



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

The Role of Soft Power and Non-Military Options in Conflict Prevention

On 5 December 2014, the House of Lords is scheduled to debate the following motion:

“that this House takes note of the role of soft power and non-military options in conflict prevention”

This Library Note provides background reading for the debate in the House of Lords on 5 December 2014 on the role of soft power and non-military options in conflict prevention. It includes information on the different conflicts taking place across the World in the 21st Century and on some of the trends that have emerged over recent years in the types of conflicts being fought. It also provides information on soft power and non-military action, using the definition of soft power developed by the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence. The Note goes on to summarise the policies of the United Nations, the European Union, the Commonwealth and the UK Government that are intended to prevent conflict. This includes information on the Government's attempts to target aid towards fragile states and its use of the Conflict Pool. It also includes a summary of parliament scrutiny of the effectiveness of the Government's current policies, and recent policy proposals from the Opposition.

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Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction 1
- 2. Conflicts in the 21st Century 1
- 3. The House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence 2
- 4. The Role of the UN in Conflict Prevention 4
- 5. The Role of the EU in Conflict Prevention..... 6
- 6. The Role of the Commonwealth in Conflict Prevention 7
- 7. The Policies of the UK Government Concerning Conflict Prevention..... 8
 - 7.1 The Government’s Use of Soft Power 8
 - 7.2 The National Security Strategy and Building Stability Overseas Strategy..... 8
 - 7.3 The UK’s Role as a Member of International Organisations..... 9
 - 7.4 The Role of UK Aid and the Conflict Pool 10
 - 7.5 Counter-terrorism Policy..... 11
- 8. Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Government’s Conflict Prevention Policies..... 12
- 9. Proposals from the Opposition Concerning the UK’s Foreign Policy Role..... 13

1. Introduction

This Library Note provides background reading for the debate in the House of Lords on 5 December 2014 on the role of soft power and non-military options in conflict prevention. It includes information on the different conflicts taking place across the World in the 21st Century and on some of the trends that have emerged over recent years in the types of conflicts being fought. It also provides information on soft power and non-military action, using the definition of soft power developed by the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence. The Note goes on to summarise the policies of the United Nations, the European Union, the Commonwealth and the UK Government that are intended to prevent conflict. This includes information on the Government's attempts to target aid towards fragile states and its use of the Conflict Pool. It also includes a summary of parliament scrutiny of the effectiveness of the Government's current policies, and recent policy proposals from the Opposition.

2. Conflicts in the 21st Century

Attempts have been made to categorise the many different types of conflict that exist in the World so that trends in the causes for political instability and violence might be identified. The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research's [Conflict Barometer 2013](#) includes details of the various conflicts that took place around the World in 2013.¹ It also provides an indication of long-term trends in the different types of conflicts that arise. As part of its methodology, the report distinguishes between three categories of conflict: low, medium and high intensity. These categories can be illustrated using examples from the *Conflict Barometer 2013*:

- Low intensity conflicts are categorised by the Heidelberg Institute as disputes and non-violent crises. The Heidelberg Institute described the disagreement between the Kosovar and Serbian governments over the succession of Kosovo as a dispute, and the disagreement between Spain and the United Kingdom over the status of Gibraltar as a non-violent crises. In 2013, there were 118 disputes and 75 non-violent crises.²
- Medium intensity conflicts includes violent crises, such as that between opposition groups and the Government in Bahrain, and between right-wing militants connected with the Golden Dawn party and left-wing militants in Greece. There were 176 violent crises in 2013.³
- High intensity conflicts would include two classes of conflict based on level of severity: 'limited war' and war.⁴ The Heidelberg Institute stated that there were 25 limited wars in 2013, such as inter-ethnic violence in Kenya and conflict between the Government and groups seeking succession in Indian held areas of Kashmir.⁵ It also reported that in 2013 there were 20 conflicts which took place that might be categorised as 'wars'. In Asia, these included wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan and in the Philippines. In Africa, wars took place in

¹ Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, [Conflict Barometer 2013](#), 2014.

² *ibid*, p 15.

³ *ibid*.

⁴ *ibid*, pp 8–9.

⁵ *ibid*, p 15.

the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. In the Americas, the conflict between the drug cartels and the government in Mexico was classed by the Heidelberg Institute as a war.

The Heidelberg Institute further observed that, since the end of the Second World War, the number of high intensity conflicts had increased constantly until 1992.⁶ In 1992, following the decline of the Soviet Union and the breakup of Yugoslavia, the number of high intensity conflicts peaked at 51. There then followed a subsequent decline in the number of high intensity conflicts. Since 1992, the number has twice peaked at 45, once in 2003 and again in 2013.

The [2014 Global Peace Index](#), published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, used a combination of 22 different indicators to measure the levels of violence and the fear of violence in different countries.⁷ The index is informed by factors such as the level of safety and security in society, the extent of domestic and international conflict, and the degree of militarisation.⁸ In the *2014 Global Peace Index*, Syria was listed as the least peaceful country in the World, followed by Afghanistan, South Sudan, Iraq and Somalia.⁹ The Institute for Economics and Peace also argued that there had been a fall in the level of global peace in 2013, primarily driven by an increase in the level of terrorist activity; an increase in the overall number of internal and external conflicts fought; an increase in the number of deaths from internal conflicts; and an increase in the number of displaced persons as a percentage of the population of different countries.¹⁰ The Institute for Economics and Peace also argued that data they had collected indicated a longer term trend for a decrease in conflicts between states, and an increase in internal conflicts.

In the seven years since the index was first published in 2008, the Institute for Economics and Peace has reported a gradual decline in the overall level of peace in the World in each successive report, with an increase in terrorist violence identified as a factor in this decline. Indeed, in its 2014 report, the Institute cited figures from the [Global Terrorism Database](#)—produced by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland—showing that the number of deaths from terrorist activity had increased globally from over 3,800 in 2002, to an estimated 17,800 in 2013.¹¹

3. The House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence

In March 2014, the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence published its report [Persuasion and Power in the Modern World](#).¹² The Committee was appointed on an 'ad hoc' basis to make recommendations on how the UK Government and non-state actors, such as businesses, might develop and improve the UK's use of soft power.¹³ For the

⁶ *ibid*, p 16.

⁷ Institute for Economics and Peace, *2014 Global Peace Index*, June 2014.

⁸ *ibid*, p 1.

⁹ *ibid*, p 6.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p 1.

¹¹ *ibid*, p 42.

¹² House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence, *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World*, 28 March 2014, HL Paper 150 of session 2013–14.

¹³ House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence, '[Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence—Call for Evidence](#)', 23 July 2013.

purposes of the inquiry, the Committee defined soft power in terms used by the American academic Professor Joseph Nye. Professor Nye has described soft power as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment”.¹⁴

The Committee’s report argued that major shifts in the conditions under which international relations are conducted had made the concept of soft power increasingly relevant.¹⁵ The rise of non-Western countries including Brazil, Russia, India and China had meant that the balance of power and influence in the World had shifted. At the same time, the assumptions on which international diplomacy had previously operated were changing, as a result of increased levels of interdependence between countries and the fragmentation of centralised power inside states. The report summarised the factors leading to those changes as follows:

Unprecedented international access to state information, the digital empowerment of individuals and groups, the growing role of global protest networks and [non-governmental organisations], the complexity of modern trade supply chains and multinational corporate operations, accelerated urbanisation, the increasing asymmetry of modern warfare, and transnational challenges are diffusing and fragmenting traditional state power, and enabling the World’s peoples and countries to be increasingly interconnected and interdependent.¹⁶

The Committee also warned that the deployment of soft power was difficult to control because it was in the nature of soft power to be less effective if its influence was forced on other countries.¹⁷ It observed too that, because it is linked to a country’s reputation, soft power is “slowly gained but quickly lost”.¹⁸ Indeed, evidence was heard that the use of hard power had in some cases undermined the soft power of the UK, such as following the UK’s involvement in counter-terror efforts in Iraq.¹⁹

Further, the Committee argued that a reliance on military force alone to resolve crises was increasingly being challenged by the “scattered and diverse” nature of modern conflict and war.²⁰ The former British Ambassador to the United Nations, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, told the Committee that the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan by Western powers in the first decade of the 21st century, and the relative helplessness of outside powers in trying to address instability in the Middle East, had provided evidence of “the importance in politics and geopolitics of the power of persuasion and the declining effect of the use of military and political compulsion”.²¹

The Committee argued there were limitations to soft power when used in isolation, describing how this weakness was illustrated in the way in which soft power alone had not been able to prevent the escalation of the civil war in Syria.²² The Committee heard evidence from the Director of the Soft Power Network, Indra Adnan, that the use of diplomatic pressure to

¹⁴ Professor Joseph S Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 2004.

¹⁵ House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World*, 28 March 2014, HL Paper 150 of session 2013–14, p 23.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p 34.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p 49.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 47.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 52.

²⁰ *ibid*, p 35.

²¹ House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World: Oral and Written Evidence—Volume 1*, 28 March 2014, HL Paper 150 of session 2013–14, pp 629–31.

²² *ibid*, p 51.

achieve the destruction by the Syrian Government of its chemical weapons showed how the many different elements of soft power could be combined to achieve a result unavailable through the use of hard power. In contrast, however, the Henry Jackson Society told the Committee that soft power had been unable to prevent the worsening conflict in Syria, despite factors such as the UK's status as the second largest donor of humanitarian aid to Syrians. *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World* recommended that the UK should seek to use soft power in combination with military power, in a way that it described as “smart power”.²³ The Committee cited the oral evidence of Professor Nye, who had argued that a combination of hard and soft power had been necessary in Syria:

Professor Nye saw an application of hard and soft power combined in “a smart power strategy: the threat of force led the Russians, as [President] Assad’s protectors, to press him to move on this, which then led to the UN resolution and the work that is being done there now”. It is hard to imagine that President Assad would have agreed to destroy the Government’s chemical weapons without any application of sanctions or threat of the use of force.²⁴

4. The Role of the UN in Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention is one of the primary objectives of the United Nations and has been recognised by the UN leadership as one of the most challenging goals to be achieved. Chapter VI of the UN Charter, ‘Pacific Settlement of Disputes’, requires parties to seek the peaceful resolution of disputes through “negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice”.²⁵

In 2001, the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, wrote that one of his priorities in the role was to move the UN “from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention”.²⁶ The ability of the UN and other international actors to prevent conflicts has been questioned following the failure to stop atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s. Indeed, Deputy Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Fred Tanner, described the 1990s as “a decade of missed opportunities for preventive action”.²⁷ In his 2001 report on the work of the UN, Secretary General Annan reflected on the failures of the international community in the previous decade:

Perhaps the most pitiful lesson of the past decade has been that the prevention of violent conflict is far better and more cost-effective than cure. The challenge is to apply that lesson so that prevention exists not just at the rhetorical level but also practically. This is easier said than done; existing problems usually take precedence over potential ones and, while the benefits of prevention lie in the future and are difficult to quantify, the costs must be paid in the present. On the other hand, the costs of not preventing violence are enormous. The human costs of war include not only the visible and immediate—death, injury, destruction, displacement—but also the distant and indirect

²³ House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, [Persuasion and Power in the Modern World](#), 28 March 2014, HL Paper 150 of session 2013–14, p 9.

²⁴ *ibid*, p 51; and House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, [Oral and Written Evidence](#), 28 March 2014, vol 2, p 753.

²⁵ United Nations, [Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice](#), 1945.

²⁶ United Nations, [Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organisation](#), 7 June 2001.

²⁷ Fred Tanner, ‘[Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution: Limits of Multilateralism](#)’, 30 September 2000, *International Review of the Red Cross*, no 839.

repercussion for families, communities, local and national institutions and economies, and neighbouring countries. They are counted not only in damage inflicted but also in opportunities lost.²⁸

In September 2011, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, published a report entitled [Preventive Diplomacy: Delivering Results](#). In this report, Mr Ban proposed that nations should pursue diplomatic action to prevent or mitigate the spread of armed conflict, and to achieve this through working in support of one another and the UN. The report referred to the work of the former UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld, who developed the concept of 'preventive diplomacy'. The UN describes preventive diplomacy as "diplomatic action taken to prevent disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of conflicts when they occur".²⁹ The UN have argued that preventive diplomacy has been used to ease tensions in Sudan, for example, to ensure the successful holding of the January 2011 independence referendum for Southern Sudan. The UN also argued that it was used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where an intervention by an envoy of the UN Secretary General in 2008 had helped to prevent the tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda from deteriorating into a regional war.

The UN has sought to pre-empt conflicts through the work of the UN Department of Political Affairs. The Department of Political Affairs advises the UN Secretary General, UN peace envoys and political missions on conflict prevention based on their monitoring of global political developments. The Department is led by the UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, who has emphasised the importance of responding to early warnings of conflicts, deploying preventative diplomacy and using mediation to resolve conflict situations.³⁰ Mr Feltman also described one of the strengths of the UN as being its perceived impartiality, arising from its universal membership. This perceived impartiality had enabled the UN to operate as an honest broker where others might not be able to.

As well as through diplomacy and monitoring the early warning signs of conflict, the UN has sought to prevent conflict through the work of the UN Development Programme, which has worked with people affected by conflicts in a number of different countries. In 2013, in Afghanistan, the UN Development Programme provided temporary work to over 50,000 conflict-affected people to repair community infrastructure.³¹ The UN Development Programme has also supported efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina to encourage the local population to hand in weapons and explosives left over from the civil conflict in the 1990s.

Perceived failures on the part of the UN to achieve conflict prevention were highlighted by Human Rights Watch in 2005. Michael Clough, writing in Human Rights Watch's *World Report 2005* criticised global leaders for dithering "in the face of a possible genocide" and for having failed to deliver on the promises made in the wake of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994:

To understand and learn from the still unfolding tragedy of Darfur, the international community must go beyond "never again" rhetoric and ask hard questions about why the UN has been unable to translate its post-Rwanda commitments into effective practice. International policymakers must confront the assumptions and interests that hobble the Security Council's ability to respond quickly and decisively to human rights

²⁸ United Nations, [Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organisation](#), 7 June 2001, p 6.

²⁹ United Nations, '[Preventive Diplomacy Report: Q&A](#)', accessed 25 November 2014.

³⁰ United Nations, '[Politics in Tough Places: UN Diplomacy in Today's Crises](#)', 13 July 2013.

³¹ United Nations Development Programme, [Crisis Prevention and Recovery](#), August 2014.

crises in Africa and elsewhere. The UN must find ways to deter potential human rights abusers and act on early warning signs to protect civilians before the death toll begins to mount. Security Council members must address the yawning gap that exists between the peacekeeping challenge that they are asking the African Union to assume in Darfur and the capacity of that nascent organisation to meet that challenge.³²

5. The Role of the EU in Conflict Prevention

Preventing conflict and promoting peace are included in articles 3(1) and 21(2) of the European Treaty:

- Article 3(1): The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.
- Article 21(2): The Union shall define and pursue common policies and actions, and shall work for a high degree of cooperation in all fields of international relations, in order to:
 - (a) safeguard its values, fundamental interests, security, independence and integrity;
 - (b) consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law;
 - (c) preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and with the aims of the Charter of Paris, including those relating to external borders;
 - (d) foster the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of developing countries, with the primary aim of eradicating poverty;
 - (e) encourage the integration of all countries into the World economy, including through the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade;
 - (f) help develop international measures to preserve and improve the quality of the environment and the sustainable management of global natural resources, in order to ensure sustainable development;
 - (g) assist populations, countries and regions confronting natural or man-made disasters; and
 - (h) promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance.³³

³² Human Rights Watch, 'Preventing Future Darfurs', January 2005, pp 1–2.

³³ Council of The European Union, [Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#), 12 November 2013.

The EU External Action Service (EEAS) was established through the 2009 Lisbon Treaty to support the work of the EU's external affairs spokesperson, the EU High Representative. The EEAS summarises the role of the EU in external affairs as being in three main areas: through its role as a trading partner, as major aid donor and as a contributor to international organisations; through mediation and diplomacy; and through its external action to prevent conflicts.³⁴ The EEAS has developed an EU Conflict Early Warning System which is intended to achieve the last of these three objectives. The EEAS describes the purpose of this early warning system as being to identify risks of violent conflict early on “in order to enable senior management to prioritise resources to manage these risks in light of EU's strategic interests and leverage”.³⁵

The House of Lords European Union Select Committee published a report on the EEAS in March 2013.³⁶ The Committee concluded that the EEAS had succeeded in achieving a comprehensive approach to EU actions in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, as well as achieving success in its negotiations with Iran, and between Serbia and Kosovo.³⁷ However, the Committee argued that the EEAS had yet to resolve all the problems arising from its establishment as a new organisation, such as achieving budget neutrality. The Committee also stated that the EEAS had not yet managed to build common ground with all the EU member states to agree a united position on issues such as trade and development.

6. The Role of the Commonwealth in Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention is one of the core objectives of the Commonwealth. Chapter 3 of the Commonwealth Charter provides a commitment to protecting international peace and security, including through its backing for international efforts for peace and disarmament, and through its support for the security, development and prosperity of member states.³⁸ One potential means through which the Commonwealth can intervene in fragile states is through the deployment of the Commonwealth Secretary General's Good Offices, a term which refers to the conflict prevention and resolution work carried out by the Commonwealth in specific Commonwealth countries. For example, Commonwealth Secretary General's Good Offices were deployed in Sri Lanka in 2013.³⁹ The Commonwealth has also stated that, between 1991 and 2012, twelve Commonwealth countries had moved from being either military-ruled or one-party states to become multi-party democracies.⁴⁰

³⁴ EEAS, '[Conflict Prevention, Peace Building and Mediation](#)', accessed 25 November 2014.

³⁵ EEAS, '[EU Conflict Early Warning System](#)', May 2014.

³⁶ European Union Select Committee, '[EU's External Action Service](#)', 19 March 2013, HL Paper 147 of session 2012–13.

³⁷ *ibid*, p 5.

³⁸ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, '[The Commonwealth Charter](#)', March 2013, Cm 8572, p 3.

³⁹ The Commonwealth, '[Commonwealth Secretary-General's Good Offices in Sri Lanka](#)', accessed 26 November 2011.

⁴⁰ The Commonwealth, '[CMAG, Good Offices and Human Rights: An Enlarging Commonwealth Role: Statement by Amitav Banerji](#)', November 2012. Further information on the role of the Commonwealth is provided in the House of Lords Library Note, '[Debate on 17 October: Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Sri Lanka](#)', 14 October 2014, LLN 2013/027.

7. The Policies of the UK Government Concerning Conflict Prevention

7.1 The Government's Use of Soft Power

In a speech in June 2013 at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in the United States, the former Foreign Secretary, William Hague, described the UK's soft power in the following terms:

We must work over the long term to persuade other nations to share our values and develop the willingness to act to defend and promote them. [...] This requires not the exercise of tough lectures and hard power but allowing our soft power—those rivers of ideas, diversity, ingenuity and knowledge—to flow freely in their direction.⁴¹

One of the objectives of the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence was to scrutinise the way in which the UK Government was deploying its soft power to meet its policy objectives, including conflict prevention. The Committee concluded that the Government needed to be clearer on which aspects of the UK's soft power it would seek to develop.⁴² It also reported that the UK Government risked neglecting some of its soft power assets. These assets included institutions such as the British Council and the UK's network of embassies, as well as areas where the UK is seen as excelling internationally, such as education, cultural activities, including sport, and the creative industries.⁴³ In its response to the report, the Government agreed with the Committee's recommendation that it should seek to gain a deeper understanding of how others saw the UK and how to maximise the UK's soft power assets.⁴⁴ The Government cited the [GREAT Britain campaign](#), to promote British industry abroad, as an example of where it had taken action to develop the UK's soft power assets.

7.2 The National Security Strategy and Building Stability Overseas Strategy

National Security Strategy

Since the 2010 general election, the Government has outlined its approach to conflict prevention as part of its [National Security Strategy](#) and its [Building Stability Overseas Strategy](#). The Government has subsequently published annual reviews on the progress of implementing the objectives of the National Security Strategy, the most recent of which is the [Annual Report on the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#) published in December 2013.

The Government's National Security Strategy includes measures intended both to protect the UK and prevent conflicts. It therefore has measures which rely on the use of a combination of

⁴¹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, '[Foreign Secretary Speech on Rejecting Decline and Renewing Western Diplomacy in the 21st Century](#)', 26 June 2013.

⁴² House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence, [Persuasion and Power in the Modern World](#), 28 March 2014, HL Paper 150 of session 2013–14, p 127.

⁴³ *ibid*, pp 58–126.

⁴⁴ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Government Response to the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence: Persuasion and Power in the Modern World](#), June 2014, Cm 8879, p 7.

soft power, as well as other non-military and military measures. In [A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy](#), the Government identified eight national security tasks.⁴⁵ These included “[tackling] at the root the causes of instability” and “[exerting] influence to exploit opportunities and manage risks”.⁴⁶ The Government also stated that one of its national security aims would be to “place much more emphasis on spotting emerging risks and dealing with them before they become crises”.⁴⁷ The Government said that it would seek to achieve this aim through the efforts of UK diplomats, development professionals and intelligence agencies. The Government has also stated that it would seek to achieve cooperation between the military and civilian agencies in its efforts to stabilise fragile states. [Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), published by the Government at the same time as the National Security Strategy, stated that the focus of the UK armed forces ought to be “on tackling risks before they escalate, and on exerting UK influence, as part of a better coordinated overall national security response”.⁴⁸ A summary of the priorities set out in the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review has been published by the House of Commons Library entitled [UK Defence and Security Policy: A New Approach?](#)⁴⁹

The strategy is monitored annually by the Joint Select Committee on the National Security Strategy. In its report [The Work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2013–14](#), published in April 2014, the Committee recommended the publication of a new National Security Strategy, to ensure that it is kept up-to-date “in a fast changing World”.⁵⁰

Building Stability Overseas Strategy

In July 2011, the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence published the [Building Stability Overseas Strategy](#), which was described by the Government as providing an “integrated cross-government strategy to address conflict issues”.⁵¹ The Government said that its priority for this strategy would be to help support stability in other countries through enabling them to develop strong and legitimate institutions. This, the Government argued, ought to be the lesson learned from the Arab Spring, where the governments of countries who had been viewed by the UK as allies were amongst those being challenged, and in some cases over-thrown, following popular uprisings.

7.3 The UK’s Role as a Member of International Organisations

Another means by which the UK Government has sought to help prevent conflicts is as a member of international organisations such as the United Nations; the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; the European Union; the G8 and G20; the World Trade Organisation; and the Commonwealth. Conflict prevention was one of the UK’s priorities for its presidency of the UN Security Council in August 2014.⁵² On 21 August 2014, the UN Security Council adopted

⁴⁵ October 2010, Cm 7953.

⁴⁶ HM Government, [A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy](#), October 2010, Cm 7953, p 3.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, pp 5–6.

⁴⁸ October 2010, Cm 7948, p 17.

⁴⁹ 21 January 2011, RPI1/10.

⁵⁰ Joint Select Committee on the National Security Strategy, [The Work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2013–14](#), 30 April 2014, HL Paper 169 and HC 1257 of session 2013–14, p 18.

⁵¹ DFID, FCO and MOD, [Building Stability Overseas Strategy](#), July 2011, p 3.

⁵² House of Commons, [UN Security Council: Written question—209566](#), 17 October 2014.

[Resolution 2171](#) on conflict prevention. This expressed the Security Council’s resolution to “enhance the effectiveness of United Nations in preventing and ending armed conflicts, their escalation, spread when they occur, and their resurgence once they end”.⁵³

7.4 The Role of UK Aid and the Conflict Pool

UK Aid

The Government has set a target for UK spending on official development assistance (ODA) of 0.7 percent of gross national income.⁵⁴ The Government has justified this level of spending on the basis that it would help to build more secure states and help those affected by conflict. The Department for International Development also committed to spending 30 percent of ODA to support fragile states and help prevent conflicts by 2014–15. In October 2014, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Tobias Ellwood, stated that the Government had achieved this target.⁵⁵

The Government’s 0.7 percent of gross national income target for aid has been debated in the House of Commons during second reading of the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Bill, a private member’s bill introduced by Michael Moore, Liberal Democrat MP for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk. The Bill would seek to secure the 0.7 percent aid target in legislation. During the second reading of the Bill, Mr Moore argued that the securing of this level of aid for the UK was necessary to help the poorest people across the World and help ensure the security of failed states.⁵⁶ However, Philip Davies, Conservative MP for Shipley, argued that the decision to freeze spending on aid at this level was not in line with the wishes of the British public, claiming:

[...] if my constituents were asked for what area it was more important to guarantee a certain level of expenditure—the NHS or overseas aid; the defence budget or overseas aid; the police budget or overseas aid; the education budget or overseas aid?—the overseas aid budget would come off second best in any head-to-head contest.⁵⁷

The Conflict Pool

The Government’s Building Stability Overseas Strategy is supported financially through the Conflict Pool. The Conflict Pool was established in 2001 and is managed jointly by Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. The Government stated in its [Building Stability Overseas Strategy](#) that the conflict pool would be used on the basis of need and in a non-politicised way, in line with UK’s international commitments.⁵⁸ The stated focus of the Conflict Pool is on conflict prevention, stabilisation and peacekeeping activities. The Government has argued that the pooling of resources across departments, including both ODA and non-ODA funds, ensured the UK could deploy money in a more flexible way. For example, the Conflict Pool can be spent across a range of different

⁵³ UN Security Council, [Resolution 2171 \(2014\)](#), 21 August 2014.

⁵⁴ Further information of the Government’s aid target is provided in the House of Commons Library Standard Note [The 0.7 percent Aid Target](#), 28 July 2014, SN03714.

⁵⁵ House of Commons, [‘Conflict Prevention: Written Question—211690’](#), 29 October 2014.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, [cols 1201–2](#).

⁵⁷ *ibid*, [col 1228](#). The House of Commons Library have published a Research Paper on this Bill entitled [International Development \(Official Development Assistance Target\) Bill \[Bill 14 of 2014–15\]](#) 10 September 2014, RP14/48.

⁵⁸ DFID, FCO and MOD, [Building Stability Overseas Strategy](#), July 2011, p 23.

types of work and at a local, national, regional and international level.⁵⁹ The Government has also argued that one of the advantages of the Conflict Pool is that it can be deployed in a way that could respond to the rapidly changing conflict situations.⁶⁰

HM Treasury announced in the 2013 spending round that the Conflict Pool would be replaced by the Conflict Stability and Security Fund from financial year 2015/16.⁶¹ The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund would have a budget of £1 billion, and would combine resources from the Conflict Pool and the Government's Peacekeeping Budget. The UK's National Security Council would set priorities for the new fund, "taking a long-term view of British interests".⁶²

Responding to a parliamentary question from Fabian Hamilton, Labour MP for Leeds North East, as to whether the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund would only be used for non-military peacebuilding efforts, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, David Lidington, stated in November 2014 that it would fund a range of interventions that would include security sector reform and peace keeping support.⁶³

The UK's aid policy is monitored by the House of Commons International Development Select Committee and by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, established in May 2011. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact reports to Parliament through the House of Commons International Development Select Committee. In 2012, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact criticised the effectiveness of the way in which the Conflict Pool was being deployed, arguing that:

[...] while the Conflict Pool has proven effective at supporting worthwhile conflict prevention initiatives and has delivered some useful results, it lacks a clear strategic framework and robust funding model.⁶⁴

The International Development Select Committee's report [The Independent Commission for Aid Impact's Performance and Annual Report 2013–14](#) recommended that DFID needed to continue to improve its aid programme management capacity, especially where contractors were implementing these programmes.⁶⁵ The Independent Commission for Aid Impact had found that, while DFID's strategies were usually strong at the individual programme level, they were weaker in respect of more complex interventions with multiple components.⁶⁶

7.5 Counter-terrorism Policy

The main focus of the Government's Prevent Strategy is to combat domestic terrorism.⁶⁷ However, the link between the threat of domestic terrorism and conflicts abroad has arguably been illustrated by the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). Although the Government has not published a figure for the number of UK citizens fighting in Syria and Iraq for ISIS, it has estimated that approximately 500 individuals from the UK have travelled to the

⁵⁹ DFID, FCO and MOD, [Conflict Pool Strategic Guidance](#), April 2013, p 6.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p 7.

⁶¹ HM Treasury, [Spending Round 2013](#), Cm 8639, June 2013, p 7.

⁶² Statement by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, on the National Security Strategy/Strategic Defence and Security Review: HC *Hansard*, 19 December 2013, [col 132WS](#).

⁶³ House of Commons, [Conflict, Stability and Security Fund: Written question—213399](#), 11 November 2014.

⁶⁴ Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [ICAI reports on the Conflict Pool and Asian Development Bank](#), 13 July 2012.

⁶⁵ HC 523 of session 2014–15, 5 September 2014, p 4.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p 9.

⁶⁷ Home Office, [Prevent Strategy](#), June 2011, Cm 8092.

region since the start of the conflict.⁶⁸ Reportedly, half of these have subsequently returned to the UK. On 26 November 2014, the Government introduced the [Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill 2014–15](#) in the House of Commons, which includes measures intended to prevent those engaged in fighting with groups such as ISIS from traveling to and from the UK.⁶⁹

In a speech to the Munich Security Conference in 2011, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, argued that terrorism needed to be combatted by European countries through domestic policy as well as foreign and defence policy, and by taking on the ideological roots of extremism.⁷⁰ The fact that terrorist groups appear to be attempting to maximise their reach by promoting their ideology across borders was considered by the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence:

In the context of shared global threats and high economic and political interdependence between states, and because military coercion alone is proving insufficient for defending nations' interests, being able to build positive international relationships and coalitions—as well as being able to export goods and services—is vital for modern nations' security and prosperity. The degree to which populations now form networks across borders gives this soft power a newly increased impact because it relies to a significant degree on popular perceptions.⁷¹

8. Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Government's Conflict Prevention Policies

In 2012, the House of Commons International Development Select Committee held an inquiry into attempts by the UK Government to improve the stability between two fragile states: the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. In its report, the Committee stated its support for the principle that 30 percent of the UK's official development assistance (ODA) should go to support fragile and conflict-affected states. However, the Committee argued that it was not clear how “expenditure [had] been allocated between states in which the UK has an obvious security interest and those in which that interest is less obvious”.⁷² The Committee recommended that Department for International Development should make this rationale explicit and also warned about the high risk in fragile states of funds not reaching their intended projects. The Committee also recommended that, because ODA funds were to be spent by departments other than DFID, the Government needed to ensure that development funds were not diverted to the UK's defence and diplomatic needs.

The Committee published a subsequent report on UK aid to Rwanda in the 2012–13 parliamentary session, following the decision by the former Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, to delay the payment of budget support to the Rwandan Government as a result of concerns over its role in the M23 rebellion in the Democratic

⁶⁸ HL *Hansard*, 17 November 2014, [cols WA 70–1](#).

⁶⁹ Further information on the powers of the Home Secretary to refuse permission for someone to enter the UK is provided in the House of Commons Library Note [‘Visa Bans’: Powers to Refuse or Revoke Immigration Permission for Reasons of Character, Conduct or Associations](#) 25 November 2014, SN07035.

⁷⁰ Prime Minister's Office, [‘PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference’](#), 5 February 2011.

⁷¹ House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence, [Persuasion and Power in the Modern World](#), 28 March 2014, HL Paper 150 of session 2013–14, p 40.

⁷² House of Commons International Development Select Committee, [The Working Effectively in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States: DRC and Rwanda](#), 5 January 2012, HC 1133 of session 2012–13, pp 3–4.

Republic of the Congo.⁷³ The UK Government updated the Committee in March 2014 on the provision of UK aid to Rwanda, and stated that the Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening, had declined to provide direct financial support to the Rwandan Government, and would instead target spending to protect the poorest groups in the country through other means, such as through non-governmental organisations.⁷⁴

In March 2012, the House of Lords Economic Affairs Select Committee published a report entitled [The Economic Impact and Effectiveness of Development Aid](#).⁷⁵ The Committee stated that “aid programmes in conflict affected or threatened fragile states are more risky and uncertain of success than in peaceful nations”.⁷⁶ The Committee argued too that the Government should not pursue an unrealistic “liberal imperialist” agenda where aid is seen as a tool for the creation of stable government, as, the Committee argued, had been the case in Afghanistan. The Committee recommended that:

[...] decisions on intervention should be carefully weighed on the basis of thorough analysis of local circumstances and realistic and proportionate assessment of what is achievable.⁷⁷

9. Proposals from the Opposition Concerning the UK’s Foreign Policy Role

Following the 2010 general election, the Labour Party commissioned a review of its foreign affairs, defence and international development policy, entitled the [Britain’s Global Role Policy Commission](#). The Commission’s report, [Britain’s Global Role](#), was published in September 2014. It stated that a Labour Government would pursue an international development policy that would seek to promote social justice and human rights, and would continue to maintain the target for 0.7 percent of gross national income for UK aid.⁷⁸ The former Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, Jim Murphy, has argued that the UK should support efforts to increase equality and a more fair distribution of power in developing countries, as well as supporting economic growth.⁷⁹

The Commission also described the Government’s Strategic Defence and Security Review as a missed opportunity, and argued that the UK should be:

[...] more strategic with [its] resources, and work effectively with international partners, in order to be able to protect Britain’s national interest and promote our values in the modern World.⁸⁰

The Commission argued that the Government’s international development policy had become increasingly reliant on the private sector for development project delivery, and that this had not been accompanied by adequate levels of transparency and accountability.⁸¹

⁷³ International Development Select Committee, [UK Aid to Rwanda](#), 30 November 2012, HC 726 of session 2012–13.

⁷⁴ International Development Select Committee, [DFID update to Rwanda Report Recommendations](#), 17 March 2014.

⁷⁵ 29 March 2012, HL Paper 278 of session 2010–12.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, pp 30–1.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Labour Party’s Britain’s Global Role Policy Commission, [Britain’s Global Role](#), September 2014, p 10.

⁷⁹ Labour Party Press Office, ‘[DFID under Labour: Development and Power—Jim Murphy Speech at the ONE Campaign](#)’, 8 April 2014.

⁸⁰ Labour Party’s Britain’s Global Role Policy Commission, [Britain’s Global Role](#), September 2014, p 6.

In a speech to the Royal United Services Institute in March 2014, the Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, Vernon Coaker, argued that the next Strategic Defence and Security Review, scheduled for autumn 2015, should be both “fiscally realistic and strategically ambitious”, arguing the previous Strategic Defence and Security Review had been “solely Treasury-led”.⁸² He also argued that the British Armed Forces should play a role in conflict prevention through the deployment non-commissioned officers to countries like Kenya, Malawi and Ghana.

⁸¹ *ibid*, p 3.

⁸² Labour Party Press Office, [‘Vernon Coaker MP, Labour’s Shadow Defence Secretary—Speech to RUSI’](#), 24 March 2014.