt they were being dictated to by the MoD. One soldier we spoke to in Kenya said that “the military will spring to it and then be accused of trying to make others dance to a military tune because we’ve finished first.”⁶⁰ This is clearly not a new phenomenon; Malcolm Chalmers (Deputy Director-General of RUSI) said in a 2010 Defence Committee Inquiry that the Armed Forces had accepted the principle of the Comprehensive Approach (see Textbox 2) but some had been frustrated by the slow progress in other departments.⁶¹ More recently, the fact that the MoD wrote a separate capabilities review to the rest of government (the MDP) indicated continued problems with uniting planning processes across departments.⁶² Conversations about the development of the MoD’s own Africa Strategy suggest that departments were running parallel efforts – with the MoD developing its own strategy well before others with minimal consultation with the rest of government.⁶³

Some commentators have argued that these challenges relate to fundamental differences in planning at a strategic and tactical level, where the assumptions and calculations are invariably different. A participant at our roundtable argued that the “[r]ole of diplomats is to keep options open; while the role of military is to shut options down – to get a decision – and this leads to frustration.” Robert Egnell, an academic at the Swedish National Defence College, went one step further and argued that there are “often-incompatible aims, philosophies, and organisational cultures” between defence and humanitarian actors making coordination difficult.⁶⁴ This concern was also noted by Roger Mac Ginty, of the University of Manchester, in 2012 when he said that – unlike diplomats and those engaged in humanitarian work – “the principal role of militaries is to fight. They are trained, equipped and conditioned to operate through a security lens.”⁶⁵ When grappling with these differences, however, the answer is not for the MoD, DFID and FCO to homogenise and lose their individuality because each department brings unique and valuable

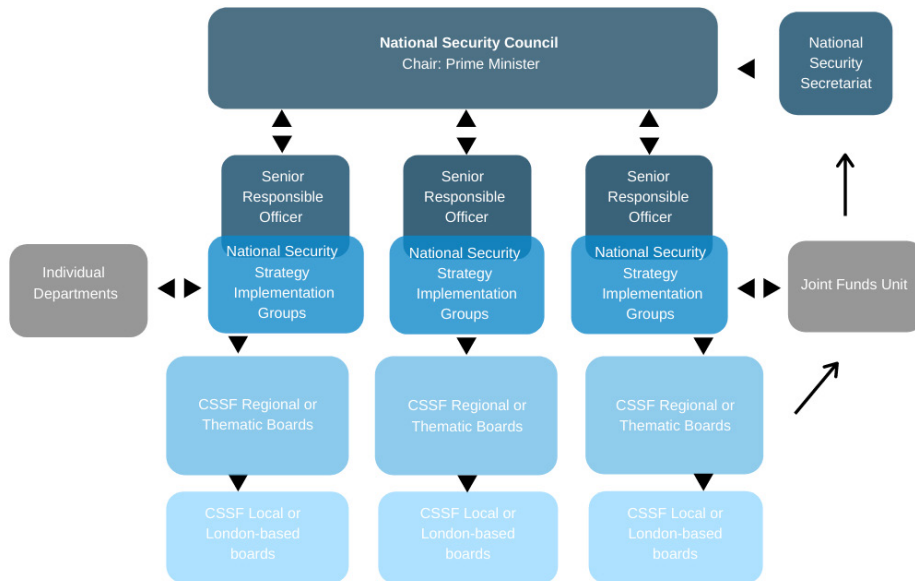


Diagram of decision-making process for Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) funded projects.

skills which should not be lost in the pursuit of shared working. Instead, mechanisms for bridging the gap between the world views of these actors would maximise the ability of departments to pool resources and capabilities and recognise the contributions each department offers.

It remains unclear how much current institutional changes are able to address these divides. A 2010 RUSI paper noted that “while some joint working groups have been successful, some have been cross-departmental in form only with the ‘parent’ departments continuing to conduct parallel policies.”⁶⁶ This reflected some complaints that we heard. For instance, one respondent at our roundtable said the “bigger question is on the utility of the joint units. Can we enable Fusion just by getting people in the same office?” Similarly, a 2016 study into whole of government working found many within Whitehall were sceptical about how much the MoD, FCO and DFID were willing to invest in joint initiatives within the SU.⁶⁷ It noted that “[s]ome participants reflected on the limitations of the tri-departmental model by discussing it in terms of a child who has three parents who all live in different parts of town and have a tendency to be distracted by their own issues.”⁶⁸

Perhaps more important in bridging this gap are continued efforts to develop shared understanding of conflict-affected areas. Sir Bill Jeffrey, former Permanent Under Secretary of the FCO said at a 2009

Defence Committee Inquiry: “I admire my military colleagues greatly, but they have a very special way of doing things.” He added: “People come at things from different angles and I think that the most challenging thing we have had to do is to build understanding among well motivated people who just approach things in different ways.”⁶⁹ Nearly a decade later, many of these same problems remain. For instance, in discussions over how to better protect civilians in contemporary warfare and crises, the FCO and DFID have adopted the terminology of “Protection of Civilians” while the MoD maintains the terminology of “Human Security”. While there is much overlap between these two concepts, there does not appear to be a plan in place to ensure that these two agendas interlink.⁷⁰ Similarly, discussions at our roundtables revealed that differences in definitions and terms created confusion between humanitarian and defence actors. Not only can this make conversations confusing, it can stymie frank debate. We heard that the MoD was often “petrified” by the language in some CSSF and JACS documents and – feeling they couldn’t engage with them – did their own analysis instead.⁷¹

To address this, supporting the SU to create shared understanding and shared language may pave the way for more routine fusion which ensures that departments are brought together systematically, however pressing the threat to the UK.

Textbox 4: Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme

In the early 2010s, a number of reviews into the UK's emergency services (Police, the Fire and Rescue Service, and Ambulance Services) found a lack of shared culture, shared language, shared training and shared risk analysis posed significant barriers to effective cooperation and coordination.⁷² In response, the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) was **created to establish stronger frameworks for coordination** between 2012 and 2014. JESIP led to several new initiatives, including joint training for members of all three services, as well as the joint doctrine which established practical guidance on multi-agency response.⁷³ As a result of JESIP, coordination has now become the norm, exemplified by the following:

- Commanders of the three services now **routinely come together** at scenes of incidents and co-locate throughout the response to establish jointly agreed objectives and to coordinate efforts.
- The three services **agreed shared language**, including acronyms and definitions. These can easily be accessed by all members of the services in JESIP publications, on their website and via an app.
- While services continue to develop **separate risk assessments, these are now shared after their development** so joint mitigation measures may be created.

While the work continues, JESIP has been widely recognised as having a significant positive effect on the interoperability between the three agencies. For instance, in the aftermath of the 2017 Manchester Arena Bombing, it was found that: "The benefits of investing in collaborative partnership and emergency planning were demonstrated to the full."⁷⁴ The national JESIP programme has now scaled down, as its function of coordinating became "embedded into responder agencies business as usual."⁷⁵ While we recognise that JESIP may not be a perfect comparison, its work building shared language and understanding as a means of building routine coordination may provide an important case study as the UK government looks at how to achieve fusion in policy making.

Step 2: UK Fusion abroad

Progress so far

“I think you need to distinguish between where we are in Whitehall and the departments versus in the field. There has been tremendous progress in the field and in terms of planning and operations.”

Professor Theo Farrell, 2010⁷⁶

When the UK military is deployed to a country, a multitude of other UK efforts – including aid, trade and diplomacy – are almost always taking place at the same time.⁷⁷ Thus, for military activity to be truly effective, they must be united in Whitehall and, perhaps more importantly, on the ground. This is especially true for remote warfare, where the military footprint is usually quite small and the military may not be the dominant UK actor in-country. In many ways, deployed personnel may be better placed to create fusion on the ground, given that they are often more able to access local actors and other UK personnel operating in the same country than those in Whitehall.

There has been a significant amount of progress in providing those on the ground with the ability to achieve this – perhaps most noteworthy is the progress in two key areas:

- Giving individuals on the ground the direction and resources necessary to “get on with their particular jobs.”⁷⁸
- Improving the lessons learned system to facilitate honest and frank discussions about the UK’s efforts in-country.⁷⁹

To the first of these, providing clear resources and direction has been a priority for the UK – particularly with the establishment of the CSSF. The CSSF was set up in April 2015 to deliver a “new, more strategic approach to work in conflict-affected states.”⁸⁰ To address criticisms that its predecessor (the Conflict Pool) lacked strategic direction, the government created a more direct link between the NSC and programmes on the ground. The NSC devises “more than 40 regional, country and thematic strategies and allocating funding according to its priorities.”⁸¹ A new sub-

committee of the NSC was also established to improve the strategic direction of the CSSF.⁸² So far, this work seems to be regarded positively, with the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) 2018 follow-up report finding that there had been a “strong response” from government in improving the strategic direction of CSSF.⁸³

The last few years have also seen an increase in the resources provided to those on the ground. £683 million was given in the Conflict Pool’s final year of operation (2014–15), while its successor, CSSF, had an annual budget of £1.18 billion in 2017/18 – which will rise to more than £1.3 billion each year.⁸⁴

This looks set to improve the UK offer to partners in Africa. As well as receiving a large proportion of CSSF funding, Baldwin said in evidence to the FAC that the UK is “recruiting the largest uplift in UK staff, working both from here and predominantly, of course, across Africa.”⁸⁵ This includes an increase in UK personnel to the Sahel, with “new embassies in Niger and Chad” and “a much larger presence in Mali.”⁸⁶

The second factor, improving the lessons learned process, has also been a key focus for the UK government. CSSF mandates



British soldier training Malian soldiers in weapon handling (Image Credit: Defence Images / Flickr Creative Commons).

annual reviews of all programmes and the Joint Programme Hub works with the SU to convene an annual workshop to share lessons and best practice across the network of departments and CSSF Framework Suppliers.⁸⁷ This is a significant step-change from the Conflict Pool where evaluations and reviews were carried out on an ad-hoc basis.

In ICAI's 2018 assessment of CSSF it flagged "weak results management and insufficient learning" as a key problem for delivering British objectives abroad. In response, the government attempted to do more to improve its monitoring and evaluation of CSSF programmes, including "[a] new global monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) strategy...that focusses on strengthening the MEL tools programme teams use, building staff capacity and capability, and generating useful and timely evidence."⁸⁸ Since ICAI's review, it has also done more to try and measure "the effects of Political Access and Influence."⁸⁹

A year later, ICAI was positive about the amount of progress the UK had made: "While the level of progress made varied, the response of the relevant government departments...was generally strong, considered and appropriate."⁹⁰ It argued that "efforts to strengthen...results frameworks[, t]ogether with the scaling up of monitoring, evaluation and learning...are likely to improve both the design and the implementation of the Fund's programmes."⁹¹ Additionally, some of the soldiers we spoke to in Mali, Kenya and Nigeria also appeared fairly positive about these improvements. One said: "Linking up development, diplomacy, defence plus those with global, regional and local perspectives is always a challenge. But...in some areas we've been having some success."⁹²

However, these improvements are likely to remain incomplete unless the significant remaining barriers are addressed.

Enduring problems

"There is no shortage of information, but no system for synthesising and prioritising key learning points across government...nor of assigning responsibility and tracking these through to action for cross-departmental lessons."

RUSI Whitehall paper, 2010⁹³

Despite improvements in empowering those on the ground, the feedback loop between Whitehall and those in-country remains convoluted and ineffective, creating a huge barrier to effective fusion. Consequently, improvements in building coherence between the strategic and tactical level are incomplete. As one roundtable participant said, from bringing people together in Whitehall "you don't get fully fused until you're back in the Embassy...there's a need for a bit more focus on the middle stage."⁹⁴

Many stationed in-country felt that they lacked clear guidance from those developing strategy in Whitehall on what was expected of them. Some soldiers felt like they were "operating in a political vacuum"⁹⁵, with "no overarching strategy."⁹⁶ For instance, in Somalia, political will was derided as "a yoyo."⁹⁷ In Mali, soldiers complained that they have not been given clear priorities to provide feedback on in their situation reports, leading to a situation where they report on everything – despite feeling it is not that useful and may not even be read.⁹⁸ This appeared to be recognised by the government. For instance, the annual review of MoD-led operations in the Sahel noted the "need for setting better strategic direction" for those in-country.⁹⁹ We were told that the lack of strategic clarity on the ground may be exacerbated by the fact that many British soldiers do not read the country JACS – potentially because of some of the issues with accessibility highlighted above.

Additionally, despite improvements to monitoring and evaluation, many of the soldiers we spoke to felt that there were still problems with creating meaningful dialogue between those on the ground and those in London and there was a general sense that there was not enough being done to have "homework marked further downstream"

or harness the knowledge of UK personnel in-country.¹⁰⁰ One soldier in Nigeria said that the MoD is not “good at using people that are on the ground”¹⁰¹, another said “[t]here is always a sense when you are in-country that London is...the A team and we are the B or the C team.”¹⁰² One soldier in Kenya said “our experience isn’t leveraged to generate that sort of knowledge.”¹⁰³ On occasion, many felt that this led to decisions being made in London that would have run counter to the advice of deployed personnel, if their lessons had been fed into the strategic process.¹⁰⁴ Again the annual review of MoD-led operations in the Sahel acknowledged this – suggesting that they could be doing more to engage with military secondments to EUTM-M.¹⁰⁵

To address this problem, more could be done to empower personnel to, not just undertake their tactical level objectives, but also to contribute to UK strategy making. For instance, an SRO figure at the country level could ensure tactical efforts remain coherent at an operational level, and equally that

those on the ground have a clearer sense of what NSC objective their work fits into. A 2010 RUSI Whitehall Paper suggested that an ambassador could play this role: “[i]n principle, an ambassador should be best placed to bring coherence to the inter-related objectives of different parts of government and oversee the implementation of a cross-Whitehall agreed strategy in his/her country post.”¹⁰⁶ In some countries, ambassadors have done well to take on this role, yet progress has been sporadic and personality-driven. At the same time, the benefits of such in-country coordinators, with strategic oversight, have already been documented. For example, several experts interviewed for this report emphasised that the UK’s response to the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone was greatly improved by the designation of a single person, who was based in DFID, as coordinator for the entire UK response.

However, attempts to have such a position on a systematic basis have been minimal – potentially to the detriment of connecting tactical and strategic efforts.

Textbox 5: Good case example: Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone’s 11 year civil war is renowned for being one of the most brutal intra-state conflicts in recent history, killing 50,000 civilians and causing the collapse of the state.¹⁰⁷ Despite international efforts, widespread violence continued until 2000.¹⁰⁸ In 2002, the UK signed a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the government of Sierra Leone and deployed the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT), which was “involved...in a wide range of institution-building, advisory and training activities with the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) – the professional military reconstituted in the wake of the conflict.”¹⁰⁹ Despite a number of significant and enduring problems, IMATT has achieved many successes.¹¹⁰ For instance, Sierra Leone “conducted [a] generally violence-free election only seven years after the end of a civil war”, with the first election without UN oversight held in 2012. Many also account UK training for enabling the RSLAF to effectively “step up to the mark” during the Ebola outbreak in 2014.¹¹¹

A key reason behind IMATT’s successes was the **autonomy and resources granted to highly capable individuals, who were able to set the direction of UK strategy in-country** and, in doing so, build coherence at an operational level. The combination of poor strategic direction from London and reliable and long-term commitment (made possible through a promised £40 million a year for the duration of the MoU) meant “coordination became a function of individuals collaborating effectively on the ground.”¹¹² While IMATT faced a number of problems – including the high turnover of staff and stymied progress when less able staff came in – it shows the value of having good individuals in post, working together to build collective strategies at a country level.

Step 3: International Fusion

Progress so far

“I see no distinction between national self-interest and global co-operation. For when the multilateral system works, it does so on behalf of nation states and our people, allowing us to harness the best we each have to offer”

Theresa May, 2018¹¹³

UK operations in regions such as the Sahel and Horn of Africa are one small component in a complex network of overlapping unilateral, bilateral and multilateral efforts. A multitude of actors – including states, multilateral international organisations and private companies – all operate on the ground. In this context, it is more vital than ever that fusion of efforts between different actors does not end in Whitehall, or between different British personnel in-country, but also involves other international actors.¹¹⁴ This is particularly true given the rise of remote warfare where no one country can expect relatively minor contributions to have a significant impact on regional security sectors without the assistance of coalition partners.

Many UK allies are turning their attention to the Sahel and Horn of Africa, creating an opportunity to build a more impactful, united response. For instance, the EU and its member states are projected to spend €8 billion on development assistance in the Sahel alone, along with billions more on security, capacity building, and other programmes between 2014 and 2020.¹¹⁵ France, with its strong historic and linguistic ties to the Francophone region of Africa, has undertaken more than 45 overt interventions on the continent between 1960 and 2005 and has defence agreements with all of its former colonies.¹¹⁶ In the aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. also increased its presence on the continent, with U.S. missions underway in roughly 20 African countries and U.S. bases on 34 sites across the continent.¹¹⁷

Other countries, which may not share the UK's long-term objectives, have also shifted their attention to the continent. For instance, a number of Gulf states are engaging

much more in the Horn of Africa – with some commentators fearing that the region may become another area in which Iran and Saudi Arabia compete for access and influence.¹¹⁸ China is now also an important force in the region, with African debt to China reaching \$143 billion in 2017.¹¹⁹ At the same time, Russia has turned its attention to African nations through arms sales, an undeclared – yet seemingly significant – presence of mercenaries, as well as capacity building programmes for local forces.¹²⁰ Countries like the UK and France lack the capabilities to individually match such investment, emphasising the importance of working closely with others to have a sizeable impact in addressing some of the problems of such engagements.

Recognising the importance of working with international partners, the UK government – under May and now under Prime Minister Boris Johnson – has made coordination between coalition partners a focal point of their “Global Britain” agenda. The government continually emphasises the importance of collaborating and coordinating with partners when engaging overseas.¹²¹ The 2017 IDES stated that the UK is “making [its] defence policy ‘International by Design’, ensuring that we make...partnerships and alliances central to all that we do.”¹²² A year later, the NSCR stated that the UK’s “international approach has entered a new era...[a]s Global Britain, we are reinvesting in our relationships around the world.”¹²³ In September 2019, ahead of his trip to the UN, Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab said: “As we make progress in our Brexit negotiations, we are also taking our vision of a truly Global Britain to the UN – leading by example as a force for good in the world.”¹²⁴ In the same month, the FCO noted that “[r]eal transformation” in Africa “will come through a co-ordinated African and international effort.”¹²⁵

There is evidence of this coordination happening in practice. For instance, the United Nations Association-UK reports that the UK has a good reputation in the UN for leading discussions in a collaborative way; one interviewee from a non-EU country said: “the UK...is one of the most fair players”, adding that they “[a]lways engage in good faith in negotiations.”¹²⁶ Similarly, in line

with its objective to support the UN, the UK more than doubled the number of British personnel committed to UN peacekeeping operations and is the sixth largest contributor financially.¹²⁷ It has also sought to improve its approach to peacekeeping missions by attempting to respond to actual needs, rather than determining involvement based on what the UK is willing to give. For instance, its decision to deploy a long-range reconnaissance task group to Mali in 2020 was based on careful analysis of where the UN mission was suffering its greatest shortfalls in terms of capability.¹²⁸ The UK is also a member of the Sahel Alliance, which was set up by France, Germany and the EU to focus on increasing coordination between partners working in the region.

The FCO noted the UK has “a strong history of supporting UN and AU operations across Africa.”¹²⁹ In September 2019, Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, said at the UN: “The African Union and the African regional economic communities are indispensable partners in maintaining peace and security on the African continent.”¹³⁰

The UK military has also worked with other countries to address shared conventional threats. For example, the Joint Expeditionary Force is a British-led initiative to develop a



British Army trainer supporting the United Nations (Image Credit: Defence Images / Flickr Creative Commons).

multinational pool of military forces able to contribute rapidly to overseas “contingency operations.”¹³¹

In many ways, then, the UK’s shift towards a more collaborative approach is markedly better than many other countries. However, some UK activities continue to undermine the effectiveness of this approach.

Enduring problems

“We are in the Sahel for the French... achieving little on the tactical level but...what is the impact of this on the UK’s contribution to peace and stability?”

Roundtable participant, 2019

Currently, UK activity risks exacerbating the already complex and fragmented engagement of international actors in the Sahel and Horn of Africa. Numerous actors engage in parallel and often disjointed activities, which end up duplicating – and even contradicting – the efforts of allies. In Somalia, AMISOM relies on a network of external partners for “logistical, financial and security force assistance”, with the UN, EU, and bilateral partners such as the UK and the U.S. all offering support. However, while the volume and variety of these activities requires careful coordination, they “have been characterised by fragmentation rather than unity of effort.”¹³²

Beyond poor coordination, some countries have actively side-lined international organisations and other countries operating in the same region. For instance, International Crisis Group said of Saudi Arabia: “The Kingdom prefers to work bilaterally in most cases and has ignored – if not intentionally side lined – multilateral organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.”¹³³

One reason for this is the complexity and difficulty of balancing national, regional and international objectives. One of our interviewees in Kenya complained that it is difficult to get things done in AMISOM because every troop contributing country required their own government to approve

changes, leading to delays and difficulties in pushing things through.¹³⁴ British soldiers we spoke to in Mali also said that “between militaries there is a mix of opinion on desired end-states before you even get to civilian aims.”¹³⁵

Attempts at balancing national and international objectives are understandable, and unavoidable when working with international coalitions. However, it can become deeply problematic when nations pursue their own agendas at the expense of regional stability. For instance, a Chadian expert interviewed for this report noted that different nations seeking political access and influence with the host nation can lead to a less effective international effort.¹³⁶ It can also create a situation where countries provide a host nation with military support – because this is what will achieve political access and influence – even though regional stability would be better served by a greater focus on, say, poverty reduction, corruption or SSR.¹³⁷ For instance, one roundtable participant said of the international effort in Niger, “it is one of the poorest countries in the world, but the focus on food security has fallen on deaf ears, while at the same time there is a whole list of countries queueing up for providing more military support.”¹³⁸

Our interviews indicated that, at times, UK military activity risked exacerbating some of these problems. As we identified in previous research, there is evidence that the UK has not always been a natural coalition operator.¹³⁹ At a force development conference in March 2018, the UK and allies from the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, Australia, and the U.S. each presented their future force concepts. The UK and the U.S. were the only two that didn’t place working in coalition at the heart of their concepts.

Many experts consulted for this report emphasised that smaller countries – especially in Scandinavia and Western Europe – recognise that their capabilities are insufficient to independently bring security to Africa (or elsewhere) and so, instead, often focus on fitting their contributions into broader international efforts. The UK, however, does not appear to have adopted such an approach; instead, its focus on international institutions seems based more on building its reputation as “Global Britain”

than on a genuine belief that its objectives are better served through pooling capability with allies. While the size and strength of the U.S. Armed Forces means that it can afford to take a discretionary approach to coalition working, the British attitude is harder to defend. We were told that the UK often finds itself in a situation where it has a desire “to continue to be a great power, but not having the capabilities.”¹⁴⁰

This approach is not only unsustainable, it is unhelpful to establishing a coherent international response. In fact, an interviewee from the EU training mission in Somalia criticised the UK for running a parallel national effort while nominally contributing troops to the EU mission. Rather than submitting to EU command structures, the British contingent was accused of “actively undermining” the EU effort by trying to operate under their own rules.¹⁴¹

Relatedly, there appeared to be a risk that British political access and influence was prioritised above actually improving the international effort. The FCO recently argued that the fact many “allies and competitors are also offering more to the [African] continent” meant that the UK should make sure its offer “stands out...to remain competitive”, rather than assessing how it can contribute to these other, international efforts.¹⁴²

This reflected conversations we had with British soldiers in Kenya and Mali. For instance, one soldier based in Kenya said: “As an embedded security adviser, am I making these people any better? Probably not. However, I am sending a political message.”¹⁴³ In fact, many soldiers that we spoke to felt that they had been deployed to send a political message. For instance, some felt that UK personnel were deployed to the Sahel to maintain relations with France in the lead up to Brexit, while others felt offering the Kenyans peace support training might be one way to offset the fact that the British rely on a facility in Kenya to train a large proportion of the British infantry.¹⁴⁴ In fact, one soldier was reportedly told, “look I don’t care what you train them, but we need you to train this unit because then HMG [Her Majesty’s Government] has access to the unit.”¹⁴⁵

Seeking influence in such a way risks the worst of both worlds where the UK fails to build lasting political access in the places it intervenes and adds to ineffectiveness in international efforts. For instance, the UK has said that a key reason for the “pivot to the Sahel” is to “support our alliances with international partners such as France, Germany and the AU as we exit the European Union”;¹⁴⁶ however, many soldiers, officials and commentators worried about the UK deploying to the Sahel just to maintain international alliances – particularly, given that the UK’s expertise, experience, and skill-sets may be better applied elsewhere in the continent.¹⁴⁷

In fact, our conversations with French personnel in Mali indicated that – while the UK’s deployment of three Chinooks in 2018 was appreciated – it was made more complicated by the lack of French speakers. One French soldier said: “It’s great for us that the UK is sending three Chinook helicopters up to Gao. But in reality, they need to operate alongside French personnel all the time because of the language barrier, so we need to be there to facilitate that. This takes a lot of time and effort.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, while the UK is sending a strong political signal,

its actual contribution may be complicated by a lack of attention paid to the importance of effectively fitting into allies’ efforts on the ground.

More generally, many felt the UK military’s failure to prioritise language skills among its soldiers potentially posed real challenges to effective collaboration. Beyond the obvious barriers to communicating, some soldiers we spoke to in Kenya and Mali felt it made soldiers less accommodating and more impatient with international and local allies who spoke English only as a second language.¹⁴⁹

As the UK’s international engagement is increasingly scrutinised (especially as it leaves the EU) ensuring that its contributions to (especially European) allies are effective will be crucial. Added to this, it seems counter-productive to succeed in getting all of Whitehall to respond as one, only to end up duplicating other countries’ existing efforts once engaged. Thus, delivering fusion will need the UK to look beyond its immediate short-term national interests in the countries where it is engaged to ensure its activities support and encourage international coordination and collaboration towards the long-term aim of peace and stability.

Textbox 6: Good case example: Belgian Special Forces in Niger

In 2017, at the tail-end of three years of training Nigerien forces, Belgian Special Forces developed a new type of strategic military collaboration: “a new light footprint approach in the framework of a major Nigerien Force Generation project: Localisation Strategy.”¹⁵⁰ This strategy “emphasis[ed] local ownership, sustainability and a light footprint, guided by the host nation’s reality.”¹⁵¹

Nina Wilén, Director for the Africa Programme at the Egmont Institute for International Relations and Associate Professor at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, argues that two key factors led to the success of this initiative:

- **Belgian Special Forces developed their programme based on the actual needs identified by the Nigerien troops on the ground.**
- **Belgian Special Forces maintained strong coordination between international actors “to standardise training and avoid duplication of efforts.”**

The small number of Belgian personnel on the ground “brought together other Western Special Operation Forces teams” – including the U.S., Germany, Italy and Canada – with weekly meetings in which the Nigerien military also participated. They also “took the lead in an effort to develop a common curriculum” which has prioritised building on local knowledge.

In doing so, the Belgian Special Forces have provided an effective tactical programme on a light footprint and based their approach on the stated needs of the Nigeriens. Through this, Belgium has increased their own influence in the region and internationally – demonstrated by the fact they are frequently brought into discussions and high-level meeting they may not otherwise have been in.¹⁵²

Step 4: Fusion that sticks

Progress so far

“Africa is today ... less a problem to be solved than a voice to be heard.”

Greg Mills and Jeffrey Herbst, 2007¹⁵³

The eventual success of the UK’s strategy in another country will inevitably be decided less by the UK’s – or its international partners’ – perfect planning processes and more by domestic factors in the host nation. This is largely down to two factors:

- Firstly, states in Africa (and elsewhere) will inevitably decide the sustainability of projects within their borders.
- Second, tactical fixes to political problems risk becoming more destabilising, especially when they inadvertently support predatory states who abuse their own citizens.

To the first of these, UK operations need to feed into nationally owned projects to be effective and sustainable. Over a decade ago Joseph Stiglitz, an American economist at

Columbia University, argued that “[w]e have seen again and again that...policies that are imposed from outside may be grudgingly accepted on a superficial basis, but will rarely be implemented as intended.”¹⁵⁴

Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, said “reforms that are not shaped and driven by local actors are unlikely to be implemented properly and sustained.”¹⁵⁵

The UK has emphasised the importance of listening to partners. In April 2018, the SU’s *Elite Bargaining and Political Deals* report noted that “interventions can be ineffectual, or counter-productive, when interveners fail to analyse and engage effectively with underlying configurations of power.”¹⁵⁶ A few months later, May noted in her Cape Town speech that “[t]rue partnerships are not about one party doing unto another, but states, governments, businesses and individuals working together in a responsible way to achieve common goals.”¹⁵⁷

However, to the second issue, engaging with a host nation must mean acknowledging when governments and state forces are a driver of instability and violence. Since 2007, a depressing 23% of the violent incidents



On foot patrol in Mogadishu with an AMISOM Formed Police Unit (Image Credit: AMISOM Public Information/ Flickr Creative Commons).

against civilians recorded were perpetrated by state forces rather than anti-regime groups.¹⁵⁸ In such contexts, the appropriate response will not take the form of tactical or militarily focussed solutions. Instead, building the capacity of predatory armed forces will feed a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and conflict that currently sees almost half of all post-civil war countries relapse within five years.¹⁵⁹ This is especially problematic for remote warfare, which often focusses on militarily supporting local and regional partners. However, the eventual success of any operation will inevitably be decided less by the ability and equipment of these partners, but also by their willingness to commit to peace in the long-term.

The UK has acknowledged the need to address these deeper issues. In 2011, the BSOS noted that building partner capacity will only be effective if “support to build the capacity of security forces [is]...matched with efforts to build accountability, legitimacy and respect for human rights.”¹⁶⁰ It is clear that this remains the case almost a decade later. In his introduction to the SU’s 2018 guide to stabilisation, former joint-DFID FCO Minister Alistair Burt said: “The UK government’s goal in conflict-affected contexts is to support the development of lasting peace and stability, which is built with the consent of the population.”¹⁶¹ Yet, despite this, problems still remain with the UK’s approach.

Enduring problems

“Some democracy promoters cling to the “Walt Disney” view of democratisation in which the endings are always happy and no one ever gets hurt.”

Thomas Carothers, 1999¹⁶²

While the UK has acknowledged the importance of having a meaningful conversation with a host nation, it remains unclear how much it is building feedback it receives from partners into its planning and strategy making in any institutionalised or systematic way.

In some interviews, we heard that the UK involved its partners once it had already made up its mind about its course of action – as one interviewee said “[w]e focus on why we’re in-country but it’s important to see it from the recipient point of view.”¹⁶³ Lisa Schirch (of the Toda Peace Institute) and Deborah Mancini-Griffoli (from the non-profit organisation, Creative Learning) suggest this is part of a wider problem where many states and donors often do not ask partners “to shape the analysis or design and implement the program. Rather they are asked to ‘comment’ on plans already made.”¹⁶⁴

This can undermine effective dialogue as the UK presents “ready-made” plans, with states often accepting the assistance even when it is not useful because they don’t want to lose the funding that accompanies it.¹⁶⁵ This was explained in a conversation with a British soldier in Kenya. To demonstrate the British approach the soldier handed us a pen and, when we took it off him, he said “why did you take the pen? You already have a pen”, he said “you took it because I offered you a free pen” – indicating that the UK offer of training courses to partners was the same.¹⁶⁶

In other circumstances, it appeared that while different departments were speaking to their own host-country counterparts, the separate conversations were not coordinated – resulting in many parallel lines of communication going between the UK and partner officials. One roundtable participant highlighted the problem of this approach: “each person you ask will say they require different things.”¹⁶⁷ This can, at times, lead to inappropriate training and support. For example, one UK soldier deployed in Kenya asked an interlocutor from the Kenyan military to get a sense of what training would be useful. However, this interlocutor was not checking the gaps in current training with the rest of the Kenyan military. This resulted in medical training being asked for but “the medical wing of the military...didn’t even know [it] had been requested.”¹⁶⁸

On the whole, many soldiers felt the UK was not doing enough to deliver what our partners actually need and want. In Mali, one soldier called for “an adult conversation about what [our partners] need and what we can deliver”, comparing the current approach to a builder that “just turned up at your house

and started fixing things you hadn't asked for."¹⁶⁹ In Nigeria, a soldier told us that it remained "a fundamental challenge" trying to understand what partners want "and making sure we are being demand led."¹⁷⁰ In Kenya, more than one soldier asked where the "demand signal" for their activities was coming from, with one stating that "no African country asks for [these activities]."¹⁷¹

An effective dialogue is even more important when addressing deeper, political issues to peace and stability. This appeared to reflect the findings of the U.S.' own Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR), which stated that: "Mali showed that failure to achieve a durable political settlement at the national level can undermine local stabilization efforts."¹⁷² Similarly, in May this year, Paul D. Williams argued that international efforts to address the conflict in Somalia have failed, in part, because "international actors failed to persuade Somalia's elites to create the right political conditions for building an effective national army."¹⁷³ He, like others, have argued that a focus on changing the mindset of elites in Somalia – and other states in the region – is essential in building sustainable peace. Jason Hartwig argued in the same month that "[r]ather than an increased military presence, the United States must present an overt diplomatic presence in Somalia," which is focussed on bringing the Somali state, al-Shabaab and regional actors like Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda towards a negotiated settlement.¹⁷⁴

In achieving this, tactical training programmes are unlikely to work. The U.S. SAR noted that "the international community is providing high volumes of security sector training and assistance to many conflict-affected countries, but our programs are largely disconnected from a political strategy writ large, and do not address the civilian-military aspects required for transitional public and citizen security."¹⁷⁵ Many countries in the Sahel and Horn of Africa, have used international support to increase the capacity of their security sectors but have failed to address root causes of instability – such as, corruption and abuses by predatory state forces. In this sense, short-term activities, which focus on "defence and security institutions" but allow oversight to remain "weak and ineffective...can lead to a situation where rights-violating security

forces become better equipped to do what they have always done."¹⁷⁶ In turn, this "risk[s] further undermining human security" when populations are trapped "between increased violence of abusive security forces and the terror of non-state armed groups."¹⁷⁷

The consequences of the focus on tactical solutions are visible in Nigeria where experts have long warned of the dangers of empowering the military. Nigeria scholar Jean Herskovits noted that while "approximately 25 percent of Nigeria's budget for 2012 [was] allocated for security[,]...the military and police routinely respond to attacks with indiscriminate force and killing."¹⁷⁸ John Campbell – former U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria from 2004 to 2007 – also notes that "the military and police are made up of various ethnic, religious, and regional groups, [but] few are native to the areas in which they serve and can be hostile to the local populations."¹⁷⁹ This only serves to exacerbate instability; and, in fact, Herskovits notes that "according to many Nigerians I've talked to from the northeast, the army is more feared than Boko Haram."¹⁸⁰ One British soldier we spoke to said of Nigeria that the international effort was "treating the symptoms not the causes of the problem [when] the whole defence structure here needs institutional reform."¹⁸¹

In Mali, the EU is currently training large numbers of local troops in basic soldiering without exerting much pressure on the government in Bamako to introduce structural reforms. This is despite the fact the Malian Armed Forces (and government) have been accused of ethnic bias. This is particularly true "when it comes to relying on ethnic self-defence forces operating in the central and northern regions of the country to provide security where they cannot (or will not) operate."¹⁸² Accelerating the growth of an unrepresentative force in the context of ongoing conflicts between different ethnicities in Mali could be extremely detrimental to long-term security.¹⁸³

In Somalia, internationally delivered short-term training courses are unlikely to "lead to locally credible and legitimate governance and security institutions."¹⁸⁴ In fact, as one soldier told us, the SNA are currently "just another militia, albeit an apparently legitimate militia."¹⁸⁵ These problems are

unlikely to be addressed by more training and may even make matters worse by providing the means for the SNA to more ably exploit the local population.

Nor is military support to regional actors likely to build stability. President Barack Obama championed Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda for engaging threats in their region so that Western forces don't have to put "boots on the ground."¹⁸⁶ However, these same states have been accused of human rights violations in Somalia and in their own countries.¹⁸⁷ Oscar Mwangi (National University of Lesotho) has said that many of Kenya's "counterterrorism agencies do not adhere to the rule of law."¹⁸⁸ In particular, he argues that the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit "has been accused of engaging in religious discrimination particularly violating the fundamental rights and freedoms of Muslims in the country."¹⁸⁹ Several of these countries have financially benefited from participating in nefarious activities in the Somalia, including alleged illicit involvement in its charcoal and sugar trade.¹⁹⁰ Jonathan Fisher, of the University of Birmingham, argues that in Uganda, "Museveni's decision to intervene in Somalia is the most recent example of his regime's multipronged 'image management' strategy" which has allowed his regime to avoid sanctions "for its destabilizing regional policies, poor record on democratisation, and failure to address corruption and alleged involvement in human rights abuses in the north of the country."¹⁹¹

The impact of this could be to exacerbate instability and violence in the region. In some areas, predatory states have further alienated the civilian population and pushed them more towards extremist groups.¹⁹² In Somalia, we were told that the abuses of the SNA are "a big recruitment tool for Al Shabab because...they steal, rape, etc. Same as others, but this time in uniform, with Somali flags on it."¹⁹³ Similarly, civilian deaths caused by AMISOM and others in their fight against al-Shabaab are turning many Somalis against them.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, a decade after AMISOM first intervened, with millions of pounds invested in the military capability of the SNA, al-Shabaab remains deeply entrenched in Somalia.¹⁹⁵

During interviews in Mali we heard that "[i]njustice is actually a huge motivator among the people I've spoken to who end up joining [extremist] groups." Similarly, an International Alert study on young Fulani people in the regions of Mopti (Mali), Sahel (Burkina Faso) and Tillabéri (Niger) found "real or perceived state abuse is the number one factor behind young people's decision to join violent extremist groups."¹⁹⁶

To mitigate against some of these risks, the UK must build a meaningful dialogue with partners, ensuring that peace and stability for the whole population is a priority.

Textbox 7: Good case example: Burundi

In 2009, in the aftermath of several projects that had proven frustrating and unsuccessful for both countries, the Netherlands engaged in a new Security Sector Development (SSD) programme with the Burundian government to strengthen the latter's Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Defence, and Security Sector Governance.¹⁹⁷ In 2015, during a period of violent political unrest in Burundi, the project was phased out before the end of its original eight-year mandate.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, there are valuable lessons to be taken from the SSD process itself.

Several aspects of this SSD programme set it apart from others, particularly when it came to the relatively **significant involvement of the Burundians** which was evident from the very beginning:

- Rather than the Netherlands setting up a rigid implementation framework, the SSD worked according to **mutually agreed strategic objectives** (that were updated when appropriate), remaining flexible to address needs and challenges as they developed on the ground.¹⁹⁹
- During implementation, **joint evaluations were conducted** by the Burundian justice and security sectors as well as all other international donors on the ground to ensure that all parties involved coordinated their efforts not only on a tactical level, but also strategically.²⁰⁰
- Additionally, to ensure national ownership throughout, **Burundian officials played an increasing role in the management of the programme over time.**

Each of these steps provide useful templates for engaging local and regional actors early in programme design and throughout implementation. It is also worth noting that – while the collapse of the SSD programme in 2015 was a huge blow – the Dutch proved responsive in halting the SDD programme. Rather than continuing support for a government that no longer reflected the values the Dutch wanted to project, they **stopped funding and have since focussed their funding on supporting community-level programmes that work towards peace and reconciliation.**²⁰¹

Step 5: Fusion that works

Progress so far

“...without ensuring meaningful and inclusive local ownership ... institutions will not be accountable or responsive to the needs of the people and will, therefore, lack public trust and confidence.”

Eleanor Gordon, 2014²⁰²

To improve UK policy in the places it engages, more must be done to engage with external experts – including parliament and local, regional and international civil society.

In-country, civil society groups often have a much better knowledge of the community they represent or engage with than the state elites that the UK and its allies routinely speak to. For state and international actors, they can deepen understanding “of the local context and culture” and “give voice to often marginalized actors and [open] up the policymaking process to a wider set of perspectives.”²⁰³ As such, the OECD notes that “[g]iven the weakness of state capacity in many countries,” civil society groups are essential in helping to not just denounce bad policies but also to “make practical suggestions that will help to sustain the reform process.”²⁰⁴ For instance, from a security perspective, they are well-placed to help monitor abuses by security and defence actors; holding them to account and improving training to mitigate the risk of abuses in the future.²⁰⁵

The importance of this engagement is now widely accepted. Nearly every international assistance framework – at the UN, World Bank, OECD, and the recent Busan Principles of International Assistance and the New Deal for Fragile States – mandates the principle of “local ownership.”²⁰⁶ The UK government also recognises the importance of this. The SU’s guide to stabilisation, for example, notes “the primacy of local ownership.”

British officials have also been realistic about their own restrictions, particularly in countries where the UK does not have many officials or country-specific knowledge. There is arguably a greater role that can

be played by UK-based and international NGOs in bridging this gap. In fact, many international organisations like Transparency International, International Alert and Saferworld already run programmes focussed on peacebuilding, civil engagement and building civil society capacity – many of which run projects that receive funding from the UK government through CSSF.

More generally, these organisations – and the broader expert community – can play a role in providing expertise to help inform and develop UK strategies. Acknowledging this, the UK has long sought to improve engagement with external experts.²⁰⁷ The UK government’s Chilcot Checklist now encourages practitioners to avoid “group think” and build a “comprehensive picture of the situation” by, for instance, “inviting diverse thinking (including independent or external viewpoints).”²⁰⁸ More recently, the MoD promised to “create a Defence Policy Board of external experts, to bring fresh perspectives and challenge as the department makes policy and strategy.”²⁰⁹ Sir Mark also said that a key part of Fusion Doctrine will be “to bring in expertise from outside Whitehall.”²¹⁰

Despite the value of external expertise, the UK government has failed to systematically engage with civil society, parliament and other external experts.

Enduring problems

“... many...governments and organisations have made commitments to the principle of local ownership. Yet this has become more a rhetorical device than a guide to donor practice”

Laurie Nathan and Bernardo Arévalo De León, 2007²¹¹

Despite a greater commitment to understanding the local context, progress is often stymied by the fact the UK rarely has country experts in government posts. This is especially problematic when it comes to remote warfare, which often sees a smaller UK footprint in-country, with limited funding and more restrictive rules of engagement (at least for regular soldiers), meaning the

prospects of people being able to undertake long-term engagement with civil society is poor.²¹²

These shortcomings were reflected in our own interviews, where a member of an international NGO in Mali told us: “International militaries engaging in this space either don’t understand these local dynamics or they rewrite the narrative to fit what they want to do.”²¹³ A roundtable participant said: “We’ve been in Somalia since 2012, there is zero country-specific knowledge. Or we have the knowledge, but we’re not passing it on. Most people in-country don’t even know which programme they are working within.”²¹⁴ One soldier in Kenya said: “There is not enough content specific training materiel”, noting that some soldiers “are trained using Afghanistan lessons learned, not Africa specific.”²¹⁵ In Mali, soldiers said they received 10-15 minutes of country-specific training which was delivered by an army captain who didn’t know that much about the country.²¹⁶ British troops rotating out of Somalia said the “very generic” pre-deployment training was not sufficient for understanding the local and regional dynamics or even the political challenges of working with AMISOM and its contributing nations.²¹⁷

Nor is this just a military issue. The OECD notes that “[i]n some cases, those working on SSR at headquarters still lack sufficient in-country political knowledge – a prerequisite for successful support to SSR programmes on the ground.”²¹⁸ The Center for Strategic and International Studies (commonly known as CSIS) notes that at the United States Agency for International Development “contracting officers are often geographically removed from the specific country or regional context and are almost always over-burdened with too many projects on which to provide oversight.”²¹⁹

In the UK case, the rotation cycle in the FCO can also mean that even staff that have been in the civil service a long time lack the country specific knowledge. In fact, many of the experts we engaged with for this report spoke of engaging with British personnel (both in-country and in Whitehall) that had rotated from an unrelated country desk and were unfamiliar with the intricacies of the new country, region, theme or conflict.

Thus, achieving better policies may involve creating space for external engagement to fill in gaps in the UK’s own knowledge and check UK strategy. To do this, the UK needs to be more transparent and more willing to engage with an external audience. A 2010 RUSI Whitehall Paper notes that by failing to improve transparency over its operations, the UK government “can constrain dissemination of many lessons, starving a wider audience of the balanced assessments needed to inform debate”, it argues that in turn this can limit “the degree of independent evaluation and research.”²²⁰ Nearly a decade later, it appears that this still risks being the case.

As we have discussed elsewhere, while parliament may be the natural place for overseeing UK activity abroad, it has faced a number of barriers to doing this effectively.²²¹ As well as the continuing problems of monitoring and evaluation (discussed in Step 2), the NSC strategies remain classified in their entirety (despite government promises to release declassified versions). The Defence Committee noted in 2018 that they “considered the NSCR to be an unnecessarily ‘closed’ process which created an atmosphere in which leaks and rumours flourished and from which parliament was almost wholly excluded.”²²² The JCNSS expressed similar concerns. For instance, it quoted Lord Robertson in saying the MDP “took place inside the MoD, rather than across government, and did not seek to discover what our role should be through a genuinely inclusive consultation.”²²³ Similarly, the FAC criticised the UK government’s discussion of its so-called Africa Strategy, saying it was hard to engage with what was “effectively a bunch of bullet points.”²²⁴ Added to this, while the ISC is provided with some level of security clearance to allow it to oversee UK intelligence agencies, no other parliamentary committee has the same privileges – creating real problems for overseeing British strategy.²²⁵

These problems become even more acute when it comes to engaging with civil society. Even civil society groups delivering on UK strategy are not always well-informed of British objectives; just two of the 14 CSSF Framework Suppliers that submitted evidence to the JCNSS’s inquiry said that they felt there was more clarity over UK priorities with CSSF than under the Conflict

Pool.²²⁶ Some again felt that “their ability to understand and respond to the government’s priorities is hampered by the fact that the NSC strategies are classified.”²²⁷ This creates the strange situation where many implementers are building projects without understanding the UK’s theory of change in the regions in which they are operating.

Moreover, while the ICAI Report asked the UK government to “[i]ntroduce country or regional plans that specify how CSSF activities will contribute to [NSC] objectives”, the government stated that it would instead invest “in strengthening programme-level theories of change with clearly defined objectives and more transparency around assumptions.”²²⁸ This is unlikely to address the problem of personnel and implementers not understanding how their activities fit into the broader NSC strategy.

Beyond this, we heard from experts with experience in government and in civil society that while shared working between government departments may have improved, engagement with civil society appears to have decreased. Many former officials said that understanding the utility of civil society groups was often difficult for people in Whitehall facing tight deadlines to find a policy solution – especially when civil society groups do not have enough knowledge of the UK system to write policy.

This has led to a system where “external experts [are] consulted rarely and, when they are, asked specific questions about a region or theme rather than being engaged in a meaningful discussion.”²²⁹

In June this year during a convening of dozens of NGOs from Western and conflict-affected countries, many argued that meaningful dialogue between government and civil society was still lacking. Some stated in an article afterwards that, while consultation is better on some issues, the larger, strategic decisions seem to be made with “zero or negligible input from communities and civil society.”²³⁰ Added to this, we heard that the unreliability of funding for NGOs hindered their ability to challenge government policy. Some have argued that “few governments and foundations fund those who offer fresh perspectives and critical feedback”, preferring organisations to echo “buzzwords and priorities, or offering technical ideas on ‘best practices’.”²³¹ They felt this sometimes pushed these organisations “toward supporting donor governments’ perspectives” which served “to mute civil society criticism of prevailing security policies.”²³²

While such an approach may help finesse and improve UK activities abroad, it is less helpful in creating real improvement in policy making and strategy.

Textbox 8: Good case example: The Strategic Peacebuilding Programme

Oxford Research Group’s Strategic Peacebuilding Programme (SSP) has developed a methodology, called “Collective Strategic Thinking”, which allows for consistent broad consultation with civil society in anticipation of internationally mediated peace agreements. The programme identifies diverse and influential civil society organisations and brings these together in inclusive and balanced “strategy groups” who formulate collective group strategies with accompanying goals, scenarios, policy alternatives and stakeholder analyses. This is then fed into local, regional, national and international debates. SPP has been using this approach for over a decade to engage with intractable conflict in Israel, Palestine and, more recently, Yemen.

Convened in 2008, the Palestine Strategy Group fills an important strategic gap by functioning as an alternative venue for strategising the Palestinian decision-making process and the public discussion at large. Many of the recommendations have been fed into the highest levels of the Palestinian Authority. In 2018, SPP and its Yemeni partner, the Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, started working with local actors from two of Yemen’s key and relatively stable governorates, Hadhramaut and Marib. The project established a platform to discuss local issues, conflict scenarios and examine solutions that could be implemented at the local level as a pathway towards national level engagement/influence.

The success of this group has come from its ability to **bring together key stakeholders to project common views, concerns and solutions onto the national and international stage.**

Conclusion

“...we spoke quite a lot about the comprehensive approach...How is the Fusion Doctrine any different?”

Tom Tugendhat, 2018²³³

It will come as no surprise to those in the UK government that making Fusion Doctrine work is no small feat. Bridging departmental cultures, having a useful debate about lessons learned and meaningfully coordinating with key stakeholders within the UK and beyond are all necessary but far from easy. Yet, despite these difficulties, the UK has made important and significant strides forward in tackling these challenges and has come much closer to building coherent UK strategy. Fusion Doctrine also promises to build on and further this progress. However, as this doctrine becomes more established at home, the UK must ensure that the same principles and efforts are applied to achieving it overseas.

Certainly, many of the key drivers of success will lie with those outside of Whitehall. This could be the UK personnel on the ground who are often best placed to learn country-specific lessons or exploit opportunities to coordinate. It could be the international partners who can complement and build on UK efforts for more effective international operations and, hopefully, a more sustainable peace. It could be our partners in the region, whose willingness and capacity will inevitably decide the effectiveness and the sustainability of the projects we deliver. Or it could be the civilians in the countries the UK is engaged in who are best placed to say how they would like to be protected and whether the current strategy is going to achieve this.

Relatedly, there may be a space for local and international civil society to fill the gaps in the UK's own capacity and knowledge. However, this will require the UK to adopt a more meaningful dialogue with those tasked with feeding into UK strategies. A greater openness to exploring what the UK is trying to achieve – and a willingness to change its approach if organisations highlight flaws in the current strategy – will greatly improve

its ability to develop coherent national and international policies able to face realities on the ground.

This will be especially important in regions like the Sahel and the Horn of Africa where the UK is rarely going to be the largest, most informed or the most devoted player. In such an internationalised space, UK operations cannot be effective unless they consider the agenda, desires and activities of other regional, national and local actors – and adapt accordingly. There are already plenty of examples of the dangers of not doing so across Africa, where tactical efforts lacking broader strategy or consultation have exacerbated societal divides, creating more conflict and violence.

It is not enough that the UK can mobilise in times of crisis; it must create processes for routine fusion even when the crisis at hand is not perceived to be existential and may not automatically draw public or parliamentary attention. Light footprint, tactical efforts still have long-term, political effects. Thus, while SSR and defence engagement and remote warfare more generally may minimise the UK footprint, they are not, and have never been, risk-free methods of sending a political signal or building the UK's reputation abroad. Failure to recognise this could dent the UK's international reputation and, worse, it could lead to more instability and violence in the places that UK is attempting to build peace.

An honest and frank debate about the real risks and effects of such engagements will create better UK policies and will help it truly deliver for its partners in Africa.

Policy recommendations

In addressing these issues, we recommend a five-step approach which aims to develop a meaningful dialogue about the UK's policy on the continent with all the key stakeholders – both in the UK and abroad.

Step 1 - Fusion in Whitehall

As part of efforts to **build shared understanding between departments**, the UK should:

- Provide **additional funding and staff to the Stabilisation Unit** to increase their capacity to bring key stakeholders across different departments together in creating JACS assessments. This would allow SU staff to:
 - Improve dissemination of the JACS among Whitehall and in-country staff;
 - Bring a wider group together in their creation;
 - Promote across government and with CSSF Framework Suppliers.
- **Encourage staff in all departments (and at all levels) to work effectively when participating in cross-departmental teams** by, for instance:
 - Having this as a metric for success in promotion and after post reviews;
 - Routinely embedding UK soldiers in other departments to allow them (and members of other departments) to get used to different languages and cultures.

Additionally, when departments send personnel abroad, they should do, at least part of, their country-specific **pre-deployment training together** (potentially with the SU's assistance).

Step 2 - UK Fusion abroad

The feedback loop does not currently allow for meaningful engagement between those in Whitehall and those in-country. To address this:

1. Whitehall must provide clear and direct instructions to deployed personnel on what they are being tasked to achieve. This could include:
 - Making **JACS assessments and NSC country strategies mandatory reading** for all UK personnel before deployment;
 - In line with ICAI's original recommendation, **introducing country or regional plans** that specify how CSSF activities will contribute to NSC objectives.
2. The UK government must also **provide the remit and resources** required to these personnel so they can deliver more **united, country specific lessons** for policymakers in Whitehall. This could involve:
 - **Utilising the expertise of individuals previously deployed on operation** to feed into policy making, for instance, by ensuring that they are systematically consulted as part of joint assessments of UK activities, such as through the CSSF monitoring and evaluation process.
3. Having a **new in-country coordinator**, an individual with strategic insight to coordinate country level activity, whether a new country-level senior responsible officer position or an ambassador, could help with the undertaking of these two tasks.

Step 3 - International Fusion

Making sure this debate happens not only among British personnel, but also among **the UK's allies and partners** will be essential for the eventual success of the UK's activities. As such, the UK should:

- Adapt its approach to international relationships to focus on how to improve long-term peace and security and be realistic about **how the UK can contribute to efforts that are already being undertaken**.
- Engage with other international actors **early on in the programme development** phase to ensure that it is not duplicating the efforts of other international actors; **filling actual gaps** in the international effort; and matching UK capabilities to the weaknesses and shortfalls partners have actively identified.
- During programme implementation, ensure effective coordination with other countries on the ground, for instance, through:
 - **Regular meetings** that deliver meaningful coordination (similar to those set up by Belgian Special Forces in Niger and explored in Step 3).
 - Investing more in **language lessons** for soldiers and other deployed UK personnel and prioritising foreign language skills in promotions.

Step 4 - Fusion that sticks

Active engagement with host governments (combined with a more honest and meaningful conversation) will ensure that UK initiatives last. Consequently, the UK should:

- Involve regional partners at the **beginning of programme design** and throughout implementation. For instance, by engaging in **shared monitoring and evaluation assessments** (as laid out in the Burundi case study).
- Use established relationships with (and assistance to) host governments to push for **broader institutional change**, including:
 - Addressing destabilising and destructive behaviour among security forces.
 - Encouraging transparent and accountable political and security institutions.
- **Coordinating the conversations** between different departments and our partners – through the recommendations set out in Step 1 and 2 – to ensure that the UK as a whole gets a better sense of what different actors in-country want and need.
- A truly meaningful dialogue also requires the UK to **recognise when a host government may be exacerbating instability** and, as such, the UK should be willing to suspend or even stop support when assistance is adding to instability rather than addressing the drivers of conflict (again, as discussed in the Burundi case study).

Step 5 - Fusion that works

Engagement with civil society both in the UK and in-country must be meaningful to ensure it has a positive and lasting impact on policy change. To do this, the UK government should:

- Set aside time in working group meetings in embassies and in Whitehall **to engage with external experts and civil society**.
- **Share best practice** (both in terms of how to engage with civil society groups and some of the lessons drawn from such engagements) between different departments so the UK as a whole can improve its approach.

- Publicly **release the number of external experts and civil society groups** that each embassy and Whitehall department has engaged with.
- Deliver on its promise to **release declassified NSC country strategies** (at least in a redacted version) so that CSSF Framework Suppliers can understand the UK's own theory of change and how their own operations fit into it, and so that civil society more generally can engage with national security debates.

Parliament also has an important role to play in UK strategy making but this is often undermined by its limited access to classified material. To address this, the UK must give members of the **JCNSS the same level of security clearance as members of the ISC**, so it can truly scrutinise the UK's national security strategy.

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Remote Warfare Programme
The Green House
244-254 Cambridge Heath Road
London E2 9DA
United Kingdom

+44(0)2035596745
org@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk

<http://oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk>