

Briefing: Support for Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings

AN ANALYSIS OF THE UK'S INTEGRATED REVIEW 2023



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Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 13 March 2023, the UK government published a refreshed version of its Integrated Review: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World^[1] (IR2023). IR2023 expands upon the objectives of the 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development, and Foreign Policy^[2] (IR2021), and is described by the UK government as a comprehensive articulation of the UK's national security and international policy in the context of a world moving towards greater competition and multipolarity.^[3]

This briefing examines how IR2023 can better support Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS), while also advancing broader objectives related to global peace, security, and development. The recommendations aim to guide the UK in engaging more effectively with FCAS, building trust with local communities, enhancing governance structures, and supporting inclusive development. By adopting a more responsive approach, the UK can contribute to lasting peace and stability, while also promoting its reputation as a responsible global actor and enhancing cooperation with its international partners.

HOW DID IR2021 SUPPORT FRAGILE & CONFLICT AFFECTED SETTINGS?

IR2021 aimed to position the UK as 'keeping pace' through foreign, defence, security, and development policy post-Brexit. IR2021 recognised the links between climate change and poverty, instability, and conflict, made commitments to open societies and human rights, and acknowledged the need to prioritise conflict resolution, and tackling the drivers of instability, all of which were welcomed.^[4]

However, IR2021 indicated a change in the UK's priority countries, with a shift towards new focus areas, particularly the Indo-Pacific, and a reduced focus on countries that were fragile and impacted by conflict.^[5] This shift raised concerns that FCAS may be seen as less of a priority, particularly in light of the absence of the 50% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) earmarked for FCAS.^[6]

SHIFTING TRENDS: IR2021 - IR2023

- IR2023 is an update to the UK's national security and foreign policy priorities in response to shifting trends that will shape the international environment until 2030.
- These include shifts in the distribution of global power, inter-state competition over the nature of the international order, rapid technological change, and worsening transnational challenges.
- IR2023 was updated in order to respond to the 'current security environment where there is a growing prospect that the international security environment will further deteriorate in the coming years', with 'state threats increasing and diversifying in Europe and beyond'.
- IR2023 also states that 'transnational security challenges, such as illegal migration, Islamist terrorism, and organised crime, also pose considerable risks to the UK'.
- IR2023 also references the 'intensification of systemic competition', particularly the growing threat of authoritarian states that challenge the basic conditions for an open, stable, and peaceful international order.

UPDATED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- The four pillars in the updated strategic framework of IR2023 are: Shape the international environment, Deter, defend and compete across all domains, Address vulnerabilities through resilience, Generate strategic advantage
- The absence of a dedicated pillar for development and humanitarian assistance in IR2023 is an omission and undermines the UK's commitment to sustainable development and poverty alleviation.
- The pillar on shaping the international environment has some merit, but fails to recognise the role that a holistic approach to development assistance can play in achieving the broader goals of IR2023 and overlooks the interconnectedness of development with security, diplomacy and foreign policy.
- The UK's thematic priorities have potential to support FCAS, but challenges remain in ensuring equitable distribution of funding and resources to marginalised communities.
- The remaining three pillars raise further questions about the balance between security and development goals, the effectiveness of increased defence spending, and how resilience measures will specifically support FCAS.
- The UK aims to strengthen its integrated approach to deterrence and defence by increasing national security resources, proposing an immediate increase in defence spending to 2.5% of GDP on defence. Security measures alone cannot address the root causes of conflict and instability, and a balanced approach that accounts for both security and development goals is necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Reinstate commitments to FCAS** by allocating and clearly defining that at least 50% of FCDO funding to be spent in fragile states and regions in each year. Prioritise the effectiveness of ODA by earmarking a greater proportion of funding to work on conflict drivers. Use a needs-based approach to prioritise FCAS countries within future foreign policy.
- **Take a comprehensive approach to FCAS** by investing in early warning systems, peacebuilding initiatives, and social cohesion based on local needs and perspectives. Integrate high-level peace and conflict prevention objectives into foreign policy, development, and national security strategies to prevent or mitigate conflicts.
- **Prioritise resilience specifically in FCAS** by investing in self-reliant initiatives that address root causes of conflict, promote sustainable peace and development, and support the restoration of basic services and infrastructure.
- **Support locally-led initiatives with long-term, flexible funding**, including Women's Rights Organisations (WROs), Youth Groups, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and peacebuilders.
- **Adopt a needs-based approach** which involves understanding the unique challenges faced by affected populations and tailoring interventions to address those needs. This approach requires a whole-of-government effort, involving all relevant departments and international partners in close coordination and collaboration.
- **Prioritise tackling climate change in FCAS** by addressing its impacts and investing in Loss and Damage, climate adaptation and resilience measures.
- **Strengthen conflict sensitivity** by designing and implementing all programming in a conflict-sensitive way, understanding potential risks and impacts on conflict dynamics, and taking steps to mitigate those risks and promote positive outcomes.
- **Invest in the emergence or strengthening of healthy, inclusive, and legally secure civic spheres in FCAS** as essential components for promoting sustainable peace, development, and democracy.

REFERENCES

- [1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>
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- [3] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>
- [4] <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2021/03/what-the-integrated-review-means-for-international-development/>
- [5] <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/98/international-development-committee/news/152805/integrated-review-laden-with-contradictions-chair-makes-statement-on-the-publication-of-the-governments-integrated-review/>
- [6] <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2021/03/what-the-integrated-review-means-for-international-development>

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