



A man fixes houses in Nairobi following post-election violence.
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BUILDING STABILITY OVERSEAS STRATEGY: THE WAY FORWARD

The Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS), published in July 2011, is the UK Government's first cross-departmental policy framework for preventing violent conflict overseas. Saferworld believes the BSOS provides a strong vision for the UK's conflict prevention work, which builds on the best available evidence for what works in preventing and reducing violence and addressing fragility. While considerable progress has been made over the past year to implement this vision, it will be a significant challenge to ensure that the approach outlined in the BSOS is consistently adhered to throughout the UK's overseas engagements. This briefing highlights some successes that have been achieved so far, identifies challenges that have arisen, and makes recommendations on ways to take this strategy forward in the following areas:

- **Mainstreaming a BSOS approach throughout government.** Work is needed to ensure that the progressive vision for promoting stability outlined in the BSOS is consistently applied across the work of government departments and reflected across relevant policy areas, including work on the post-2015 development framework.
- **Increasing understanding of and buy-in to the idea of upstream conflict prevention.** Relevant officials should invest increased time and resources implementing this third 'pillar' of BSOS, encouraging those with relevant

responsibilities to adopt this vision in their work.

- **Mainstreaming a gender perspective.** UK policy and practice on gender, peace, and security must be fully linked in with work on the BSOS, ensuring that a gender perspective is mainstreamed throughout implementation.
- **Debate and scrutiny of BSOS implementation.** Further opportunities for increased debate on conflict issues and effective parliamentary and civil society scrutiny of BSOS implementation will be needed.

BOX 1 THE THREE 'PILLARS' OF BSOS

The BSOS, which is jointly owned by the Department for International Development (DFID), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and Ministry of Defence (MOD), outlines three mutually reinforcing 'pillars' of focus in addressing conflict and instability:

1. **Early warning**, to improve the UK's ability to anticipate instability and triggers of conflict.
2. **Rapid crisis prevention and response**, to improve the ability to take action to prevent a crisis or stop escalation.
3. **Investing in upstream conflict prevention**, to help build societies that are capable of managing shocks without resorting to violence.

BUILDING ON PROGRESS



Women in Bargal, Somalia, whose participation in peacebuilding is necessary for future stability.

The government has made welcome progress on some key areas of BSOS implementation,¹ including greater cross-departmental working and putting in place the structures needed to implement BSOS.

DFID, FCO, and MOD officials working on conflict issues at multiple levels of government are meeting more regularly in order to co-ordinate their work. Each of the departments has increasingly integrated a BSOS lens in their work; for example, in the MOD's commitment to shifting its focus away from short-term 'stabilisation' activities toward upstream conflict prevention, which signals a welcome commitment to BSOS objectives.

In addition, institutional structures have been set up to facilitate better cross-departmental working and provide oversight of BSOS implementation, such as the Building Stability Overseas Steering Group and Building Stability Overseas Board.² The cross-departmental Conflict Pool, which funds conflict prevention activities under the BSOS, is functioning well and findings of two recent reviews of the fund have been accepted and their recommendations are already being

implemented. Government has reported that the new conflict early warning system is working well, and the cross-departmental Joint Analysis on Conflict and Stability (JACS) methodology³ has been agreed and is already being used to conduct conflict analyses which are jointly owned by DFID, FCO, and MOD.

The move towards greater cross-departmental working, which is at the core of the BSOS, requires a significant shift in the way that DFID, FCO, and MOD interact with each other when it comes to conflict issues. The challenge of uniting three departments, each of which have their own policy objectives, organisational cultures, and ways of working, behind the single vision set out in the BSOS should not be underestimated. However, the value of the integrated approach lies in the possibility of facilitating consensus on those difficult strategic issues on which the approaches of different departments are furthest apart. Strong political leadership will be needed, and clear incentives must be provided for officials to prioritise shared BSOS objectives over individual departments' competing objectives.

NOTES

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- 1 *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*, p 5.
- 2 UK Government, *Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria*, www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/3849543/eu-arms-export.
- 3 Vince Cable MP, oral evidence given to the Committees on Arms Export Controls, 7 February 2012, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmquad/419/120207.htm.
- 4 UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, *Peace and security thematic think piece* (2012), p 3. Signatories include 60 UN agencies.
- 5 Saferworld, *Approaching post-2015 from a peace perspective* (2012), www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/699.
- 6 For the purpose of increasing understanding of upstream conflict prevention, Saferworld has produced the briefing, *Upstream Conflict Prevention: Addressing the root causes of conflict* (2012), www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/688.
- 7 UK Government, *Building Stability Overseas Strategy* (2011), www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/1/Building-stability-overseas-strategy.pdf p 26.
- 8 While the UK Government frames this agenda as 'women, peace, and security' reflecting the language of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Saferworld advocates for taking a 'gender, peace and security' approach. For more on this, see Saferworld, *Leading the way on gender, peace and security* (2011), www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/588, p 2–3.
- 9 UK Government, *UK Government National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security* (2012), www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/global-issues/womenpeacesecurity-nap, p 16.
- 10 Saferworld, *Taking international action to tackle sexual and gender-based violence* (2012), www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/686.

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- 1 For a more detailed assessment, see Saferworld, *Building Stability Overseas Strategy: challenges and opportunities* (2012), www.saferworld.org.uk/BSOSassessment.
- 2 The Building Stability Overseas (BSO) Steering Group was established shortly after the publication of the BSOS, bringing together the Directors General of DFID, FCO, and MOD to provide senior level oversight of BSOS implementation. The BSO Steering Group is complemented by the BSO Board comprised of senior officials from DFID's Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department, FCO's Multilateral Policy Directorate, and MOD's Security Policy and Operations division.
- 3 For more on this, see Saferworld, *JACS – a new approach or SCA repackaged? Saferworld submission on the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability* (2012), www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/626.

LOOKING FORWARD

While there has been considerable progress on BSOS implementation, some pressing challenges remain. The following section addresses key areas in which these challenges can be addressed to take BSOS implementation forward.

Mainstreaming a BSOS approach

While considerable progress has been made on setting up the structures needed for BSOS implementation, effort and resources must now be invested in integrating the policy elements of BSOS, such as its progressive vision of 'stability'. It is necessary to mainstream the BSOS approach and vision of stability within FCO, DFID, and MOD, among officials who are working explicitly on conflict issues, as well as those who are not. Although BSOS is jointly owned by DFID, FCO, and MOD, a truly integrated approach requires all of the government's interactions with conflict-affected and fragile states to be conflict-sensitive. This includes the activities of other departments, such as justice sector assistance delivered by the Ministry of Justice, energy co-operation managed by the Department of Energy and Climate Change, or trading relationships managed by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.

BOX 2 BSOS DEFINITION OF 'STABILITY'

"The stability we are seeking to support can be characterised in terms of political systems which are representative and legitimate, capable of managing conflict and change peacefully, and societies in which human rights and rule of law are respected, basic needs are met, security established and opportunities for social and economic development are open to all. This type of 'structural stability', which is built on the consent of the population, is resilient and flexible in the face of shocks, and can evolve over time as the context changes."¹

For example, the BSOS vision of 'structural' stability (outlined in Box 2) could facilitate an improved assessment of conflict risk in relation to UK arms transfer control. Presently, the UK and EU export licensing criteria require the government to refuse a licence for any arms transfer if there is a clear risk that it will, among other things, provoke or prolong armed conflict, be used for internal repression or external aggression, or in contravention to international human rights law or international humanitarian law.² Prior to the Arab Spring, the UK and other EU governments transferred large quantities of defence and security equipment to authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, many of which subsequently conducted campaigns of brutal oppression against peaceful protesters in their countries. The UK Government has argued that those countries were "not unstable"³ at the time when export licences were granted. In future, applying a broader, more nuanced definition of 'stability' as contained in the BSOS would improve the risk assessment process for arms transfers and bring more cohesion across UK policy.

Integrating peace post-2015

One example of where the government should seek to mainstream BSOS commitments is through discussions on the global development framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015, which are quickly gaining momentum.

It is vital that attention is drawn to the fact that no conflict-affected or fragile state has achieved, or is set to achieve, a single MDG. The UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda has argued that "violence and fragility have become the largest obstacle to the MDGs".⁴ The BSOS makes clear that preventing and reducing violent conflict is vital to achieving sustainable development. It is therefore incumbent on the UK Government to advocate for the post-2015 framework to include commitments to help prevent conflict and fragility by addressing their root causes.

With this in mind, Saferworld compared six well-known and credible peace-building frameworks and found that there is a considerable degree of agreement among them on what are the most important building blocks for peace.⁵ While they are framed in different ways, the following seven issue areas appear repeatedly across the six frameworks:

1. All social groups have access to decent livelihoods.
2. All social groups can participate in the decisions that affect society.
3. All social groups have equal access to justice.
4. All social groups have access to fair and accountable social service delivery.
5. All social groups feel secure.
6. All states are able to manage revenues and perform core functions effectively and accountably.
7. The international community is effectively addressing the external stresses that lead to conflict.

It is notable that the BSOS also identifies most of these as crucial to building peaceful, stable societies. Saferworld would strongly encourage the UK Government to advocate for the inclusion of these issue areas in the post-2015 development framework as part of the international outreach that was identified as a priority in the BSOS.

RECOMMENDATION

- **The UK Government must invest effort and resources in implementing the policy elements of BSOS, such as its progressive vision of 'stability'.**
- **The UK Government requires a plan for ensuring that engagements by departments other than DFID, FCO, and MOD in conflict-affected or fragile countries adhere to the BSOS approach.**
- **The UK Government should advocate for the inclusion of issues outlined in the BSOS in other policy areas, such as working towards the inclusion of peace-building commitments in the post-2015 global development framework.**

Upstream conflict prevention

Saferworld has strongly welcomed the emphasis given in the BSOS to preventing conflict upstream and believes this has the potential to be one of its most significant contributions to increasing the positive impacts of UK overseas engagements. Saferworld believes that the commitment to upstream conflict prevention and the progressive definition of stability represent the core policy innovations contained in the BSOS. While the government has made progress in establishing the institutional structures needed to implement BSOS, it is vital that the government now invests as much effort in implementing the policy elements of BSOS as it has in the structural elements.

Saferworld has found from research and on-going meetings that, while the term ‘upstream conflict prevention’ has gained increasing currency within government, levels of understanding of the meaning of the term vary widely within and between government departments.

BOX 3 WHAT IS UPSTREAM CONFLICT PREVENTION?

Moments of crisis are usually symptoms of long-standing tensions within or between societies. These tensions may be a result of, for example, political exclusion, lack of jobs, or inadequate or unequal access to basic services, such as security and justice, health or education. Upstream conflict prevention aims to identify and address the root causes and drivers of conflict, in order that societies have the greatest chance of becoming more cohesive, resilient, and able to manage tensions without resorting to violence.⁶

In order for BSOS implementation to be effective, it will be necessary to ensure that officials across DFID, FCO, and MOD at a minimum understand and buy into the idea of upstream conflict prevention and treat it as a priority in their work.

RECOMMENDATION

- **The government should develop a communications strategy for increasing understanding of and buy-in to the idea of upstream conflict prevention across government departments.**

Gender, peace, and security

It is welcome that the BSOS makes reference to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security and the importance of supporting women’s participation in peacebuilding.⁷ However, while the BSOS mentions commitments made in the *UK National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security (NAP)*, Saferworld believes that gender, peace, and security considerations⁸ should not be siloed in the NAP, but mainstreamed throughout the UK’s conflict prevention activities.

In this regard, it is welcome that the government has committed to consulting with civil society on ways in which women, peace, and security can be integrated into BSOS implementation.⁹ It will be a significant challenge to ensure that all government officials working on conflict issues – not just those with a gender focus in their brief – receive adequate training on gender as a matter of course, and that appropriate incentives are provided to ensure that a gender perspective is included in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of all activities. Including a gender analysis in the JACS process will be key to this, as well as ensuring that this translates into the inclusion of gender, peace, and security considerations into all joint country strategies.

Saferworld has welcomed the UK’s Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative¹⁰ and recommends that it be seen in the light of the BSOS commitment to conflict prevention. Not only is sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) a direct threat to people’s security – particularly that of women, girls, and other marginalised groups – it can also be a trigger for violent conflict. Preventing SGBV, therefore, can help to prevent further violence from breaking out. While addressing short-term triggers of conflict and protecting civilians from its worst effects are worthy goals, a new emphasis on this issue must not come at the expense of increased efforts to prevent conflict upstream by addressing its long-term structural causes. Nor must this detract resources from other important aspects of the UK’s work on gender, peace, and security, such as women’s participation in peacebuilding, on which significant progress has been made in recent years.

RECOMMENDATION

- **The government should develop a strategy for ensuring that a gender perspective is mainstreamed throughout BSOS implementation, including in conflict analysis (the JACS), country strategies, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.**



Community security discussions in Tajikistan, which can help communities to manage conflict and change peacefully.

Debate and scrutiny on BSOS

Parliamentarians and civil society have played an important role in calling for and developing the BSOS in partnership with government. Increased dialogue on implementation and scrutiny of the BSOS will be important in building on progress already made.

The government has engaged frequently with civil society organisations, including holding workshops with development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian organisations on practical challenges to BSOS implementation. Saferworld welcomes this willingness to consult with civil society. Greater engagement with academics, think tanks, and the broader development community could also bring new perspectives to this dialogue.

Ultimate responsibility for the implementation of BSOS lies with the National Security Council, on which the Secretaries of State for DFID, FCO, and MOD, as well as other relevant departments, are present. While Secretaries of State for DFID, FCO, and MOD jointly own the BSOS, on a day-to-day level ministerial responsibility for BSOS implementation lies with DFID's Minister of State for International Development, FCO's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for conflict issues, and MOD's Minister for International Security Strategy – at the time of writing, Alan

Duncan MP, Mark Simmonds MP, and Andrew Murrison MP respectively.

However, clarification of the relationship between cross-departmental structures such as the Stabilisation Unit Management Board, Building Stability Overseas Board, and Conflict Pool Secretariat would enable Parliament and civil society to engage more closely with BSOS implementation. It is therefore essential that information is made publicly available on the structures and activities involved in BSOS implementation.

In addition, while the government has engaged parliamentarians and has provided written ministerial statements to update Parliament on BSOS implementation, more opportunities for debate on the floor of both Houses of Parliament would enable more effective scrutiny and broader dialogue on conflict issues.

RECOMMENDATION

- **The government should continue to foster and seek to broaden dialogue with civil society on BSOS implementation at the UK and country levels.**
- **An organogram of structures for implementing BSOS should be made publicly available, further clarifying roles and responsibilities.**
- **More opportunities should be made for debate on conflict issues and parliamentary scrutiny of BSOS implementation.**

CONCLUSION

Welcome progress has been made on implementing the progressive vision for conflict prevention set out in the BSOS. It is now necessary to carry forward this momentum to ensure that the BSOS approach is mainstreamed across government. This should include related policy areas, such as advocating for the inclusion of peacebuilding in the post-2015 development framework and reviewing current arms transfer risk assessment in relation to 'stability'.

In addition, further implementation will require that upstream conflict prevention is increasingly understood and integrated, and that a gender perspective is mainstreamed across the UK's work on conflict prevention. The open and consultative approach by government to the practical elements of BSOS implementation is welcome, and should be further strengthened through greater opportunities for debate and scrutiny on conflict prevention activities by parliamentarians and civil society.

It is now time to build on the progress that has been made and put in the political effort needed to ensure that the BSOS vision for building a more stable environment for all is consistently adhered to throughout the UK's engagements overseas. Ultimately, the conflict prevention approach outlined in the BSOS is about improving the lives of people in communities affected by violence and instability. Parliamentarians, government, civil society, business, and development actors all have an important role to play in taking forward this progressive vision.



SAFERWORLD

PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we

believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

We are a not-for-profit organisation that works in over 20 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and Europe.

All our publications are available for download from our website. We can provide hard copies of specific publications upon request.

Diana Zhgenti of Georgian Young Lawyers Association, a Saferworld partner, speaks to media at a national event about the importance of dialogue between authorities and communities to solve local problems concerning peace and stability.

