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Improving the engagement of UK armed forces overseas

Generating a sophisticated understanding of complex operating environments

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Summary

- The UK government's Integrated Review of security, defence, development and foreign policy, published in March 2021 alongside a supporting defence command paper, set a new course for UK national security and highlighted opportunities for an innovative approach to international engagement activity.
- The Integrated Review focused principally on the state threats posed by China's increasing power and by competitors – including Russia – armed with nuclear, conventional and hybrid capabilities. It also stressed the continuing risks to global security and resilience due to conflict and instability in weakened and failed states. These threats have the potential to increase poverty and inequality, violent extremism, climate degradation and the forced displacement of people, while presenting authoritarian competitors with opportunities to enhance their geopolitical influence.
- There are moral, security and economic motives to foster durable peace in conflict-prone and weakened regions through a peacebuilding approach that promotes good governance, addresses the root causes of conflict and prevents violence, while denying opportunities to state competitors. The recent withdrawal from Afghanistan serves to emphasize the complexities and potential pitfalls associated with intervention operations in complex, unstable regions. Success in the future will require the full, sustained and coordinated integration of national, allied and regional levers of power underpinned by a sophisticated understanding of the operating environment.
- The UK armed forces, with their considerable resources and global network, will contribute to this effort through 'persistent engagement'. This is a new approach to overseas operations below the threshold of conflict, designed as a pre-emptive complement to warfighting. To achieve this, the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) must develop a capability that can operate effectively in weak, unstable and complex regions prone to violent conflict and crises, not least in the regions on the eastern and southern flanks of the Euro-Atlantic area.
- The first step must be the development of a cohort of military personnel with enhanced, tailored levels of knowledge, skills and experience. Engagement roles must be filled by operators with specialist knowledge, skills and experience forged beyond the mainstream discipline of combat and warfighting. Only then will individuals develop a genuinely sophisticated understanding of complex, politically driven and sensitive operating environments and be able to infuse the design and delivery of international activities with practical wisdom and insight.

- Engagement personnel need to be equipped with:
  - An inherent understanding of the human and political dimensions of conflict, the underlying drivers such as inequality and scarcity, and the exacerbating factors such as climate change and migration;
  - A grounding in social sciences and conflict modelling in order to understand complex human terrain;
  - Regional expertise enabled by language skills, cultural intelligence and human networks;
  - Familiarity with a diverse range of partners, allies and local actors and their approaches;
  - Expertise in building partner capacity and applying defence capabilities to deliver stability and peace;
  - A grasp of emerging artificial intelligence technology as a tool to understand human terrain;
  - Reach and insight developed through 'knowledge networks' of external experts in academia, think-tanks and NGOs.
- Successful change will be dependent on strong and overt advocacy by the MOD's senior leadership and a revised set of personnel policies and procedures for this cohort's selection, education, training, career management, incentivization, sustainability and support.

01 Introduction

Persistent engagement is the MOD's new approach to overseas operations below the threshold of conflict, but specialist operators are needed rather than generalists to drive its design and delivery.

2021 marked a moment of strategic re-direction for the UK that will provide opportunities for change within UK armed forces. In March 2021, the UK government published *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (Integrated Review),[1] which set out a vision for how the UK will engage and operate across the world. A supporting defence command paper, *Defence in a Competitive Age,*[2] described what the Integrated Review means for defence. In addition, the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) supporting doctrinal publication, *The Integrated Operating Concept 2025,*[3] presented a new approach to the utility of armed force against state threats in an era of persistent competition, which underpins the government's new policy. Most recently, the British Army has published *Future Soldier*,[4] its transformation programme in response to the Integrated Review.

At the heart of *The Integrated Operating Concept 2025* is 'persistent engagement'. This is a new approach that aims to deliver an increased forward presence overseas as a way to compete with and campaign against state threats below the threshold of conflict, while generating understanding and shaping the global landscape.[5]

1 HM Government (2021), *Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, 16 March 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf.
2 Ministry of Defence (2021), *Defence in a competitive age*, 23 March 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974661/CP411_-Defence_Command_Plan.pdf.
3 Ministry of Defence (2020), *Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept*, 30 September 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/922969/20200930_-_Introducing_the_Integrated_Operating_Concept.pdf.
4 Ministry of Defence (2021), *Future Soldier: Transforming the British Army*, 25 November 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-soldier-transforming-the-british-army.
5 Ministry of Defence (2020), *Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept*, p. 15.

It will support foreign policy objectives in weakened and failed regions[6] through deterrence of state competitors, conflict resolution and prevention, pre-emption of crises, building long-term stability, and post-conflict stabilization.[7] To this end, the MOD is taking steps to create a pre-emptive capability for persistent non-combat operations as a complement to its traditional, reactive crisis role of warfighting.

To achieve this, military personnel operating in the MOD's persistent engagement network will be required to conduct a range of non-core, non-combat tasks alongside an array of unfamiliar non-military partners. This will require a more specialist rather than a generalist capability realized through revised policies and support frameworks. The recent failure of the Afghanistan campaign serves to highlight the complexities and potential pitfalls of operating in unfamiliar, politicized and complex human terrain. It also emphasized the need for international engagement activity to be underpinned by a sophisticated understanding[8] of the underlying history as well as political, economic and socio-cultural dynamics of target regions. The imperative for military personnel to be equipped with the right knowledge, skills and experience (KSE) for these tasks has never been higher.

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This paper considers how the MOD should optimize its armed forces for persistent engagement. Specifically, the paper makes recommendations on ways to professionalize its engagement capability by developing a cohort of specialist operators who can engage effectively in weakened and failed regions, equipped with expert KSE tailored to the tasks of gaining understanding, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding for long-term stability. This is an appropriate moment for engagement roles to be filled by individuals and teams with specialist KSE rather than continuing to rely on individuals with generalist, mainstream expertise grounded in the combat and warfighting disciplines.

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6 'Weakened and failed' is the term used by the UK government in the Integrated Review and defence command paper to describe states and regions that are prone to instability and conflict and from which security issues have potential to emerge. Other terms such as 'failing' and 'fragile' are also in use in academic and professional literature. All these terms, especially 'fragile', can elicit strong reactions from countries and communities that do not want to be labelled in this way. Commentators point to the inherent fragility and weakness in *all* countries including Western states with strong institutions. Agreed definitions are lacking, circumstances in each country or locale differ, and there are no common solutions. This paper uses the Integrated Review's chosen term of 'weakened and failed' to describe complex operating environments, but recognizes it is imprecise and contestable.
7 Conflict resolution, conflict prevention, stabilization and building stability are multi-faceted and overlapping activities. Common definitions are lacking among countries, supranational organizations and academia. In simplistic terms they are all responses to conflict and/or violent conflict, or the threat of it, at different points in a traditional conflict cycle, and usually either side of a crisis response itself. These activities have multiple conflicting and overlapping interpretations in terms of their objectives, tasks, actors, timing and duration, and processes. This paper does not focus on these debates and accepts that nuances over precise definitions will continue. Instead, the paper recognizes that UK armed forces will play a role in all of these tasks through persistent engagement either side of any crisis itself, as set out in the Integrated Review, and require personnel who can conduct these roles effectively.
8 Understanding is the perception and interpretation of a particular situation in order to provide the context, insight and foresight required for effective decision-making – from *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th Edition, 2011. Understanding underpins all activities of an armed force. It helps to identify the causes of conflict, the nature of crises, and supports decision-making and risk management, see MOD (2016), *Joint Doctrine Publication 04: Understanding and Decision-making*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/584177/doctrine_uk_understanding_jdp_04.pdf.

This paper starts by reviewing the character of the conflict environment in the 21st century, then analyses the approaches used by the UK, allies and supranational security organizations in weakened and failed states including the tasks of conflict prevention and building stability. It assesses the KSE needed in individuals to gain a sophisticated understanding leading to practical wisdom and insight. The paper makes recommendations on new systems for the selection, education, training, career management, incentivization and support of a new human capability for engagement roles. These recommendations run counter to the prevailing practices and culture, meaning that successful change will require strong and sustained advocacy from senior leaders.

02
The current UK MOD approach

Achieving the MOD's objectives and preventing violence will require a sophisticated understanding of unstable operating environments. However, the UK's global engagement network is not yet optimized for this task.

In support of the Integrated Review, the defence command paper and the *Integrated Operating Concept 2025* introduced persistent engagement as the MOD's approach to state and non-state security threats below the threshold of conflict. However, the concept is immature, overseas operating environments are fluid and fast-evolving, and the capabilities that sustain persistent engagement are still under development.

First, the security challenges emerging from weakened and failed regions are increasingly complex with potential to negatively impact the UK's security and trade interests as well as contribute to human suffering. Unstable environments present state competitors of the UK with opportunities to further their foreign policy agendas and provide conditions for illegitimate and violent non-state actors to flourish. For the UK and the EU, the eastern and southern flanks of the Euro-Atlantic area hold potential to generate complex security threats at a time when the US is pivoting to the Indo-Pacific, the established institutional mechanisms for keeping conflict at bay are weakening, and the coronavirus pandemic is exacerbating already complex situations.

A civilian-led comprehensive cross-government approach is needed, which coordinates resources early in the conflict cycle to generate understanding, address the root causes of conflicts, promote durable peace, prevent escalation to violence and, if necessary, manage the transition to crisis response. Success requires a balanced approach, blending the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) diplomacy and development activities with the MOD's persistent

engagement approach. Through its global network, the MOD can support FCDO by understanding and shaping environments and building capability and capacity in partners.

Second, since the Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010, the MOD has developed a non-combat 'defence engagement'[9] capability with the purpose of preventing conflict, building stability, promoting prosperity, and generating influence in support of national security objectives. It has grown and matured in the last decade, particularly the defence attaché network. However, in light of the Integrated Review's added emphasis on persistent engagement, there is now a need to review and enhance the MOD's approach to its international engagement and optimize it for a new policy era. This process must start with the development of a cohort of personnel who possess sufficiently specialist and tailored KSE to understand and decipher complex operating environments and design and implement effective MOD activity in support of wider UK objectives.

Complex security threats and human suffering in weakened and failed states

A group of academics including Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker in his famous book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature,*[10] have argued that the world is in an unprecedented era of peace, war and violence are steadily declining, and inter-state wars are less likely than ever. Others are less optimistic having used different metrics to reach an opposing conclusion:[11] violent conflicts are more numerous, last longer, and involve a broader range of more extreme non-state actors including organized criminals and jihadists.[12] Despite fewer inter-state wars, civilians suffer at the hands of repressive and exclusive states leading to political turmoil and violence.[13] The Integrated Review highlights an increase in violent conflict globally in the last decade, the majority now being civil wars, and acknowledges that conflict and instability will remain prevalent unless concerted action is taken to address underlying political, social, economic and environmental drivers.[14]

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9 Defence engagement is the term for the use of UK defence personnel and assets in situations short of combat operations to achieve influence.
10 Pinker, S. (2011), *The Better Angels Of Our Nature*, New York, NY: Viking.
11 For example, Fazal, T. and Poast, P. (2019), *War Is Not Over: What Optimists Get Wrong About Conflict*, Foreign Affairs, Nov/Dec 19, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-10-15/war-not-over; see also Kleinfeld, R. (2019), *A Path to Security for the World's Deadliest Countries*, TED Talk, https://www.ted.com/talks/rachel_kleinfeld_a_path_to_security_for_the_world_s_deadliest_countries; in which she argues for a re-understanding of violence and acknowledgment that bad governance can lead to higher rates of civilian death despite being nominally peaceful states.
12 Von Einsiedal, S., Bosetti, L., Salih, C., Wan, W. and Cockayne, J. (2017), *Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict*, UNU-CPR Occasional Paper, https://cpr.unu.edu/civil-war-trends-and-the-changing-nature-of-armed-conflict.html; for examples, see Oxford Research Group's *Sustainable Security Index*, https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/Pages/Category/sustainable-security-index; 2019 was the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom according to Freedom House (2020), 'A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy', https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy.
13 In the decade 2010 to 2019, 76 per cent of the conflict deaths recorded by Uppsala Conflict Data Programme resulted from state-based violence, see UCDP (undated), 'Conflict data', https://ucdp.uu.se/exploratory.
14 UK Government (2021), *Global Britain in a competitive age*, p. 29.

At the same time, the established institutional mechanisms for keeping conflict at bay – democracy, economic prosperity and international cooperation – are weakening and increasingly ill-suited to dealing with non-state actors.[15] Prevailing conditions in weakened countries – including inequalities, perceptions of injustice, lack of opportunity, stalled development, unrepresentative and predatory leadership with little or no political legitimacy, weak state institutions, a politicized security sector, and illicit financial flows – create a toxic mix of spoilers that fuel violent conflict with insufficient capacity to stop it.[16] Climate and demographic change and the forces of globalization are now adding macro-level stress to already fragile countries and exacerbating the drivers of violence, increasingly shaping the security narrative.[17] Meanwhile, the coronavirus pandemic has exposed and accelerated these trends, made fragile regions even more fragile,[18] increased the prevalence of hard security solutions for political problems,[19] and made the world more vulnerable to international conflict.[20] The upshot is that conflict, violence and fragility remain major obstacles in reaching the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.[21]

The established institutional mechanisms for keeping conflict at bay are weakening and increasingly ill-suited to dealing with non-state actors.

Weakened and failed states are also ideal arenas for major state competitors to leverage hybrid warfare tools and conduct destabilization activities to advance their geopolitical interests. Addressing the root causes of instability and violence in these regions can therefore have multiple effects, such as countering state, security and economic threats,[22] and reducing human suffering.

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15 Kampf, D. (2020), 'How COVID-19 Could Increase the Risk of War', World Politics Review, 16 June 2020, https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28843/how-covid-19-could-increase-the-risk-of-war.
16 Born, H., Reimers, D., Csordas, V., Robinson, A. and Arvaston, C. (2020), *At The Interface Of Security And Development: Addressing Fragility Through Good Governance Of The Security Sector*, Saudi Arabia 2020 Think, Task Force 5, p. 3, https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library/Policy-and-Research-Papers/At-the-Interface-of-Security-And-Development-Addressing-Fragility-Through-Good-Governance-Of-The-Security-Sector.
17 For example, Schröder, P. and Evans, T. (2021), 'Building global climate security', Chatham House Expert Comment, 29 September 2021, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/09/building-global-climate-security.
18 *Economist* (2020), 'Covid-19 raises the risks of violent conflict', 18 June 2020, https://www.economist.com/international/2020/06/18/covid-19-raises-the-risks-of-violent-conflict.
19 Watson, A. (2020), 'Planning for the World After COVID-19: Assessing the Domestic and International Drivers of Conflict', 23 April 2020, https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/927-planning-for-the-world-after-covid-19-assessing-the-domestic-and-international-drivers-of-conflict.
20 Ibid.
21 Born, Reimers, Csordas, Robinson and Arvaston (2020), *At The Interface Of Security And Development: Addressing Fragility Through Good Governance Of The Security Sector,* p. 3.
22 Dalton, M. (2020), *Partners, Not Proxies: Capacity Building in Hybrid Warfare*, CSIS Brief, https://www.csis.org/analysis/partners-not-proxies-capacity-building-hybrid-warfare.

The character of conflict continues to evolve

There are numerous theories to conceptualize contemporary conflict and the shift in its character since the end of the Cold War including 'war among people', 'hybrid war', 'irregular warfare', 'privatized war' and 'new wars'.[23] It is worth dwelling on the most prominent of these to identify key themes.

Mary Kaldor championed new wars as a framework for understanding and distinguishing contemporary violent conflicts in unstable regions where she identified a transformation in the character of the actors, goals, methods and means of finance in conflict.[24] New wars are globalized and regionalized and fought by networks of state and non-state actors rather than regular state armed forces.[25] They fight in the name of identity rather than for geopolitical interests or ideologies. There is no victor and no conclusion, and conflicts persist and spread because the actors waging violence are gaining politically and economically. Kaldor advocates a response that attempts to undermine the dominant logic of 'political marketplaces' and 'identity politics', which in her view are the primary drivers of violence, and instead focus on nurturing local-level 'civicness' and fostering vibrant contracts between the authority and the citizen.[26] Her theory is increasingly supported by evidence of effective locally-led conflict prevention cases.[27]

Rupert Smith, in his 2006 book *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World,*[28] complements Kaldor's thinking with his identification of a paradigm shift away from 'industrial warfare' to 'war amongst the people' i.e. persistent, intrastate conflict between parties within a population or operating among it. The root causes and objectives of conflicts today lie in the grievances and confrontations of individuals and societies, usually political, rather than the harder absolutes of interstate industrial war. Tensions continuously simmer along political, socio-cultural and economic fault lines that fluctuate between periods of non-violent confrontation and violent conflict waged by a range of state and non-state actors. Traditional hard combat power optimized for an interstate 'trial of strength' cannot be effective in these human-based clashes of politics and will. Instead, new capabilities are needed that decipher and understand the human elements of a conflict and offer solutions focused on people in order to prevent, manage and when necessary win conflicts.[29]

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23 As categorized by: Hables Gray, C. (1997), *Post-modern war: The new politics of conflict*, London: Routledge; Hoffman, F. (2007), *Conflict in the 21st century; The rise of hybrid wars*, Arlington: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies; Kaldor, M. (2012), *New and old wars: Organised violence in a global era*, 3rd edition, Cambridge: Polity Press; Munkler, H. (2005), *The new wars,* Cambridge: Polity Press; Smith, R. (2005), *The Utility of Force*, London: Alfred A. Knopf; Snow, D. (1996), *Uncivil wars: International security and the new internal conflicts*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner; Van Creveld, M. (1991), *The transformation of war*, New York: The Free Press. As listed in Kaldor, M. (2013), 'In Defence Of New Wars', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(1): p. 4, https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.at/#r21.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Kaldor, M. and Radice, H. (2020), 'Rethinking UK policy towards conflict: evidence from comparative research on the drivers of conflict', *LSE British Politics and Policy* blog, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/rethinking-uk-policy-towards-conflict.
27 For example, the Better Evidence Project (https://carterschool.gmu.edu/research-impact/programs-and-projects/better-evidence-project) has documented cases of successful locally led efforts to stop violent conflict since 1990. Peace Insight (https://www.peaceinsight.org/en) is an online platform for local analysis, insight and mapping of conflict prevention and peacebuilding around the world, which also highlights local initiatives and organizations.
28 Smith, R. (2006), *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, Penguin.
29 Brown, D., Murray, D., Riemann, M., Rossi, N. and Smith, M. A. (eds) (2019), *War Amongst The People: Critical Assessments*, Howgate Publishing Limited.

In his 1990 book, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases,*[30] Edward Azar argued that the sources of conflict in underdeveloped parts of the world lie predominantly within and across rather than between states. Like Kaldor, he identified multiple causal factors in violence and emphasized that goals, actors and targets constantly evolve and conflicts have no clear start or end. Key preconditions for violence include the mix of racial, religious, political and cultural identity groups; deprivation of human needs; weak state governance characterized by 'incompetent, parochial, fragile and authoritarian governments that fail to satisfy basic human needs';[31] and international linkages – both political–economic and political–military – exacerbated by the porosity of a state's borders.

Azar's ideas have been extended by contemporary academics into an interpretative framework labelled 'transnational conflict'.[32] Its hallmark is that global drivers of conflict are linked almost instantaneously to local sites of confrontation via transnational connectors – flows of people, capital, weapons, criminal networks, money and ideas. Ramsbotham et al. advocate a pluralistic approach to conflict analysis that focuses more broadly on global, regional, local, state, identity group and elite/individual levels, while employing a range of social science tools from anthropology, psychology, politics and international relations.

The theories of Kaldor, Smith and Azar are not without criticism.[33] However, their thinking on contemporary conflict provides a conceptual and analytical prism through which fast-evolving conflicts in unstable regions and their dynamics can be interpreted and more easily understood. They also offer insights for the MOD on how to conceptualize and design its approach to persistent engagement and optimize its support to the UK's wider conflict prevention, stabilization, and peacebuilding initiatives.

Shifting to the left of the conflict curve

The concept of preventing violence is neither new nor radical. It was a dominant theme at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 where preventive frameworks and measures were introduced for the first time. It remains a central component of the Charter of the United Nations, the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and its 2005 Responsibility to Protect principle focused on safeguarding populations by preventing genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes

30 Azar, E. (1990), *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*, Dartmouth.
31 Ibid., p. 10.
32 Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T. and Miall, H. (2016), *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*, Cambridge: Polity, 4th Edition, p. 121.
33 For example, Stathys Kalyvas argues that understanding New Wars only came from misunderstanding old wars, see Kalyvas, S. (2002), '"New" and "Old" Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?', *World Politics*, 54(1): pp. 99–118, https://www.ncl.ac.uk/media/wwwnclacuk/schoolofhistoryclassicsandarchaeology/Kalyvas%20New%20and%20Old%20Civil%20Wars.pdf; Rob Johnson argues that previously proclaimed paradigm shifts have not always lived up to expectations; Colin Gray cautioned against dismissing the utility of conventional force when we cannot know what the 21st century will bring; Alex Waterman argues that a focus on 'people' risks missing the often-overlooked socio-political nuances behind a conflict and he advocates a reconceptualization of 'war amongst peoples'; and Edward Newman has criticized the idea of 'novelty' regarding the elements of Smith's paradigm. Summarized in Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2016), *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*.

against humanity.[34] The World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UN and others give priority to addressing fragility and the drivers of violent conflict.[35] As a prime example, the 2018 joint initiative by the World Bank and the UN – Pathways for Peace[36] – builds on 30 years of evolutionary developments in conflict prevention[37] and makes the case for the attention of the international community to shift away from crisis response and reconstruction towards preventing conflict through an early, sustainable, inclusive and collective approach.[38]

In 2019, the US passed the Global Fragility Act,[39] which was followed in 2020 by the supporting Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability.[40] This legislates a pan-government approach to addressing inherent problems in fragile, conflict-prone states early, with a focus on states where weakness or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland.[41] Commentators regard this as a good opportunity to re-shape how the US approaches violent conflict prevention and migration and to balance the reactive foreign policy approaches of the previous decades.[42]

The recent intensified focus on early action in a conflict curve is perhaps understandable. Traditional responses to violent conflict have proven unreliable and the risk of failure high.

The recent intensified focus on early action in a conflict curve is perhaps understandable. Traditional responses to violent conflict have proven unreliable and the risk of failure high: military intervention may exacerbate violence, top-down political diplomacy potentially entrenches the power structures inherent to the original problem, and humanitarian assistance can fuel the political

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34 United Nations General Assembly (2005), *Resolution 60/1: 2005 World Summit Outcome*, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_60_1.pdf.
35 Yayboke, E., Pforzheimer, A. and Staguhn, J. (2021), *A Policymaker's Guide to the Global Fragility Act*, CSIS Briefs, https://www.csis.org/analysis/policymakers-guide-global-fragility-act.
36 United Nations and World Bank (2018), *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org.
37 UN (1992), 'Agenda for Peace', https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/A_47_277.pdf, which introduced the concepts of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peacebuilding; UN (2001), 'SECRETARY-GENERAL, REPORTING INITIATIVE ON PREVENTION OF ARMED CONFLICT, NOTES TREND TOWARDS DISCORD WITHIN STATES', https://www.un.org/press/en/2001/sgsm7874.doc.htm; UN (2006), 'Progress report on the prevention of armed conflict : report of the Secretary-General', https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/581457?ln=en; and in 2014, the Security Council passed its first resolution explicitly on conflict prevention (S/RES/2150), UN (2014), 'Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2150 (2014), Security Council Calls for Recommitment to Fight against Genocide', https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11356.doc.htm.
38 United Nations (undated), 'Sustainable Development Goals: The 17 Goals', https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300. Goal 16: to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
39 US Congress (2019), *Global Fragility Act of 2019*, S.727, https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/727#:~:text=The%20President%20shall%20report%20to,prevent%20extremism%20and%20violent%20conflict.
40 US government (2020), *United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/us-strategy-to-prevent-conflict-and-promote-stability.pdf.
41 Ibid.
42 Yayboke, Pforzheimer, and Staguhn (2021), *A Policymaker's Guide to the Global Fragility Act*.

economy of the conflict.[43] There are also moral, security and economic benefits to preventing violent conflict and avoiding costly, prolonged resolutions through crisis response. Human suffering is more likely to be lower in a stable, well-governed state, which is progressing towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.[44] Stability can help deny opportunities for major state competitors to exploit situations for geopolitical advantage (although there remain risks in propping up undemocratic allies merely to achieve higher strategic ends as seen in the Cold War). A stable state can also reduce the likelihood and severity of threats emerging that negatively impact UK and European national security. From a financial perspective, a stable, non-violent state is also cheaper for the global community. A 2017 UN report estimated that, for every $1 spent on prevention, there is potential to save $16 in conflict costs, with potential total savings estimated between $5 billion and $70 billion a year.[45]

Despite this, the interests and behaviours of the UN's member states are regularly at odds with this logic. Members have a tendency to support reactive crisis management at the point when risk has become most apparent and most concentrated, explicable by the fact that the issues are tangible, pressing and their impact is easier to measure.[46] The consequence is that future-looking, long-term and potentially slow-moving preventative solutions are disproportionately lacking and under-resourced.[47] Resources allocated to longer-term prevention initiatives represent only a fraction of those spent on crisis response and reconstruction.[48] The economic and human incentives for adopting the alternative approach are compelling.[49]

The *Pathways for Peace* report among others is attempting to change this behaviour by promoting a preventive framework for steering weak and unstable societies along a 'unique pathway' towards peace. It incentivizes viable, coordinated and sustained action to prevent violence. Importantly, it also aims to replace the trend of episodic bursts of activity at flash points in the conflict cycle with more consistent, committed and long-term approaches. This way of thinking is important in shaping the UK's future approach to its international engagement activities and driving development of the MOD's future capabilities.

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43 LSE Conflict Research Programme (2020), *Evidence from the Conflict Research Programme: Submission to the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, p. 4, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/106522/3/Integrated_Review_evidence_from_the_CRP.PDF.
44 Although it must be acknowledged that moral considerations may not always drive the UK's strategic decision-making.
45 United Nations and World Bank (2018), *Pathways for Peace*, p. xix.
46 Bressan, S. (2020), 'What's Left of the Failed States Debate? Putting Five Hypotheses to the Test', GPPi Commentary, https://www.gppi.net/2020/05/13/whats-left-of-the-failed-states-debate.
47 United Nations (2017), *Can the Security Council Prevent Conflict*, Security Council Report, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/research-reports/can-the-security-council-prevent-conflict.php.
48 Ibid., p. VXII.
49 For example, it has been assessed that adopting prevention strategies in about five countries each year would prevent about $34 billion in losses per year, at a cost of $2.1 billion in the initial years after adoption. In addition, the donor community would save close to $1.2 billion each year from spending less on aid and peacekeeping, taken from Mueller, H. (2018), 'The Business Case for Prevention', World Bank blog, https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/business-case-prevention.

Preventing violent conflict by building long-term stability

The UK has retained a strong conceptual foundation for, and considerable practical experience in, preventing conflict and building stability over the last decade. However, commentators are now calling for the UK government to build on this legacy through publication of a comprehensive, pan-government sub-strategy or strategic framework for tackling conflict akin to the activity spawned by the US Global Fragility Act.[50] The creation of the conflict centre in the FCDO will help to push forward this objective.

Policy foundations were laid in the UK's Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010[51] in which the concept of early, upstream activity to address the root causes of conflicts emerged.[52] The tri-departmental Building Stability Overseas Strategy[53] coordinated the long-term, whole-of-government approach to building stability and preventing conflict in fragile states by drawing on all diplomatic, development, military and security tools. This recognized that ineffective governance and accountability, low integrity in security and justice institutions, and poor legitimacy directly trigger and fuel violent conflict and open up power vacuums to be filled by malevolent non-state actors (who admittedly can sometimes provide legitimate, effective governance) and to be destabilized by authoritarian regimes.[54] In contrast, strong, fair and legitimate institutions, including sometimes those operated by non-state actors, have potential to act as an immune system in societies by promoting resilience to ward off illness through quick, targeted responses to emerging pathogens.[55]

The Department for International Development's (DFID) *Building Stability Framework,*[56] the Stabilisation Unit's *Stabilisation Guidance,*[57] and the MOD's

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50 For example: Ferguson, K. (2021), 'A response to the Integrated Review', The Foreign Policy Centre, https://fpc.org.uk/a-response-to-the-integrated-review; Saferworld (2021), 'The UK Integrated Review: The gap between the Review and reality on conflict prevention', Comment and Analysis, https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/952-the-uk-integrated-review-the-gap-between-the-review-and-reality-on-conflict-prevention; Attree, L., Dumasy, T. and Egan, J. (2021), 'Ensuring the UK's new conflict framework successfully promotes peace', The Foreign Policy Centre, https://fpc.org.uk/ensuring-the-uks-new-conflict-framework-successfully-promotes-peace; Mangnall, A. and Ali, R. (2021), 'Fighting for an end to conflict will help save lives and the planet', *The Times*, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fighting-for-an-end-to-conflict-will-help-save-lives-and-the-planet-s2fbsssf6.
51 UK government (2010), *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf.
52 DFID, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Ministry of Defence (MOD) (2010), *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67475/Building-stability-overseas-strategy.pdf. The concept was reiterated in the National Security Strategy 2015 (NSS) and SDSR 15. DFID was merged with the FCO to create the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in 2020.
53 DFID, FCO, MOD (2011), *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-stability-overseas-strategy.
54 Burian, A. (2018), 'SSR and Conflict Prevention', ISSAT Blog, https://issat.dcaf.ch/Share/Blogs/ISSAT-Blog/SSR-and-Conflict-Prevention.
55 United Nations and World Bank (2018), *Pathways for Peace*, p. 80, referencing World Bank (2011), *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, Washington DC: World Bank.
56 DFID (2016), *Building Stability Framework*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5968990ded915d0baf00019e/UK-Aid-Connect-Stability-Framework.pdf.
57 Stabilisation Unit (2019), *The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784001/The_UK_Government_s_Approach_to_Stabilisation_A_guide_for_policy_makers_and_practitioners.pdf.

complementary policy on human security in military operations (JSP 1325)[58] have since been added to the stable of UK doctrine in this area. The introduction of Fusion Doctrine in 2018 has the potential to facilitate coordination of all this activity more effectively towards singular national security priorities including early conflict prevention, but to date views on its efficacy to do so are mixed.[59]

Any new conflict strategy must, however, recognize the perils of generalizing approaches to fragility and instability.[60] No two countries' circumstances are the same and no common solution exists either in policy or in practice. Equally, despite popular sentiments, it is not inevitable that conflict in weakened and failed states will lead to violence given that some states possess sufficient resilience to contain clashes.[61] The assumption that good state governance is an essential pre-condition for stability, and vice versa, is at times contradicted by the reality that political and developmental outcomes are often determined by an underlying, hidden political settlement rather than the state's formal institutions themselves. Recognizing this reality, the FCDO's 'elite bargains' policy[62] highlights how internationally-led conflict prevention and resolution initiatives need to carefully consider in-country dynamics including the informal ways through which resources are allocated, decisions are made, and people are given power.

For the MOD, the good news is that a great deal of conceptual thinking on conflict prevention and peacebuilding was conducted by a UK-led Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC) project in 2013–17, culminating in publication of the military handbook *Understand to Prevent*.[63] This sought to re-balance the traditional focus on national security through warfighting and crisis response with a complementary focus on human security and prevention of violent conflict. Such an approach has produced examples of best practice elsewhere, for example the Dutch Conflict Prevention Unit[64] and the US Security Governance Initiative.[65] In this way, there is now potential for the MOD to play a supporting role to the UK government similar to that being adopted by the US Department of Defense following the US Global Fragility Act and the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. *Understand to Prevent* offers a method to interpret complex environments, foster relationships, support security for diplomatic and development efforts, and build the capacity of foreign security

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58 Ministry of Defence (2019), *Human Security in Military Operations*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-security-in-military-operations-jsp-1325.
59 Fusion Doctrine, introduced in 2018, is an evolutionary addition to UK government's efforts to orchestrate national security capabilities, from economic levers and military resources to wider diplomatic and cultural influence. It presents an opportunity to coordinate Building Stability Overseas Strategy activity more coherently, although some commentators argue there is little evidence for this yet. For example, see Lawson, E. (2020), *The UN and Peacekeeping in the UK's Integrated Review*, https://rusi.org/commentary/un-and-peacekeeping-uk.
60 Bressan (2020), 'What's Left of the Failed States Debate? Putting Five Hypotheses to the Test'.
61 Putzel, J. and Di John, J. (2012), *Meeting the Challenges of Crisis States*, Crisis States Research Centre report, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08aa5ed915d622c000835/Meeting-the-Challenges-of-Crisis-States.pdf.
62 Stabilisation Unit (2018), *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Briefing Paper*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elite-bargains-and-political-deals.
63 Multinational Capability Development Campaign (2017), *Understand to Prevent: The Military Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Conflict*, MCDC joint project, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understand-to-prevent-the-military-contribution-to-the-prevention-of-violent-conflict.
64 The Dutch Conflict Prevention Unit sits within the Dutch Ministry of Defence and coordinates across government departments.
65 The US Security Governance Initiative, launched in 2014, is a partnership with six African nations that offers a comprehensive approach to improving security sector governance and capacity to address threats of conflict and insecurity, see US government (2014), 'Fact sheet: Security Governance Initiative', press release, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/06/fact-sheet-security-governance-initiative.

forces. As an easy first step in doing so, and in light of the renewed emphasis on persistent engagement in the Integrated Review, the MOD must invigorate its prevent doctrine.

The MOD already possesses an engagement capability through its global network

Britain has a long history in the use of non-combat military power overseas to achieve national ends.[66] In the 20th century its use was widespread, diverse and a primary way in which the MOD supported national objectives through the mediums of shared intelligence, technology exchanges, training of indigenous troops, exchange officers and military attachés, and covert influence operations.

In the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review this type of military activity was formalized as 'defence engagement' within the government's invigorated focus on upstream conflict prevention. Defence engagement, currently being re-named as global engagement, is defined as the use of defence personnel and assets overseas short of combat operations to achieve influence internationally, shape the environment, build stability, and prevent conflict in support of the UK's security and prosperity, all underpinned with the credible threat of hard power.[67] In the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, defence engagement received a policy and resource boost[68] and, with the introduction of persistent engagement overseas in the Integrated Review in 2021, the next step in its evolutionary lifecycle has been taken.

The international defence engagement network is large, far-reaching and adds weight to the UK's global diplomatic network. The defence command paper announced the expansion of the network by one-third.[69] Permanent defence engagement roles include policy posts in the UK, defence attachés in British embassies and High Commissions, loan service personnel attached to other nations' armies, exchange officers and liaison officers in other nations' HQs and NATO, British defence staffs (BDS) coordinating regional engagement activity, British military advisory training teams (BMATT), and British peace support teams (BPST). Total numbers swell considerably when temporary defence engagement roles are included, for example tactical-level short-term training teams (STTT), partner capacity-building, overseas training exercises, and military advisory roles including in security sector reform (SSR). Peacekeeping missions such as the UK military deployment to Mali as part of the United Nations Multidimensional

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66 Kennedy, G. (ed.) (2020), *Defense Engagement since 1900: Global Lessons in Soft Power*, Kansas: University Press of Kansas.
67 MOD and FCO (2017), *UK's International Defence Engagement Strategy*, p. 10.
68 UK government (2015), *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf. In National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015, defence engagement was instated as a core, funded MOD task in support of a new policy to make UK 'international by design'. Core funding of £80 million per annum, rising over the next four years.
69 UK Ministry of Defence (2021), *Defence Command Paper*, p. 15. The permanent network currently covers 160 countries and territories with over 1,000 military and civilian people permanently employed in it, and its numbers swell considerably when temporary employees are counted.

Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)[70] are technically not classified as defence engagement. However, individual knowledge and skills needed to operate in such an environment are relatively common in defence engagement roles.

The point is that all defence engagement roles, both permanent and temporary, ultimately support the achievement of UK policy objectives particularly in building long-term stability and preventing conflict in unstable, weak regions. However, the UK's defence engagement capability is currently not optimized for this role and it must be enhanced.

The MOD's global engagement network is not yet optimized for persistent engagement

UK defence engagement has matured over the last decade. Key developments at the defence and Army-levels include the creation of regional points of contact known as British defence staffs; a defence engagement school to train personnel in language, culture, intelligence and security; a new defence engagement career field for better management of personnel; the creation of the British Army's 77th Brigade as an influence and outreach capability possessing advisers in stabilization, outreach and culture to support defence engagement activity overseas; and, as part of the British Army's *Future Soldier* programme, a new Security Force Assistance Brigade and Special Operations Brigade that are designed to strengthen tactical engagement activity below the threshold of combat by building partner capacity and generating influence networks in unstable regions.

This is all encouraging, but there remain issues with the KSE of personnel filling all engagement roles, which limits the overall effectiveness of the MOD's engagement capability.

First, specialist training is only available to personnel in some defence engagement roles. Defence attachés and their teams receive greatly enhanced training at the defence engagement school and bespoke training is being developed for the new Ranger battalions in the Army Special Operations Brigade. However, there is currently no uniform, tailored and comprehensive professional development programme for personnel in all defence and Army-level engagement roles. A large element of personnel employed in engagement roles, both permanent and temporary, receive limited to no specialist training for their roles.

Instead, the MOD operates a policy of re-purposing individuals' generalist, mainstream knowledge and experience, forged in the mainstream disciplines of combat and warfighting, to specialist engagement tasks. The assumption is that education and training in this most demanding task equips an individual with sufficient breadth and depth of generalist KSE to be applied to other forms of warfare and also to more specialist roles such as building stability and conflict prevention i.e. doing the former automatically makes you capable of the latter. This phenomenon has been coined by observers as the 'fallacy of the

70 United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (undated), 'Protection of Civilians', https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/protection-civilians.

lesser-included'[71] on the basis that the two tasks are actually very different, rarely interchangeable, and the outcome of such a generalist approach will always be less than optimal. They argue that a specialist task needs someone with specialist KSE for an optimal outcome.

The consequences of continuing with a generalist approach are potentially far-reaching: through their inexperience individuals are more likely to misinterpret the dynamics of their operating environment; they are more likely to design and execute tasks in complex environments poorly; they may select the incorrect or inappropriate partner for the UK; and they will miss opportunities.[72] Poor continuity between personnel rotating through engagement assignments at a high rate risks them reaching different and contradictory interpretations of the nature of the objective and the ways to achieve it. Not only does this risk confusing partners but it sows seeds of doubt over the UK's long-term objectives and its commitment.

While individuals will certainly accrue knowledge and experience 'on the job', the short length of their assignment means they will never get beyond a perfunctory level of analysis.

Second, the career structures in the British Army, as the major supplier of individuals to the engagement network, are not fit for purpose for more specialist tasks like engagement.[73] A large majority of individuals assigned to defence engagement roles have no prior experience of engagement let alone building stability and conflict prevention,[74] and assignments are normally short in duration.[75] An individual's contextual understanding of a region, its political and socio-cultural dynamics, key actors and networks, and their grasp of the potential tools for addressing the causes of instability will be superficial at best. While individuals will certainly accrue knowledge and experience 'on the job', the short length of their assignment means they will never get beyond a perfunctory level of analysis leading to the concomitant risk that their progress assessments are over-optimistic, meaningless or misleading.

On completion of an engagement assignment, it is common for personnel not to be re-employed in the same region and a large majority are never re-employed

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71 Cleveland, C., Jensen, B., Bryant, S. and David, A. (2018), *Military Strategy for the 21st Century: People, Connectivity, and Competition*, New York: Cambria Press, p. 161. Based on the observation that military leaders incorrectly assume that training for high-end warfare best prepares individuals and units for all forms of warfare and that switching from high-intensity conflict to other situations is easy.
72 Knowles, E. (2018), *Falling Short of Security in Somalia*, Oxford Research Group, https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/falling-short-of-security-in-somalia.
73 Watling, J. (2021), 'The Army's Officer Career Structure is Not Fit for Purpose', RUSI Commentary, https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/armys-officer-career-structure-not-fit-purpose.
74 Of all British Army personnel employed in a defence engagement post (at December 2020), 34 per cent have previously been employed in a defence engagement post in the past 5 years, according to an email exchange between the author and the Army Personnel Centre, October 2020. The Army fills the vast majority of defence engagement posts across the UK armed forces.
75 The standard duration of an overseas deployment is six months, though some stretch to 12 months. Permanent assignments are between two and three years, which brings greater continuity.

in the engagement career field.[76] Any KSE and understanding accrued in the role will be lost to the MOD as an organization with consequences for its collective understanding. The underlying cause of all these issues is that engagement individuals are not part of a distinct, coherent body and they lack clear leadership and sponsorship, identity, ethos, career structure and policies, and a management framework. Other nations are distinctive for the heightened emphasis they place on developing specialists for engagement roles, which serves to highlight the competitive nature of understanding and the potential opportunity costs for the UK:

> …the competitive advantage the French have…over us [the UK] by having sustained their strategic understanding of the benefits of enduring defence engagement [is illustrated by] the French Defence Attaché in Libya (and he is one of many) with a year's intelligence training, two years Arabic language training, a year in Egyptian Staff College, 3 years in Cairo, 3 years in Abu Dhabi, and now 2 years as DA in Tripoli.[77]

Third, the management of specialist knowledge is weak despite the emphasis in the Integrated Review and Fusion Doctrine on securing a position of advantage through greater integration across government, allies and society. Currently there is no formal, routine mechanism for connecting engagement individuals to networks of expertise or 'knowledge networks' comprising external thematic and regional experts in government, the private sector, NGOs,[78] academia, retired military and experts in-country. Access to external networks would assist individuals in preparation for their assignment, act as an alternative source of advice during it, avoid the risk of repeated mistakes as roles pass from person to person, and enhance the MOD's long-term institutional memory.

Fourth, there remains a perception among UK military personnel that employment in the engagement career stream equates to a step out of mainstream military employment with potential to damage promotion and career prospects. Recent research found that the incentives and career rewards for individuals in combat forces to commit to international training and engagement roles are questionable and indistinct, and specialist skills are not valued by the hierarchy.[79] Currently an individual who has demonstrated an aptitude for the defence engagement career field and accrued extensive specialist KSE is not guaranteed recognition and reward commensurate to peers in other career fields. Even if this is more a perception than a reality, the effect is that individuals are discouraged from volunteering for defence engagement assignments and the pool of available talent is diluted.[80] A better incentivization system is required.

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76 Of all British Army personnel employed in a defence engagement post since January 2015, only 24 per cent have been re-employed in defence engagement so far. It is possible that some will be re-employed in defence engagement roles in the future, according to an email exchange between the author and the Army Personnel Centre, October 2020.
77 Mayall, S. (2015), *Defence Engagement*, Combat Journal 2015, p. xi, article was published behind an MOD firewall, p. xi.
78 For example, Conciliation Resources, International Alert, Peace Direct, and Search for Common Ground.
79 Knowles, E. and Watson, A. (2018), *Remote Warfare: Lessons from Contemporary Theatres*, Oxford Research Group, https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1280-remote-warfare-lessons-learned-from-contemporary-theatres.
80 Mayall (2015), *Defence Engagement*, p. xi.

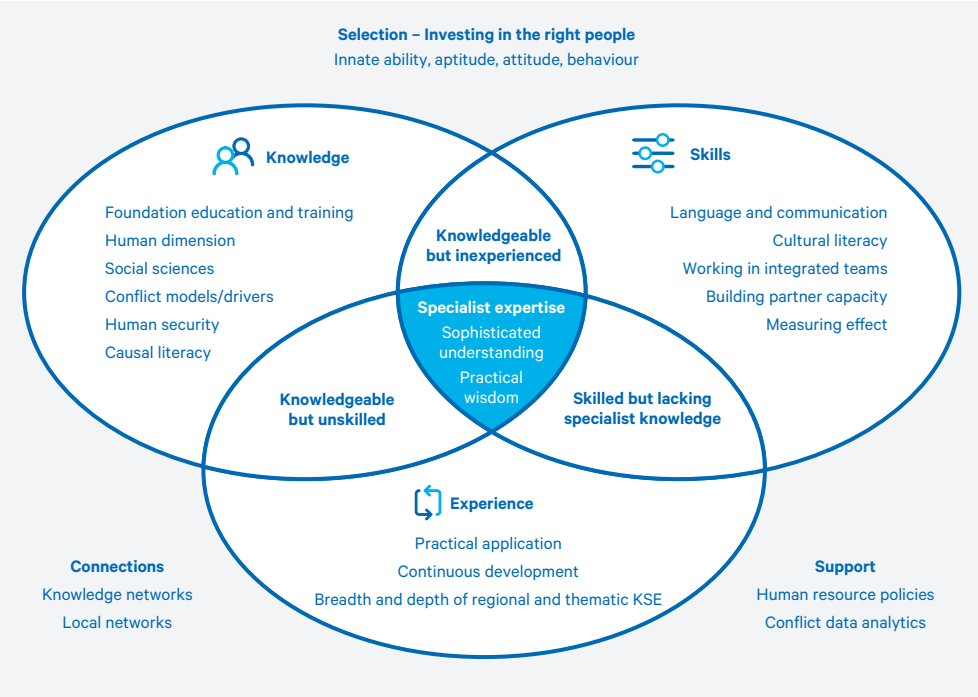
03 What is the solution?

The MOD must develop a new approach to selection, education, training, career management, incentivization, sustainability and support in order to establish a cohort of specialist engagement operators.

Understanding is the cornerstone of military philosophy and underpins all successful military action;[81] this principle applies equally to non-combat engagement activity. Good understanding is fundamental to analysing the dynamics of a complex, politically-driven environment in terms of identifying the root causes of conflict, supporting the planning and execution of activity, and informing engagement with in-country actors. To gain good collective understanding, the MOD must develop engagement specialists with KSE leading to a sophisticated individual understanding of situations and practical wisdom in making decisions and managing risks;[82] an ability 'to grasp the meaning of a thing, an event, or a situation…[and] see it in its relation to other things: to see how it operates or functions, what consequences follow from it, what causes it, what uses it can be put to…'[83] A philosophy is required that blends experience and knowledge with education and training and promotes a proactive approach to sharing information.

81 MOD (2016), *Joint Doctrine Publication 04: Understanding and Decision-making*, p. 8.
82 Ibid. Understanding is not mere knowledge. Understanding involves acquiring and developing knowledge to a level that enables individuals to know why something has happened or is happening (insight) and to identify and anticipate what may happen (foresight). When judgment is applied to insight, comprehension, situational awareness and contextual analysis, foresight and anticipation is generated.
83 Wiggin, G. and McTighe, J. (2005), *Understanding by Design*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria. Quoted in MOD (2016), *Joint Doctrine Publication 04*.

Figure 1: Developing understanding and practical wisdom for persistent engagement



Source: Compiled by the author.

There are several important steps for selecting the right individuals for persistent engagement, generating specialist KSE over time, supporting them as a distinct group, and connecting them to sources of expertise and knowledge.

Step 1: Select and invest in the right people

Engagement is different to warfighting and so logic dictates that the individual qualities that are best suited to one differ from the other. Although not mutually exclusive, in broad terms combat requires organized violence to be waged while engagement requires violence to be prevented. Engagement in complex human terrain demands skills in dialogue and negotiation, patience, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity and a capacity to deal with complexity, a passion for sustainable development and security, empathy and inter-personal skills, and linguistic and cultural agility[84] – skills that are not necessarily essential in combat situations. This does not mean that people who are more suited to engagement roles are ill-suited to combat and vice versa. Nor does it mean that individuals who lack innate abilities are untrainable and cannot develop appropriate skills over time. Rather, it means that some people start their professional life with the advantage

84 There is a broad body of literature on the qualities needed by military advisers and those engaging with partner nations, for example Ramsey, R. III (2006), *Advice for Advisors: Suggestions and Observations from the Lawrence to the Present*, Global War on Terrorism, Occasional Paper 19, Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/ramsey_op19.pdf; International Security Sector Advisory Team (2010), *The Security and Justice Sector Reform Adviser*, DCAF Operational Guidance Note, https://issat.dcaf.ch/content/download/1181/8973/file/ISSAT%20OGN%20-%20The%20Security%20and%20Justice%20Reform%20Adviser.pdf%20.

of a natural aptitude for engagement above their peers, on which specialist expertise can be more easily built over time. There is therefore logic to employing a more scientific system to identify and select these people in order to invest in them as specialists, however, such a system is missing.

Currently, the MOD and the British Army in particular, as the largest supplier of individuals, have no mechanism for objectively measuring the innate ability and aptitude of individuals for specialist roles. The British Army's Programme Castle – the ongoing overhaul of the British Army's human resource system – is investigating mechanisms to assess an individual's motivations, interests, and aptitude for specific roles as a way for both the organization and the individual to better understand their optimum employment, and it should be advanced as a priority.

Step 2: Develop specialist knowledge through foundational education and training

The conceptual basis of the career, education and training model remains rooted in combat and warfighting given it is rightly classified as the most demanding task and the unique contribution of any military force. This should not change, yet a combat-oriented education and training programme cannot optimally prepare individuals for engagement roles in complex human environments. A supplementary education system is needed to develop specialist knowledge and skills that build on an individual's core foundation in combat soldiering and warfighting. This should be applied to different cohorts of engagement practitioners in a graduated way based on their level and type of engagement activity, with a core focus on:

1. The human dimension[85] – the crucible of conflict

Traditional state-centric approaches to conflict do not adequately interpret the human context[86] that forms a complex tapestry of multiple actors with shifting or ambiguous allegiances.[87] The roots of conflict lie in human nature, therefore it follows that a conflict can only be understood and addressed – prevented, managed, won or lost – by having sufficient understanding and influence over the cognitive dimension of the human terrain i.e. the political, social, cultural, physical, informational and psychological elements of human nature. John Galtung's work on conflict theory, summarized succinctly in the *Understand to Prevent* handbook, is helpful in categorizing conflict and violence in this respect.[88]

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85 Definitions of a 'human-centric approach' vary. Terminology includes 'human terrain', 'human dynamics', the 'human dimension', and the 'human domain'. A debate is ongoing in Western military circles over the merits of formal recognition and adoption of a 'human domain' in military doctrine alongside the existing five physical domains of land, sea, air, cyber and space.
86 United Nations and World Bank (2018), *Pathways for Peace*, p. 77.
87 MOD (2015), *DCDC Strategic trends Programme: Future Operating Environment 2035*, p. 25, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/646821/20151203-FOE_35_final_v29_web.pdf.
88 Multinational Capability Development Campaign (2017), *Understand to Prevent*.

2. Social sciences – the key to deciphering conflicts

Social sciences enable the interpretation of human behaviour and act as a lens to bring coherence and understanding to complex human-related issues. The MOD's engagement specialists must be able to look through such a lens to conceptualize, analyse and understand networks of in-country actors and audiences as well as interpret their perceptions, decision-making and behaviours. This can help generate a baseline of understanding in a region or locale (in terms of what is 'normal' and what is not) before any escalation to violent conflict or crisis situation. Some commentators liken this to a 'social radar'.[89]

A foundation in social science will enable individuals to ask focused questions that address the causes rather than merely the symptoms of a conflict; to understand the political dimension and support politically-led solutions; to act as a socio-cultural data collection asset 'in the field' in support of specialist intelligence capabilities; to interpret and interrogate social science data more effectively; to speak in the same language as partners from across government, academia, NGOs, and allies; and to be champions of social science techniques that the uninitiated in the military may otherwise dismiss as irrelevant.

3. Contemporary conflict models and frameworks – tools for application in the field

Familiarity with conflict models and frameworks developed by academia and field practitioners will help identify hidden and counterintuitive dynamics in conflict environments in weakened and failed states. Furthermore, it will make engagement activity more targeted and effective and, if necessary, initiate the transition to crisis response.[90] For example, Stathis Kalyvas, a contemporary political scientist and conflict theorist, has published influential research on the causes and dynamics of violence in civil wars. He highlights the importance of considering local micro factors as the drivers of violent conflict as much as central macro factors.[91] Cleveland et al. argue that the 'human domain' is defined by networks that shape the character of war.[92] Careful mapping of these complex-adaptive systems is essential for true understanding of local dynamics, which in turn drives the generation of friendly networks to enable cooperation, influence and disruption of state competitors.

Nicholas Krohley, meanwhile, highlights the importance of focusing resources at the tactical, local level to map societal ecosystems, generate understanding and identify contextual nuance.[93] Individuals and local networks, he stresses, should not be regarded as isolated 2D entities, but instead as part of holistic social, economic and political systems akin to a tree with deep roots. Only by taking a 3D view can actors and their networks be viewed in the right context and activity be

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89 Flynn, M, Sisco, J. and Ellis, D. (2012), *'Left of Bang': The Value of Sociocultural Analysis in Today's Environment*, p. 14, https://www.enodoglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Prism-Left-of-Bang.pdf.
90 Perez, C. (2013), book review of Schirch, L. (2013), *Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning*, Inter Agency Journal, 4(2), http://thesimonscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/IAJ-4-2Summer-2013-70-72.pdf.
91 Kalyvas, S. (2006), *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
92 Cleveland, Jensen, Bryant, and David (2018), *Military Strategy for the 21st Century: People, Connectivity, and Competition*.
93 Author interview with Dr Nicholas Krohley on 26 March 2020 and Krohley, N. (2019), *Moving Beyond the post-9/11 Manhunt*, Modern War Institute, https://mwi.usma.edu/moving-beyond-post-9-11-manhunt-translating-tactical-wins-strategic-success.

targeted against them effectively.[94] Camilla Molyneux has recently stressed the importance of addressing the local drivers of violence by supporting, learning from, and building local community responses.[95] Yet, despite this array of advanced contemporary thinking and experience, it is not uncommon for new international initiatives to duplicate or contradict existing approaches in-country through ignorance of their existence.[96] Mapping the socio-political environment prior to starting any new activity is a critical first step to gaining true understanding.

The aim must be to progress individuals towards a state of 'causal literacy' or a nuanced appreciation for the complex-adaptive political, economic and socio-cultural currents that drive human attitudes and behaviours, which ultimately drive conflict.

Such a specialist education programme would create individual experts for employment in persistent engagement roles who are grounded in the human dimension of conflict and in social sciences and versed in historical and contemporary conflict thinking. It would provide a comprehensive and uniform theoretical grounding. It could be delivered as a foundational training programme on an individual's entry to the specialist engagement capability field and act as a complement and counter-balance to an individual's experiences in the discipline of combat and warfighting.

The aim must be to progress individuals towards a state of 'causal literacy' or a nuanced appreciation for the complex-adaptive political, economic and socio-cultural currents that drive human attitudes and behaviours, which ultimately drive conflict.[97] Professor Celestino Perez's military education programme for the US Army along these lines is instructive. His course aims to generate a cohort of individuals with causal literacy as a complement to the traditional Western military education grounded in warfare.[98]

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94 Krohley's concept is called The Ecosystem™.
95 Molyneux, C. (2020), *Made in Marib: A Local Response to Instability and Violence*, Oxford Research Group, https://copese.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/maribbriefing-molyneux.pdf.
96 See, for example, Guiryann, O. (2020), *Counterterrorism Assistance to Chad for the Sahel: The Price the People Pay*, Just Security, https://www.justsecurity.org/72199/counterterrorism-assistance-to-chad-for-the-sahel-the-price-the-people-pay.
97 Perez Jr, C. (2016), 'Causal Literacy: Strategic Discontent, Political Literacy, and Professional Military Education', The Strategy Bridge, https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2016/1/7/strategic-discontent-political-literacy-and-professional-military-education.
98 Called the 'Local Dynamics Of War' scholars' class at the US Army War College.

Step 3: Develop practical skills and experience

1. Understanding through language and culture

A body of academic and practical literature exists that emphasizes the importance of language and cultural awareness to national security and international engagement.[99] The better an individual's grasp of language and culture, the better their relationships, levels of trust and mutual understanding with partners, which in turn results in enhanced insights and decision-making. If progress in the human terrain moves only at the 'speed of trust',[100] then proficiency in language and cultural competence must be a priority. In 2009 President Obama talked of military strength being measured not only by weapons but by languages spoken and cultures understood. And the chief of staff of the US Army, General Ray Odierno, noted in 2012, 'we have learned many lessons over the last 10 years, but one of the most compelling is that – whether you are working among citizens of a country, or working with their government or Armed Forces – nothing is as important to your long-term success as understanding the prevailing culture and values'.[101]

The UK's Defence College of Languages and Culture (DCLC) was formed in 2014 and the MOD overhauled its language policy in 2016. A core group of engagement personnel – defence attachés and their support staff – receive extensive language training at DCLC and some culture-specific training.[102] Loan service personnel and some others deploying to operational theatres receive language familiarization training. However, this leaves a large group of personnel employed in engagement roles who receive little or no language and cultural training beyond the most basic and short mandatory pre-deployment training.

While it would be optimal to train all engagement personnel in high-level language skills and culture, the current high turnover and low return rate for personnel in engagement roles means there is a cost–benefit equation to consider. In the current model it would be impractical from a resource perspective to train everyone fully (although the advent of online learning via videoconferencing ushered in by the coronavirus pandemic offers fresh possibilities), so alternative models deserve investigation.

An alternative, more cost-effective and practical approach would be to invest language resources in a specialist cohort of individuals *over time*, say a period of 10 to 15 years. Classroom-based learning to reach language expertise and

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99 For example, Chen, S. and Breivik, A. (2013), *Lost For Words: The Need for Languages in UK Defence and Security*, British Academy, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/lost-words-need-languages-uk-diplomacy-and-security; MOD (2016), *Joint Doctrine Publication 04: Understanding and Decision-Making*.
100 Kerr, A. and Miklaucic, M. (eds) (2017), *Effective, Legitimate, Secure: Insights for Defence Institution Building*, Center for Complex Operations, Washington DC: National Defence University, https://cco.ndu.edu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=9YCCggKpP6s%3D&portalid=96.
101 MOD (2016), *Joint Doctrine Publication 05, Shaping a Stable World: the Military Contribution*, p. 96, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/516849/20160302-Stable_world_JDP_05.pdf.
102 NATO language proficiency levels reached at the DCLC range from Level 1 (Survival) and Level 2 (Functional) to Level 3 (Professional).

transferable intercultural competence[103] would be complemented by periods of immersion in target regions akin to district officers from the era of British Empire, as advocated by commentators such as of Rory Stewart.[104]

2. Familiarity with partners, their techniques and new developments across government

The work undertaken by the MOD's engagement personnel falls within, and is driven by, policies, strategies and processes that are owned by or jointly owned with other government departments rather than solely by the MOD. Furthermore, engagement roles are by definition focused on conflict prevention and stabilization tasks at the extremities of the traditional conflict curve rather than on a crisis itself. Defence personnel must therefore be trained and confident to work effectively in cross-functional teams in which the lingua franca is politics, conflict, peacebuilding and development not just crisis and combat. They must be able to converse freely in non-military, cross-departmental dialects and participate with confidence in cross-government processes such as the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). Recent progress has been made by the MOD, including publication of the human security policy (JSP 1325), but the MOD's engagement specialists need to be taken further to deepen their relationships and understanding of partners, and stay abreast of the latest developments in UK and international policy and the processes employed by the FCDO and the Stabilisation Unit. The list of required knowledge is long and includes: human security; the role of gender in conflict; climate change and security; elite bargains grounded in political dynamics in-country; conflict sensitivity and conflict assessments; integrating military activity into a theory of change;[105] and designing and applying measurements of effect.
In turn defence personnel must educate partners. Familiarity can be developed over time through a programme of formal education, practical experience and cross-departmental exchanges.

3. Expertise in partner capacity-building

Building capability and capacity in partner nations' security forces – also known as security force assistance[106] – is a principal activity in the MOD's international engagement and an important tool to support the UK's efforts to promote stability

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103 A definition of military intercultural competence is: culture-general knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes developed through education, training, and experience that provide the ability to operate effectively within a culturally complex environment. This includes skills such as acquiring cultural knowledge, demonstrating cultural self-awareness, cultural perspective-taking, and cultural observation. Taken from Mackenzie, L. and Miller, J. (2017), *Intercultural Training in the United States Military*, https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/CAOCL/files/International%20Encycopedia%20of%20Intercultural%20Communication.pdf?ver=2019-07-11-083127-170.
104 RUSI Podcast (2021), 'Rory Stewart: Failure, and the Villains of the Western Campaign in Afghanistan', Western Way of War Podcast, 19 August 2021, https://rusi.org/podcasts/western-way-of-war/episode-60-rory-stewart-failure-and-villains-western-campaign-afghanistan.
105 Watson, A. (2021), *Different strategy, same mistakes? The UK persistent engagement strategy*, Saferworld, https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1375-different-strategy-same-mistakes-the-uk-persistent-engagement-strategy.
106 Across academia, security force assistance is known variously as security assistance, remote warfare, surrogate war, light footprint warfare, low-intensity war and 'by, with, and through'. The definition of security force assistance in Allied Joint Doctrine (AJD) 3-16, as used by many NATO members, is derived from *US Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-13, Security Force Assistance*, which describes security force assistance as the act of making foreign security forces – at all levels – competent, capable, sustainable, committed, confident and accountable.

and prevent violent conflict in weakened and failed states. Security force assistance aims to create more reliable, effective, transparent, affordable and accountable security institutions in unstable regions and create more effective military partners.

A RAND report in 2014 found that institutional capacity-building is 'a necessary first step to providing the institutional foundations for stability'.[107] Despite the recent setbacks in Afghanistan, institutional capacity-building continues to drive global security organizations including the UN, African Union, EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), NATO and Western governments to recognize the security benefits of military capacity-building activities including SSR at the state institutional level.[108]

The rewards are considerable if this approach is done well as seen in post-conflict Sierra Leone and South Africa for example.[109] However, it is not a panacea and it remains a broad-ranging,[110] politically sensitive, and complex activity full of pitfalls for inexperienced practitioners especially those with scant knowledge of their region and its political context.[111] The risks of damaging rights and exacerbating conflict through poor security force assistance remain very real.[112]

At the macro level, the dynamics underlying the political marketplace must be understood and addressed first. Success requires the active involvement of pro-reform local coalitions from across civil society to act as a counterbalance to political and business elites and security services.[113] Furthermore, the correct balance must be found between short-term 'train and equip' programmes building tactical capability and long-term institutional development programmes that establish strategic and operational capacity.[114] The recent, well-documented imbalance towards the former is in some ways explicable by its comparative ease, fewer resources, shorter time frame, and lower risk compared to the latter.[115] However, short-term 'train and equip' increases the risk that the dynamics

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107 Quoted in Kerr and Miklaucic (eds) (2017), *Effective, Legitimate, Secure: Insights for Defence Institution Building*, p. xx.
108 Capacity-building falls under the umbrella concept of security sector reform (SSR), which is underpinned by UN Security Council Resolution 2151 (2014) and enshrined in publications such as the *OECD DAC Handbook on SSR*. According to the UN, SSR is 'a process … led by national authorities that has as its goal the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the State and its peoples without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.' It comprises an array of subordinate activities aimed at developing the security and justice domains of partner nations. However, there have been recent challenges to the SSR model outlined in formative documents like the OECD DAC Handbook on SSR in practice. There is now interest in SSR programming that is more flexible, sensitive to power dynamics, adaptive, and inclusive of a wide range of actors (see for example *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*).
109 Detzner, S. (2017), 'Modern post-conflict security sector reform in Africa: patterns of success and failure', *African Security Journal*, 26(2), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10246029.2017.1302706.
110 There is a spectrum of capacity-building activity ranging between (1) building tactical, short-term military capability to confront immediate security threats, often known by many as 'train and equip' or 'train, advise, assist' and (2) building longer-term institutional capacity and resilience at the strategic/operational level in areas such as oversight, governance and accountability as well as logistics, administration, finance, and personnel management, known as Defence Reform or Defence Institution Building (DIB). The common characteristic is that these are all military activities that are conducted in civilian environments in support of wider national political and security objectives to prevent violent conflict and build stability.
111 Kerr and Miklaucic (eds) (2017), *Effective, Legitimate, Secure: Insights for Defence Institution Building*, p. 372.
112 Brooks, L. (2021), *Playing with matches? UK security assistance and its conflict risks*, Saferworld, https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1374-playing-with-matches-uk-security-assistance-and-its-conflict-risks.
113 LSE Conflict Research Programme (2020), *Evidence from the Conflict Research Programme*, p. 18.
114 Evans, T. (2015), *Can train and equip alone qualify as SSR?*, DCAF (ISSAT), https://issat.dcaf.ch/Share/Forum/Can-train-and-equip-alone-qualify-as-SSR. A review of SSR by the UN Peacebuilding and Security Operations division in 2013 found that 93 per cent of their funding was on train and equip and infrastructure projects while only 7 per cent of funding was spent on governance-related SSR.
115 Brown, Murray, Riemann, Rossi and Smith (eds) (2019), *War Amongst The People: Critical Assessment*.

of the political context are missed or ignored and the structural roots of conflicts are not addressed with potential negative impacts on human security and stability.[116] The result can be the creation of security forces that are expensive to construct but lack resilience and institutional depth under pressure due to their inherent poor governance, integrity and administrative systems.[117]

Results of capacity-building initiatives have been mixed, the obstacles to success are many and complex, and criticism of past initiatives has been justifiably vocal in some quarters.[118] The consequences of getting it wrong are manifold including misinterpreting the country's political economy and a partner's true incentives; supporting predatory partners who exacerbate the conflict; misaligning objectives with partners leading to misunderstanding and ultimately failure; poor ownership of the process by partner nations' political and military leaders; template 'one-size-fits-all' solutions that fail to address local issues; and attempts to recreate partner forces in the image of Western forces (a pitfall described as 'isomorphic mimicry'[119]) – all of which can exacerbate violence and undermine human security, leading to potential programmatic and reputational risk for the UK. It is essential that those conducting this activity possess the correct KSE to do it effectively and sensitively, while being supported by an appropriate political strategy and safeguards.

Results of capacity-building initiatives have been mixed, the obstacles to success are many and complex, and criticism of past initiatives has been justifiably vocal in some quarters.

The British Army possesses dedicated capacity-building expertise in the 77th Brigade. However, its small size and limited resources mean it lacks the ability to be engaged permanently in all capacity-building programmes and thus it is forced to provide an analytics and advisory service from the UK. The new UK Security Force Assistance Brigade and Army Special Operations Brigade will strengthen this effort. They will engage persistently with international partners and build capacity as a task within persistent engagement. However, as highlighted above, its focus so far has tended towards building short-term military capability at the tactical and operational levels rather than the more nuanced and enduring task of building long-term institutional capacity at the operational and strategic levels. This needs to be rectified if unintended and potentially undesirable outcomes are to be avoided.

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116 Among other reports by Oxford Research Group's Remote Warfare Group (now incorporated into SaferWorld), Knowles, E. and Watson, E. (2018), *Remote Warfare: Lessons Learned from Contemporary Theatres*, https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1280-remote-warfare-lessons-learned-from-contemporary-theatres.
117 Matisek, J. (2018), 'The crisis of American military assistance: strategic dithering and Fabergé Egg armies', Defense and Security Analysis, 34(3): pp. 267–290, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14751798.2018.1500757?src=recsys&journalCode=cdan20.
118 Criticism has come from the Oxford Research Group's Remote Warfare Programme, among others, see for example: Knowles and Watson (2018), *Remote Warfare: Lessons Learned from Contemporary Theatres;* Knowles, E. and Watson, A. (2018), *No Such Thing As A Quick Fix*, https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1294-no-such-thing-as-a-quick-fix-the-aspiration-capabilities-gap-in-british-remote-warfare; Watson, A. and Karlshøj-Pedersen, M. (2019), *Fusion Doctrine in Five Steps*, accessible via https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.
119 Ibid., p. 371.

Beyond the need for a clear strategy based on an improved theory of change,[120] UK MOD requires its engagement specialists to be competent in security force assistance including SSR and capacity-building techniques from the tactical to the strategic levels. Through education, training and experience, they need to understand:

- SSR and capacity-building techniques, policies and doctrine and the doctrinal and procedural differences between partners and allies.
- The success criteria for capacity-building[121] including: an understanding of the political context; partners with the leadership style, political will, legitimacy and capacity to conduct change; matching the objectives of the UK with partners; incorporating civic actors including women into the process to promote relationships with the security sector; ensuring local ownership where possible; having a clear vision and strategy for the long-term; designing incentivization methods; and, grounding the programme in a set of expectations that account for the inherently complex realities of security provision in fragile states.[122]
- The need to balance initiatives aimed at building hard military capability in the short-term (people, guns, tanks and rockets) with building institutional capacity in the long-term (governance, integrity, accountability, sustainability, resilience, doctrine, administrative procedures).[123]

Step 4: Leverage technology to warn and predict violent conflict

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are increasingly enabling deep learning and 'big and thick' data analytics, which provide opportunities to leverage social sciences in the quest for a more sophisticated, predictive understanding of the human dimension in conflict environments.[124] The US military is investing in multiple technological research projects[125] to create a 'social radar' capable of forecasting and detecting political instability in foreign lands.[126] The UK also

120 Watson (2021), *Different strategy, same mistakes? The UK persistent engagement strategy.*
121 Paul, C., Clarke, C. P., Grill, B., Young, S., Moroney, J. D. P., Hogler, J. and Leah, C. (2013), *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity and Under What Circumstances?*, RAND National Defense Research Institute, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/MG1200/MG1253z1/RAND_MG1253z1.pdf.
122 Knowles, E. and Matisek, J. (2019), 'Western Security Force Assistance in Weak States: Time for a Peacebuilding Approach', *RUSI Journal*, 164(3): pp. 10–21, https://rusi.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03071847.2019.1643258#.XupzE2hKhhE.
123 United Nations and World Bank (2018), *Pathways for Peace*, referencing Bryden, A. and Olonisakin, F. (2010), *Security Sector Transformation in Africa*, Geneva: Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.
124 Nesic, A. and Arnel, D. (2019), 'Operationalizing the Science of the Human Domain in Great Power Competition for Special Operations Forces', Small Wars Journal, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/operationalizing-science-human-domain-great-power-competition-special-operations-forces.
125 González, R. (2015), 'Seeing into the hearts and minds: Part 1. The Pentagon's quest for a 'social radar'', *Anthropology Today*, 31(3): 8–13, https://rai.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8322.12174.
126 For example, HABITUS, a programme of the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency that seeks to provide commanders with insider knowledge of local environments, see DARPA (2020), 'Enhancing Stability Operations in Under-governed Regions', https://www.darpa.mil/news-events/2020-01-30.

recognizes that deep learning and predictive modelling of social behaviour are key technical opportunities in the next 20 years with potential to satisfy some of the challenges in achieving a nuanced understanding of operating environments.[127]

However, this technology remains immature and it is currently unrealistic toexpect deep learning to provide a complete picture of complex human terrains or even to provide legitimate insights given the uncertain nature of open, complex-adaptive systems in fragile regions with a myriad of qualitative variables. In the next decade humans will remain the principal element in generating a sophisticated understanding of complex human environments – the expertise of the area scholar and the in-country observer steeped in situational knowledge will be difficult to beat.[128] Yet, over time, advances in technology mean that humans will be increasingly supported by deep learning capabilities. As a result, the MOD must start now to investigate appropriate training and education for engagement specialists in order to be in a position to equip them with the knowledge and skills to fully exploit new technology when it matures.

Step 5: Expand reach through 'knowledge networks'

The UK armed forces contains organic specialist organizations to generate intelligence and understanding including Defence Intelligence, the Specialist Group Military Intelligence, 77th Brigade, and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Group. However, they are necessarily focused on supporting current operations in priority over longer-term non-operational engagement and stability activities.

The good news is that, outside of defence, knowledge and expertise exists in abundance among partners across government, academia, think-tanks, NGOs and retired military personnel. Access to and collaboration with external experts will help generate a sophisticated understanding of a region or thematic issue. However, currently there is no mechanism to convene a network and the approach to network-generation is informal, ad hoc and relies on the initiative of individuals.

The MOD has an opportunity to develop 'knowledge networks' that leverage external expertise to gain access to thematic and regional knowledge.[129] Such networks would be convened by the MOD but otherwise they would be informal, flat and decentralized, enabled by videoconferencing technology, and driven by the principle of information-pull rather than information-push. The true power of the network would lie in its potential to grow organically driven by the needs of its users. Undoubtedly there would be technical, security and administrative issues

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127 MOD (2015), *DCDC Strategic trends Programme: Future Operating Environment 2035*. One example is the UK government's support of the Turing Institute's Global Urban Analytics for Resilience Defence (GUARD) programme that is seeking a reliable way to predict where conflict will break out in a city or region 12 months in advance – it is currently 94 per cent accurate, taken from O'Neill, S. (2019), *Predicting conflict – a year in advance*, https://www.turing.ac.uk/research/impact-stories/predicting-conflict-year-advance.
128 Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2016), *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*, p. 153.
129 The idea of retaining access to recently retired military experience was discussed with Colonel Rich Hart in an author interview on 3 February 2020.

in establishing and managing such a network. However, the long-term advantages of shared understanding, collaborative thinking, and collective knowledge would outweigh any issues in the setting up.

This concept could be extended to consider specific in-country issues through a 'reach back' process. A group of experts and practitioners with regional and thematic experience would convene and include trusted representation from the specific country or region in question in order to ensure full consideration is given to the in-country dimension. The MCDC *Understand to Prevent* handbook expanded this idea as a 'Comprehensive Contact Team',[130] which it defined as a forum to ensure coordination between all legitimate parties and agencies – political, diplomatic, economic, military, non-governmental organizations, civil society and business – in the search of bespoke solutions to specific in-country issues.

Step 6: Sustain this specialist capability over time

The MOD's engagement specialists must be developed in a way that builds on and complements their core grounding in combat by giving them KSE to function effectively in specialist engagement roles.[131] From early-to-mid career onwards, selected individuals should progress through a tailored career management system and career structure that builds specialist KSE progressively and coherently. This must give them opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in field settings and build experience and practical wisdom over time. Individual careers must be managed in a manner that is satisfactory to both the individual (in terms of variety, opportunity, expertise, incentivization) and to the organization (in terms of capability management, institutional expertise, collective performance). Individuals should be employed for longer periods and repeatedly in the same region as a way to deepen expertise and to build continuity, familiarity and trust with their network and in-country partners while improving institutional memory and expertise. Periods employed in-country will be interspersed with periods spent in policy posts in the UK relevant to that region or thematic area. In the long term, individuals should have access to a rolling programme of continuous professional development and remain incentivized through recognition and reward for development of their specialist KSE that is on a par with their peers in mainstream employment. Finally, this group of engagement specialists must grow over time to become sufficiently broad and deep in structure and mass to offer varied opportunities to individuals employed within it while sustaining and advancing an individual's career and interest level.

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130 Multinational Capability Development Campaign (2014), *Understand to Prevent: The military contribution to the prevention of violent conflict*, MCDC joint project, p. 115, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/518617/20150430-U2P_Main_Web_B5.pdf.
131 This paper does not attempt to identify exactly which roles and units in the UK armed forces need specialist levels of KSE. As a concept, persistent engagement is still immature and it may end up being defined not by the persistence of individual professionals but by the persistence of a network or layers of individuals and groups. Some of these will be more engaged than others and therefore need deeper and broader KSE. The concept of graduated levels of KSE warrants further investigation.

04 Recommendations and conclusion

A specialist engagement capability is crucial to implementing persistent engagement but to achieve this the MOD will need to review its selection, training and management policies.

The Integrated Review highlighted persistent engagement as one of the MOD's principal tools to support the UK's foreign policy and security objectives. The aim of this approach is to complement the traditional role of crisis response and warfighting by operating below the threshold of conflict to deter state competitors, prevent and resolve conflict, build stability, and pre-empt crises. Personnel employed in this network will conduct a range of unfamiliar, non-combat roles focused on conflict prevention and stabilization in weakened and failed regions alongside an array of partners.

As a first step, the MOD needs to design and develop a specialist engagement capability with individuals who are equipped with the KSE to operate in complex, politically-driven and unstable regions. They must be able to contribute effectively to pan-government initiatives to prevent conflict and build stability, and be equipped to support any transition to crisis response. They must possess the KSE to understand complex human terrain, identify the drivers of conflict, and design and execute measures that address the underlying causes of the conflict while working alongside diverse partners from government, the wider international community and in-country actors. To achieve this, the MOD must review and refresh its policies and processes for the selection, education, training, career management, incentivization and support of a new group of engagement specialists, with senior leadership driving through the programme and associated cultural change.

1. **Adapt the MOD's personnel policies to support engagement specialists.** The MOD, and the British Army as its land-based force, must:
   - Develop a specialist capability for persistent engagement that can operate in weakened and failed regions in support of the UK's trade, security and human security objectives. The recent invigoration of the defence attaché network through enhanced training and career management, combined with the creation of an Army Special Operations Brigade and Security Force Assistance Brigade, has started to address this issue. Momentum must now be maintained and attention and resources focused on energizing the MOD's entire persistent engagement network.
   - Develop a personnel recruitment mechanism that identifies and selects individuals based on their inherent aptitude, personal qualities and motivation for specialist engagement roles.
   - Create sufficient mass and structure to ensure this approach is sustainable over time. Further work is required to map roles and units to this specialist engagement capability, with potential to develop graduated levels of specialist KSE among different cohorts of the engagement network.
   - Introduce a new career structure with revised policies for personnel selection, development, management, incentivization and reward, which benefits both the individual and the organization. The ongoing review of the Army's human resource system, Programme Castle, offers an opportunity for the MOD to test new initiatives.
   - Invigorate the conceptual thinking developed in the 2017 MCDC handbook *Understand to Prevent*. This publication provides a baseline conceptual framework from which to develop and employ a new specialist engagement capability in support of both national and human security.
2. **Develop individuals with a sophisticated understanding of complex operating environments through knowledge and skills.** Introduce a foundational education and training programme, which orientates individuals to their specialist engagement role and complements their core knowledge and skills in the mainstream discipline of combat and warfighting. Individuals must:
   - Possess a grounding in social sciences as the basis for understanding human actions.
   - Be versed in the human dimension in complex, conflict-prone environments. They must possess 'causal literacy' or a nuanced appreciation of the complex-adaptive political, economic and socio-cultural currents that drive attitudes and behaviours, while possessing an appreciation of the impact of global and transnational variables on contemporary conflicts.
   - Possess language and cultural skills that can unlock effective engagement with, and understanding of, in-country partners and help build relationships, networks, understanding and trust. They must conduct periods of immersion in target regions.

- Be experts in the design and delivery of military capacity-building and security force assistance, from the tactical to strategic levels including the military contribution to SSR. They must be equipped with the tools, awareness, diplomacy, and humility to navigate this nuanced and politically-sensitive environment with confidence.
- Remain aware of advances in AI-enabled approaches that couple deep learning with big and thick data analytics in the quest for a more sophisticated, predictive understanding of human terrain. While this technology and supporting data remain immature in predicting human behaviour and currently cannot supplant human capability, it is developing rapidly and will become an increasingly important enabling capability in future years.

3. **Inculcate experience and practical wisdom in individuals over time.** Engagement specialists must develop heightened levels of KSE through a rolling programme of professional development and management through their career:
   - Stay abreast of developments in conflict studies as a way to ensure personnel can conduct conflict analysis and design and execute activity supporting stability and conflict prevention.
   - Become experienced and confident at working with diverse partners across government in civil–military cross-functional teams and with international partners where the lingua franca is conflict resolution, peace and stability not warfighting.
   - Design and nurture networks to leverage external knowledge across government, the private sector, academia, NGOs, retired military, and in-country experts. This will connect engagement specialists to external thematic and regional experts, develop individual competence, capture best practice, improve continuity, ensure coherence of delivery, and improve institutional memory.

Through persistent engagement, the MOD will play a vital role in denying opportunities to state competitors, supporting efforts to promote good governance and stability, addressing the root causes of conflict, and preventing conflict from escalating into violence in weakened and failed states. A new non-combat approach demands a specialist capability. Therefore, to optimize for persistent engagement, the MOD must enhance its existing engagement capability to make it fit for the complexities and uncertainties of the contemporary operating environment. Individuals and teams employed in the global network need tailored knowledge, skills and experience, beyond their warfighting foundation, to generate a more sophisticated understanding of target regions and the practical wisdom to inform the design and execution of the MOD's activity in support of government foreign policy and security objectives.

Acronyms and abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
BDS	British defence staff
BSOS	Building Stability Overseas Strategy
CSSF	Conflict, Stability and Security Fund
DCLC	Defence College of Languages and Culture
DE/GE	defence engagement, recently re-termed as global engagement
DL	deep learning
JACS	Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability
KSE	knowledge, skills and experience
IOpC	Integrated Operating Concept
MCDC	Multinational Capability Development Campaign
NGO	Non-governmental organization
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NSS	National Security Strategy
P4P	Pathways for Peace
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
SDA	Sustainable Development Agenda
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SFA	security force assistance
SFAB	Security Force Assistance Brigade
SSR	security sector reform
STTT	short-term training team

About the author

Colonel Will Davies is a British Army officer and the British defence attaché in Jordan. His military service includes overseas operational tours in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. During 2018–19, he advised the Kurdistan Regional Government on its Peshmerga Reform Programme, an experience that inspired this paper. In 2019–20, he was the Army Chief of the General Staff visiting research fellow in the International Security Programme at Chatham House.

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Cover image: Soldiers from the 3rd Battalion Parachute Regiment practise live fire battle drills at the British Army's Nanyuki training area in Kenya. Photographer: Cpl Jamie Hart

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