



2021 Integrated Review report card

In March 2021 the UK released its Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policyⁱ which sets out the government's vision for the UK's role in the world over the next decade and the action it will take to 2025.

Over the last decade, violent conflicts have surged by two-thirds globallyⁱⁱ and with this has come soaring rates of human displacement. Conflict helps criminal networks flourish, creates environments for violent extremist groups to grow, impacts trade opportunities and presents a grave threat to future generations. We know from Iraq and other contexts that hard security interventions are not enough to deliver durable security outcomes.

This report card looks at how well the Prime Minister's vision responds to this reality through commitments made around peacebuilding and conflict prevention. It scores the Integrated Review against five key indicators including: Tackling the root causes of conflict; Preventing violent extremism; The Climate and Conflict nexus; Women, Peace and Security agenda; and Pandemics and insecurity.

How these issues are addressed is fundamental to both national and global security. If the UK truly wants to strengthen security and defence at home and overseas, and be a 'force for good in the world'ⁱⁱⁱ, then addressing these issues should be central to the UK's security, defence, development and foreign policy.

Tackling the root causes of conflict

Global insecurity and conflict pose great risk to UK national security. National resilience can only be achieved by taking a global perspective and a shared security approach. Those most secure are only as safe as the most vulnerable.

Central to this is tackling the root causes of violent conflict and is what lies at the heart of Peacebuilding interventions. Understanding and addressing root causes of conflict, as opposed to responding to or suppressing violence, will result in a more durable and measurable peace impact. To date though, this has largely been treated as an add on to development and foreign policy interventions rather than placing it at the heart of foreign assistance and security policy.

The Integrated Review's Strategic Framework sets out four key priority areas for the UK, one of which is *Strengthening security and defence at home and overseas*, which has a dedicated section on conflict and stability. This focus on conflict and stability as a 'major test to global security and resilience'^{iv} is a welcome one, as is the acknowledgement of transnational challenges to global shared security and prosperity. The Integrated Review also emphasises the importance of addressing the drivers of conflict and instability such as 'grievances, political marginalisation and criminal economies'^v. Underscoring this focus is a commitment to establishing a more integrated approach to the UK's work on conflict and instability, including a focus on political approaches to conflict resolution.

The UK's commitment to addressing conflict seems to be further confirmed by the proposal to establish a new conflict centre within the FCDO, also a welcome commitment, with the potential to be utilised for a more strategic and integrated approach to conflict and instability.

However, while the Integrated Review specifies the need to address the root causes of conflict, it does not give enough space to outlining how the UK government will do this, instead leaning towards conflict resolution and other capabilities. Ultimately it underplays the importance of peacebuilding and conflict prevention relative to their role in delivering durable security outcomes for the UK.

Indeed, the Review does not actually use the term Peacebuilding nor does it reflect on how the UK's ambitions intersect with key multilateral initiatives including the UN's Sustaining Peace Agenda.

In particular, a political-level commitment to a cross-government strategy on peacebuilding and conflict prevention would have filled a key gap in the UK's strategic architecture. Such a strategy would promote a more effective approach across HMG, a better use of resources and empowered the FCDO to police adherence to that strategy in assessing, year on year, what HMG's peace impact actually looks like. The Review does not rule such a strategy out, but its absence undercuts the political coverage the FCDO will need to genuinely direct HMG efforts on conflict prevention to maximum effect.

Of particular concern is that the Review offers little clarity on how the UK's development assistance will be more effectively leveraged for peace outcomes. The UN and World Bank have indicated that there is no linear relationship between more development and more peace^{vi}. Aid for governance, education infrastructure etc needs to be deliberately designed to achieve this effect. Despite DFID's leadership on conflict in a number of spaces it was unable to sufficiently overcome this challenge. The Review does not give the new FCDO the impetus it needs to ensure that what its diplomats are saying in New York about integrated approaches aligns with what its aid arm is delivering in reality, as highlighted most recently by both the Covid and food security responses.

Leveraging the broader aid budget becomes even more important at a time of shrinking resources which has coincided with a moment in time where the majority of the world's poor now live in fragile and conflict-affected regions. A failure to address conflict will undercut the sustainability of future UK aid investments.

With gaps in the vision for tackling root causes of conflict the review gets an **AMBER** rating.

Violent Extremism

The UK's ability to address the root causes of conflict has flow-on effects for interlinked agendas. Addressing **violent extremism** is first amongst these.

Even though the war on terror has dominated security and foreign policy considerations for two decades, terrorist acts have actually increased^{vii}. ISIS has not been 'defeated', but 'displaced', growing its influence in North Africa and the Sahel.

Although the Integrated Review does commit to taking a 'robust, full spectrum approach' in its response to 'countering radicalisation and terrorism' inclusive of 'addressing the conditions that give rise to terrorism'^{viii}, more traditional counter terrorism capabilities take precedence.

The Integrated Review focuses on 'targeted military activity' and a continuation of the contribution of armed troops to the Global Coalition against Daesh in Iraq and Syria,

continued support to the government of Afghanistan and the support of French troops in the Sahel.

A 'kinetic first' approach increasingly runs counter to thinking within senior military leadership. General John Allen, who headed the global coalition against ISIS, has expressed that, without dealing with the reasons why people fight, we are doomed to fight ISIS forever. The UK's own Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Nick Carter has expressed similar sentiments related to terrorism^{ix}.

Concern about an unbalanced approach is reinforced by cuts to the source of funding needed to address underlying drivers of violent extremism – ODA, including to the regions where British troops are putting their lives on the line. This places the UK behind the EU and US in particular, the latter actually increasing support for dealing with the root causes of conflict under the 2020 Global Fragility Act. When it comes to genuinely addressing violent extremism the UK cannot play a zero-sum game between military and civilian spending.

It also brings into question how truly integrated the approach is. Overreliance by some states on securitised approaches have in some cases, exacerbated conflict. UNDP analysis^x found that the majority of those inspired to join violent extremist groups in Africa did so as a result of abuses by the state. Yet the Review is silent on the need for the UK to have a clearer strategy around and more robust conversations with, through both diplomatic and defence engagement channels, States whose own actions run counter to UK objectives.

Finally, the Review seems to take little from the Chilcot report, the MOD's follow-on guidance, 'the Good Operation' and the UK's subsequent experience in Libya in terms of applying the 'do no harm' principles it refers to elsewhere in the document, to security interventions.

The UK seems to have passed up the opportunity to be true leader in this space by striking an appropriate balance between a hard security and a root causes approach to violent extremism and for this reason it scores a **RED** rating.

Climate Change and Conflict

There is growing recognition of the intersection between climate and conflict and the complex interdependencies between factors such as climate variability, institutional fragility, resource competition and inter-group conflicts, economic and/or climate resilience, displacement, and food security. Indeed, the UK commissioned a report for the G7 entitled a New Climate for Peace in 2015.

The Review does confirm the UK's commitment to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss specifically, reaffirming its pledge to reach a net zero target by 2050. It also outlines the priority actions it will take going forward, including monetary commitments. As the host of COP26, it also highlights the need for international action on climate change, particularly emphasising that 'the UK's resilience is intertwined with global resilience'^{xi}. Noting the impact of climate change on peace and security it references the recent chairmanship of the UN Security Council's first ever high-level meeting on this nexus.

However, it falls short on outlining dedicated action on addressing the climate-security nexus. It acknowledges the effects of climate change 'as a driver of future instability and poverty'^{xii} but does not specifically outline how the UK will tackle this. In placing an emphasis on 'future' instability it overlooks the reality we are already seeing such conflict materialise, in places like Mali and Nigeria. Diminishing resources as a result of climate change are playing into existing farmer-herder conflict, that is in turn being exploited by armed groups and malign national actors.

Investment in climate adaptation and mitigation, and in research and development in green technologies as well as ensuring ODA is aligned to the Paris Agreement are very welcome commitments. However, given the strong comments made by the Prime Minister at the UNSC's high-level meeting on Climate and Security where he argued that "it is absolutely clear that climate change is a threat to our collective security and the security of our nations"^{xiii}, the Integrated Review does not go far enough in terms of a clear strategy or how the resources it is investing will also incorporate conflict considerations.

Given the pivotal role of the UK in hosting both COP26 and the G7 Summit in 2021, the Integrated Review could have marked out the UK as the global leader on climate change and insecurity.

The focus on climate change as an international priority for the UK government and the associated commitments are welcome and necessary, however the Review needed to go much further in addressing the specific climate-security nexus. For this reason, its scores an **AMBER** rating.

Women Peace and Security

The Integrated Review has been released in the year following the 20th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The Integrated Review was an opportune time for the UK to recommit to this agenda and the Gender, Peace and Security agenda more broadly. UNSCR 1325 clearly states the important role of women in preventing conflict and contributing to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. As UN Women state, the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes is essential to their success and gender-equal participation contributes to longer and lasting peace after conflict^{xiv}. Women's involvement in peacebuilding efforts can broaden the scope of peacebuilding by promoting consensus and inclusion as a key strategy, advance broader issues of social justice and build peace beyond the negotiating table^{xv}. It is therefore vital to put women and gender equality at the heart of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Alongside this, it is also essential to analyse and understand the critical role of gender and cultural norms play in either contributing to or reducing violence and conflict. Patriarchal and restrictive gender norms act as significant barriers to the effective and comprehensive implementation of the WPS agenda and block progress on the advancement of gender equality.

Over the years the UK in its rhetoric has been a supporter of this agenda. So it is not unreasonable to expect that the Integrated Review, would include a dedicated strategic focus on gender peace and security. A focus that would particularly take into account the complex and nuanced ways in which conflict and gender intersect and the adverse effect of conflict on women and girls and other minority groups as well as on men and norms of masculinity.

Yet this is glaringly absent. There is a pledge to promote gender equality and to work 'with women's rights organisations to tackle the discrimination, violence and inequality that hold women back'^{xvi} as well as a commitment to strengthening justice for survivors of CRSV and a survivor-centred approach. Girls' education is prioritized, with commitments to using ODA to ensure that 40 million more girls can access education in low and middle income countries. However, it does not reflect the complex relationship between gender equality and conflict or the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. By focusing heavily on girls' access to education it also ignores the social and cultural norms that prevent girls (and women) from meaningfully accessing and participating in educational, social and political spaces, including conflict prevention and peacebuilding. While girls' education is critical, it is not a standalone issue that can be tackled by a siloed approach to gender equality.

The UK is in danger of losing its stance as a global leader in in this space. It will be critical that any cross-government strategies that flow from the Review address this deficit.

For the reasons articulated above the Review scores a **RED** rating on Women Peace and Security.

Future Pandemics and Instability

Although much is being done globally to respond to and curb the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, future pandemics still present great risk for global security. The Integrated Review in fact, states that 'on current trends, global deaths related to antimicrobial resistance will rise from 700,000 to 20 million per year by 2050'^{xvii}. According to global health experts this predicted increase will be largely due to the encroachment of humans on the natural world.

It is critical therefore that global health security and pandemic preparedness is a top priority for the UK and all governments around the world. Central to this must be a clear understanding of how the current pandemic specifically affects fragile and conflict-prone societies, where governments' ability to manage the interlinked public health and economic crises is limited.

The Covid-19 pandemic is highlighting even more deeply the absence of functional and responsive state institutions in conflict-affected countries. This is leading to more civilian grievances that will be felt long after the pandemic is contained. It is compounding existing root causes of conflict such as political and economic exclusion, weak governance and absence of basic services, lack of trust in government and resource competition, increasing the chances of violence and making the public health response more challenging. The crisis is also disrupting the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people already living in conflict, while pre-existing conflict itself will restrict access for those seeking to respond to Covid-19. It is also affecting ongoing conflict prevention and peacebuilding work.

Continuing conflict will also undermine the effectiveness of global vaccination efforts, leaving pockets where vectors are sustained and mutate. A case in point is Pakistan where Polio eradication efforts have been consistently undercut by instability.

While the review acknowledges the need to address the drivers of conflict and the risk of future pandemics, it does not draw a connection between the two. While committing to supporting stronger health systems globally, a focus on the impacts of the current or future pandemics in fragile and conflict-affected states is lacking. As stated, we are only as secure as those most vulnerable.

For taking an unintegrated approach to the nexus between pandemics and conflict the Review scores an **AMBER** rating.

Conclusion

On some fronts the Integrated Review is saying the right things when it comes to peacebuilding. However, overall, it is underplayed relative to its centrality in delivering the durable security outcomes which the UK seeks. While there are some innovations such as the Conflict Centre and a commitment to a more joined-up approach, there is a lack of clarity around how far the Review takes the UK beyond its commitments in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review. It is also unclear how truly integrated the approach is when considering issues such as climate and pandemics, while missing opportunities to reassert leadership on issues like Women Peace and Security.

Ultimately, it will be the strategies and financial investments that flow from the Review that will be the litmus test for whether or not the UK will show true leadership when it comes to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. And the world will be watching.

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- ⁱ Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy>
- ⁱⁱ Overseas Development Institute and International Rescue Committee, SDG progress: Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind, 2018, pg. 13
- ⁱⁱⁱ Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, 2021, pg. 14
- ^{iv} Ibid, pg. 79
- ^v Ibid, pg. 79
- ^{vi} United Nations; World Bank, Pathways for peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict, 2018, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>
- ^{vii} Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index: Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism, 2017, pg. 4, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-terrorism-index-2017>
- ^{viii} Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, 2021, pg. 80
- ^{ix} <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/dynamic-security-threats-and-the-british-army-chief-of-the-general-staff-general-sir-nicholas-carter-kcb-cbe-dso-adc-gen>
- ^x United Nations; World Bank, Pathways for peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict, 2018, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>
- ^{xi} Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, 2021, pg. 87
- ^{xii} Ibid, pg. 46
- ^{xiii} PM Boris Johnson's address to the UN Security Council on Climate and Security, 23 February 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-boris-johnsons-address-to-the-un-security-council-on-climate-and-security-23-february-2021>
- ^{xiv} UN Women, The power of women peacebuilders, 28 October 2019, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/10/compilation-the-power-of-women-peacebuilders>
- ^{xv} Conciliation Resources, Women building peace, Accord Insight, 2013, https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Women_building_peace_Accord_Insight_1.pdf
- ^{xvi} Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, 2021, pg. 48
- ^{xvii} Ibid, pg. 31