

INFOGRAPHIC BRIEFING | OCTOBER 2021

‘Persistent Engagement’, Persistent Risk

The impact of UK security assistance on rights and peace

The UK is increasingly providing training and equipment to support other security forces to do the bulk of frontline fighting, policing and containment of perceived threats abroad. From training the Somali military to providing heavy machine guns to Kurdish forces fighting Islamic State, UK personnel and either gifted or commercially sold military equipment can be found across the world. While much of this assistance is relatively routine, some carries risks of causing harm. For instance, forces that the UK trains or arms may harm civilians or may use that support to pursue agendas at odds with UK interests. Arms provided by the UK may even end up in the hands of unauthorised recipients. These risks are arguably heightened when training or equipment is provided within fragile or conflict-affected countries.

While the character of military engagements has changed over the last two decades, mechanisms for overseeing UK security assistance have not kept up. Even when UK troops are being placed in the line of fire, much military activity is subject to little or no public or parliamentary scrutiny – especially in the case of special forces operations.

With UK security policy increasingly focused on state-based threats, ‘operations below the threshold of war’ are in vogue. The UK’s ‘persistent engagement strategy’ envisions ‘armed forces overseas more often and for longer periods of time, to train, exercise and operate alongside allies and partners across all our priority regions’. The risks of these types of engagements need to be understood to ensure the UK is contributing to peace and learning from the past.

Mechanisms do exist to manage the risks of UK security assistance:

- The Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) Guidance is a tool to address civilian harm from trained forces by identifying risks and mitigation measures.
- The Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) framework brings together UK officials to establish a ‘shared understanding’ of conflict issues and risks.
- The arms export licensing system considers arms transfers to other countries against a list of Consolidated Criteria covering the potential harms of those transfers.

Nevertheless, there is room for improvement. This briefing and infographic map set out examples of UK security assistance, what the risks are, how they are managed by the UK, how this risk management could be improved, and the key questions for understanding future UK security assistance interventions.

INSIDE

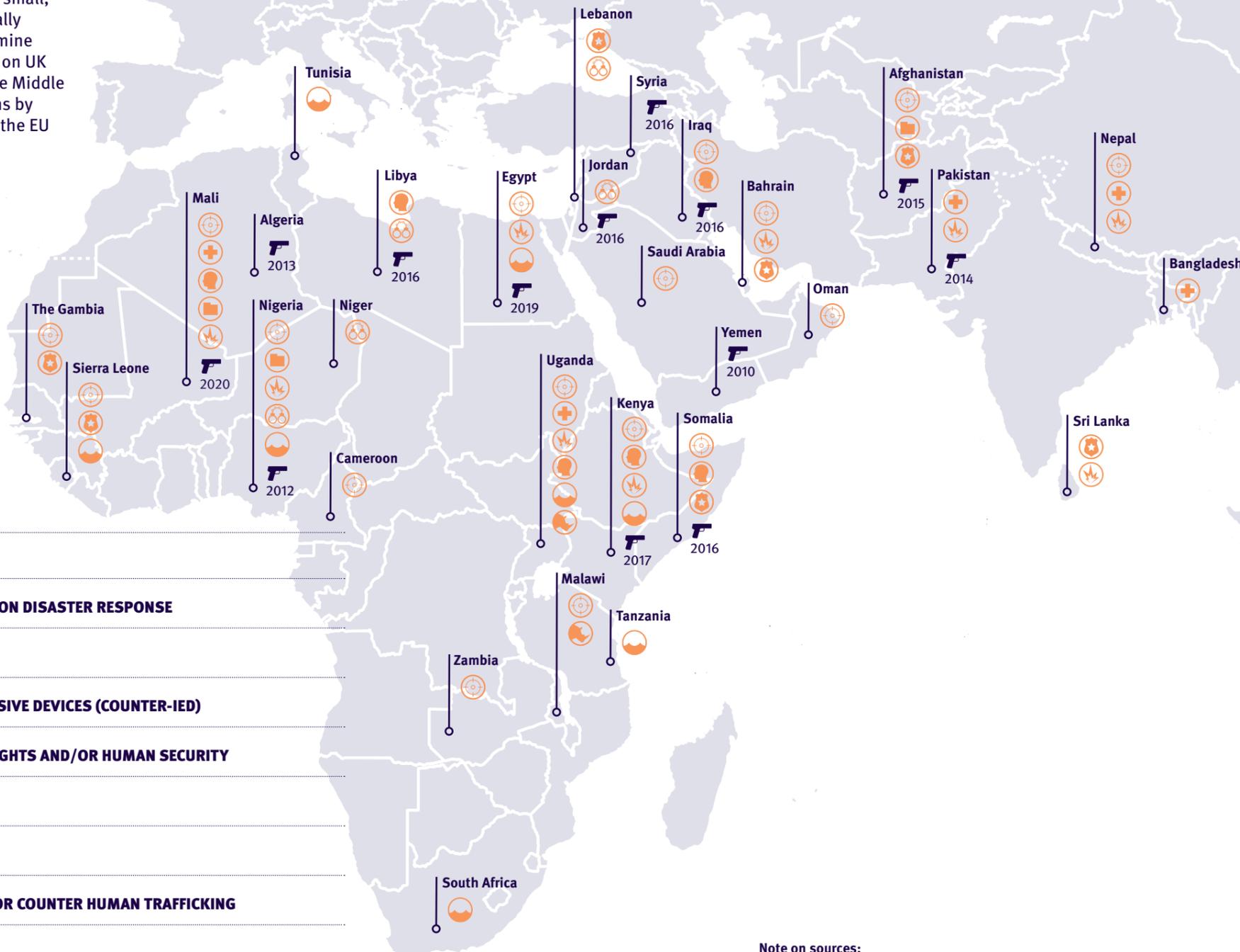
Examples of UK security assistance and its risks for overseas conflicts | [Managing the risks of UK security assistance?](#)

EXAMPLES OF UK SECURITY ASSISTANCE AND ITS RISKS FOR OVERSEAS CONFLICTS

The UK provides security assistance in many parts of the world, training security forces, transferring arms (including commercial and gifted equipment) and deploying special forces. While these deployments are small, there are a number of risks – especially in conflict affected countries. To examine these risks, this infographic focuses on UK assistance across Africa, Asia and the Middle East including as part of interventions by international organisations (such as the EU or the UN) from 2018 – 2020.

UK
This infographic just focuses on UK security assistance provided overseas in conflict affected countries or impacting conflicts. Nevertheless, the UK also hosts personnel from foreign security forces in the UK for the purposes of training, from officer courses at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and the Defence Academy to combat pilot training.

- COMBAT TRAINING**
- MEDICAL SUPPORT; EVACUATION DISASTER RESPONSE**
- INTELLIGENCE TRAINING**
- COUNTER IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES (COUNTER-IED)**
- GENDER EQUALITY; HUMAN RIGHTS AND/OR HUMAN SECURITY**
- SUPPORT TO POLICE**
- MARITIME SECURITY**
- BORDER MANAGEMENT AND/OR COUNTER HUMAN TRAFFICKING**
- COUNTER POACHING**
- MEDIA REPORTS OF SPECIAL FORCES DEPLOYMENTS OVER THE LAST DECADE ***



* Special Forces are covered by a blanket no comment policy. To track potential deployments this infographic relies on media reports. Thank you to AOAV for their advice.

EXAMPLES OF ASSOCIATED RISKS

- (IHL) VIOLATIONS**
That trained or equipped forces commit human rights and IHL violations.
- ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR**
That security assistance emboldens or legitimises authoritarian and abusive behavior by recipient states or groups.

- AGENDAS**
That assisted forces pursue agendas at odds with UK interests.
- DIVERSION**
That equipment gifted or sold could be diverted to parties other than the intended recipient.

- MANIPULATION**
That security assistance partners manipulate UK policy-making and the effective pursuit of UK interests.
- CORRUPTION**
That commercial arms sales feed into bribery and corruption in the UK and overseas.

EXPORTED MILITARY EQUIPMENT

Top 5 types of military equipment exported under a standard export licence by the UK by value since 2018.

- £4.1BN** **ML4**
Grenades, bombs, missiles, countermeasures
- £3.7BN** **ML10**
Aircraft, helicopters, drones
- £893M** **ML1**
Small arms
- £495M** **ML9**
Warships
- £495M** **ML5**
Target acquisition, weapon control and countermeasure systems

UK ARMS SALES RECIPIENTS

Top ten recipients of UK arms sold under standard export licences by total value since 2018 also listed as a priority country by the UK government for action on human rights.

- £2.2BN**
Saudi Arabia
- £163M**
Bangladesh
- £80M**
Israel
- £53M**
China
- £46M**
Afghanistan
- £38M**
Egypt
- £37M**
Bahrain
- £28M**
Pakistan
- £12M**
Iraq
- £7.8M**
Sri Lanka

Note on sources: Information compiled from open-source data, including annual reports, programme summaries, press reports, parliamentary questions, statements, UK arms export data (via Campaign Against Arms Trade) and NGO reports. Information has been cross referenced with data compiled by Peace Research Institute Oslo and builds on past work by Saferworld and Oxford Research Group.

Managing the risks of UK security assistance?

To improve the quality and impact of its security assistance in conflict settings the UK should:

- **Ensure security assistance contributes to conflict prevention and open societies** by ensuring clear objectives that help address the root causes of conflict and improve security governance, or at the very least are conflict sensitive in their approach.
- **Keep improving the consistency and quality of decision making** by tackling inconsistencies in analysis, decision making and the application of risk assessment measures, such as those used in the provision of arms and security assistance to Saudi Arabia and Egypt.
- **Assess political impacts of security interventions and consult those affected by interventions** by ensuring risk management and strategy-setting tools enquire into the likely impact on the politics and governance of a recipient country and listen to the perspectives of communities, civil society and third parties who may be affected.
- **Consider alternative approaches** such as: avoiding or halting security assistance; promoting civilian, judicial and parliamentary oversight of the security sector; supporting the role of civil society in protecting human rights; and promoting peaceful change.
- **Improve guidance given to officials on how to decide between priorities that conflict with one another** and institute proper record-keeping, regular review of these decisions, and appropriate public and parliamentary scrutiny.
- **Improve transparency and accountability** through releasing public versions of country and thematic national security strategies, explaining details of security assistance programmes – and evaluating them openly and thoroughly. Parliamentary oversight of special forces should be improved.

In each use of UK security assistance, the nature of the risks identified in this briefing will vary. To understand them – and whether the UK is effectively mitigating them – researchers, parliamentarians, journalists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) seeking to scrutinise such activities need answers to the following questions:

- **Conflict analysis (JACS)**
 - When was the last conflict analysis undertaken? Did it engage communities and civil society representatives from the recipient country?
 - What are the UK's objectives in the country or thematic national security strategy in question?
- **Overseas Security and Justice Assessments (OSJA)**
 - When was an OSJA last made? Did it engage communities and civil society representatives from the recipient country?
 - Have the potential political and governance risks within the recipient or affected societies been assessed and mitigated? Have alternative approaches such as security sector reform, promoting civilian oversight or peacebuilding been considered?
- **Post-assistance**
 - Has security assistance contributed to longer-term and sustainable peace and security?
 - Why did the security assistance end? Was assistance halted because of allegations of wrongdoing? If it wasn't halted, why, and what other adaptations to the assistance were made instead?
 - How did the UK learn and apply lessons from post-assistance evaluations?
- **For arms (in addition to specific questions on the context):**
 - Were recommendations to reject licences on the basis of the Consolidated Criteria governing arms exports made by any department at any stage of the licence application? If so, what were the reasons, have they been overruled and, if so, why?
 - Were UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) conflict or human rights advisers consulted in the licensing process?

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with 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 in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity. We are a not-for-profit organisation working in 12 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Cover photo: A British Army Paratrooper (R) instructs a Kenyan ranger during a training course against poaching and logging near Nanyuki town, some 200 km (124 miles) north of the capital Nairobi, 5 December 2013.

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