



**Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign
Affairs Committee's Seventh Report of the Session 2013-
2014
(HC86-I)**

**The UK's response to extremism and instability in North
and West Africa**

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by
Command of Her Majesty

May 2014



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Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee's Seventh Report of the Session 2013-14

The UK's response to extremism and instability in North and West Africa

The Government welcomes the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into the UK's response to extremism and instability in North and West Africa, published on 21 March 2014. We welcome the detailed work the Committee has undertaken and comment on the main points of the inquiry.

This Command Paper sets out our response to each of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations. The Committee's text is in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to the Committee's report.

The Committee should note that combined answers have been given for recommendations 4 and 5, 7 and 8, and 19, and 20.

Conclusions and recommendations

THE LINK WITH EXTREMISM

1. Addressing terrorism in the Western Sahel-Sahara region comprehensively means addressing the environmental conditions that are allowing it to grow: poverty and inequality, corruption and mis-governance, the pressure of fast-growing populations on depleting natural resources, insufficient cross-border co-operation, and the spread of extremist ideology. This is a huge task requiring international co-operation across a number of disciplines. We see signs that development and investment challenges are beginning to be addressed, but are concerned that co-operation on security matters should not be neglected. (Paragraph 29)

The Government agrees that a holistic approach to tackling the problems that face the Western Sahel-Sahara region is needed. International co-ordination is essential and security co-operation an important element of this. That is why the UK supports the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, both of which seek to harness the combined resources of the international community to tackle the wide range of challenges facing the Sahel.

Examples of security co-operation, where the UK is contributing, include the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the various EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in Mali, Niger and Libya. In West Africa, the National Crime Agency's (NCA) regional manager is regional co-ordinator for an EU project aimed at weakening the capacity of organised crime to traffic cocaine and heroin to and within the EU. Home Office and NCA are active in the G8 West Africa Transnational Organised Crime Group and used the UK's Chairmanship in 2013 to press for closer international co-operation on this issue, including increased support for ECOWAS in implementation of the West Africa Praia

Plan to combat drug trafficking and organised crime in the region. Other international work includes the regional security training exercise Operation Flintlock involving 16 countries from Africa and outside the continent, including the UK, which fosters regional co-operation to support Counter Terrorism (CT) and stabilisation activities in North and West Africa. The most recent exercise was held in Niger in February 2014.

Together with Denmark, the UK is funding, through the Africa Conflict Pool Programme (ACPP), a conflict prevention and border security capacity building project in the Niger/Mali/Burkina Faso region. Its purpose is to build greater capacity in local communities and government bodies to work together to reduce armed violence in the shared 'Gourma' border area.

2. We recognise that the UK Government has sought to secure international cooperation, for instance through the communiqué agreed at the 2013 G8 summit. We recommend that the UK Government, in its response to this report, outlines how it proposes to maintain momentum on this issue over the remainder of this Parliament, particularly in relation to security and intelligence co-operation. (Paragraph 30)

The Government has worked to translate the Lough Erne Communiqué language on combating terrorism into practical activity. For instance we have held high-level discussions with G8 partners directly and through the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum which has taken forward specific initiatives in the Sahel-Sahara region. The UK has supported a number of GCTF workshops to improve information sharing, and coordination of CT efforts in the region in 2014. The Government will continue to pursue initiatives begun at Lough Erne for the remainder of this Parliament and beyond.

A wide range of government departments have regular exchanges with partners on security and intelligence matters. This co-operation takes place in a number of multilateral and bilateral arenas as well as in the region, through exercises such as Operation Flintlock and the EU and UN programmes. As mentioned above, the Government believes security co-operation is, and will continue to be, essential to tackling the problems facing the region.

THE JIHADIST TAKEOVER OF NORTHERN MALI

3. The UK Government was right to back France's intervention in Mali in January 2013, and to provide practical assistance. France's intervention was justified and necessary: the threat to the whole country appeared credible, given the state of the Malian military and the lack of a regional response. The intervention also helped prevent the humanitarian catastrophe beginning to unfold in northern Mali from significantly worsening. It is too early to say whether Mali is now "safe": this in any case requires more than military intervention, but we can say that Operation Serval was, in military terms, a success. (Paragraph 42)

The Government agrees with the Committee that the French military intervention in Mali was necessary and, in military terms, successful. Significant challenges remain,

including the slow progress of peace negotiations between the Government of Mali and relevant armed groups. Other challenges include tackling the humanitarian needs resulting from the conflict in northern Mali. These have added to pre-existing needs caused by the food security and nutrition crisis of 2012. The conflict has complicated efforts to bring food relief and build resilience, and disrupted water, health and education services in the north. The Department for International Development (DFID) provided £83 million in humanitarian assistance in 2013 to the Sahel, including £23 million to Mali to support communities still at risk of food insecurity and conflict-affected populations, and recently announced a further contribution of £20 million for 2014.

ALGERIA: THE ATTACK AT IN AMENAS

4. The UK's ability to respond independently to the hostage crisis at In Amenas, Algeria, in January 2013 was limited, given the nature of the Algerian state. However, it is evident that, at the moment of crisis, the channels of communication that the UK wanted to access were not available, indicating that there is an ongoing need to develop key relationships at political and diplomatic levels. We accept that this will be challenging. We note that the FCO has taken steps to ascertain whether there are lessons to be learned from the attack, and is working closely with industry to ensure better co-ordination and information-sharing on security matters, in order to ensure that British expatriate workers are as safe as possible. We urge the Government to ensure that this includes contractors and subcontractors of companies, as well as employees. (Paragraph 48)

5. We note that the UK Government expressed confidence in 2013 that it would in due course secure more information from its Algerian counterparts on the circumstances surrounding the mission to recover the plant from the terrorists. We would be grateful for an update. (Paragraph 49)

Since the In Amenas incident, the Government has continued to build closer links with the Algerian authorities. The Prime Minister visited in 2013, as did the then Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The current Minister for MENA has visited twice in 2014. The Prime Minister's Trade Envoy for Algeria has visited several times. We have increased our engagement on security matters, most notably through the bilateral Strategic Security Partnership, through which two high-level meetings took place in 2013. It has been an important forum in which to discuss security and industry concerns

As the report notes, the FCO has learned lessons from the attack: the FCO is also continuing to work closely with industry, most recently at a conference on overseas business risk with City Security and Resilience Networks on 31 March 2014. We have raised the concerns passed to us by contractors and their families with the UK companies represented at In Amenas.

The Coroner for West Sussex is currently considering the circumstances of the deaths of the six British nationals and a British resident in the In Amenas attack. On 10 March 2014 the Algerian Government responded to a request for information from

the Coroner. Until the Coroner has given her verdict, it would be inappropriate for us to comment further.

NIGERIA

6. The UK Government wants Nigeria to defeat terrorism, but has concerns about assisting the Nigerian military. We fully understand the Government's dilemma but consider it important that the UK do whatever it can, consistent with its respect for human rights values, to assist Nigeria in its battle against Boko Haram's uniquely repellent brand of extremism. We ask the Government to be mindful of the importance of effective counter-terrorism co-operation between the two countries, given our strong diaspora links with Nigeria, and of the possibility of Nigeria eventually seeking security assistance elsewhere, perhaps from countries with far fewer scruples than the UK has. We note that the UK Government provides training and assistance to other armies in the developing world and seek clarification from the Government that it is satisfied that its position is entirely consistent. (Paragraph 63)

The Government shares the committee's concern over Boko Haram and Ansaru's repellent and indiscriminate use of violence. The abduction by Boko Haram of the girls at Chibok underscored just how callous they can be. The attacks on Abuja on 14 April and 1 May, as well as the bombs in Jos on 20 May which are believed to have killed over 100, demonstrate that Boko Haram is an enduring and growing threat to stability across Nigeria. The Foreign Secretary reiterated our support to Nigeria and its neighbours at the Summit hosted in Paris on 17 May, where further steps were taken with those countries in partnership with the UK, US, EU and France to counter the regional threat of Boko Haram.

Nigeria is a key CT partner for the UK and we continue to provide assistance to various parts of the Nigerian security forces and judicial systems. We offered assistance to the Nigerian authorities following the kidnap of the Chibok schoolgirls. The Prime Minister announced on 14 May a package of CT assistance for Nigeria including aerial surveillance and a team of military experts who will work with Nigerian, US and French experts within an Intelligence Fusion Cell in Abuja. We continue to keep our assistance under review. UK assistance aims to enable the Nigerians to disrupt terrorism by having effective legislation, and by conducting effective terrorism investigations, arrests and detentions based on respect for the rule of law and human rights. Nigeria is, and will continue to be, a high priority for the UK in respect of CT and organised crime, both as threats to Nigeria's own stability and development and to the UK and UK interests in Nigeria.

At present the UK has a Defence Section in the High Commission in Nigeria and a small British Military Advisory Training Team (BMATT). The latter will be strengthened this year. Our military assistance supports the development of Nigerian training establishments and is mainly focused on leadership and doctrinal training, with a strong emphasis on ethics, behaviours, and the rule of law. We are developing human rights, strategic communications, and logistics training and also deliver maritime security cooperation.

The Government also has a close working relationship with the National Security Adviser Sambo Dasuki. We are considering what more we can do with his office to strengthen Nigeria's resilience to terrorism. We have delivered a number of capacity building initiatives through his office. DFID has a range of programmes focused on countering Islamic extremism and delivering justice and better governance in the north of Nigeria.

We are also working through the EU to help coordinate increased EU assistance through the Instrument for Stability fund and successfully negotiated the first tranche of EU assistance for Nigeria's CT efforts (€10 million) in 2013. We are currently in discussions in Brussels to see whether more funds could be released under an emergency mechanism to address some of the ongoing security and stability threats in Nigeria.

All of our assistance across the world is, and will remain, consistent with the statements the Foreign Secretary made to the House of Commons on 15 December 2011 and 28 February 2014 on overseas justice and security assistance. We are satisfied that our position in Nigeria is consistent with this. In order to strengthen the impact of our own interventions in Nigeria we will also work closely with international partners, including the US and France.

WIDER LESSONS FROM RECENT EVENTS

7. We agree with the UK Government that parts of North and West Africa have become a new frontline in the contest with Islamist extremism and terrorism. (Paragraph 65)

8. However, we have encountered limited evidence thus far to confirm the Prime Minister's concerns that the empty quarters of the region have become a "magnet for jihadists". (Paragraph 66)

The Government notes the Committee's agreement that parts of North and West Africa are increasingly important in the contest with Islamic extremism and terrorism. As the Committee noted earlier, weak political institutions and long-standing political grievances can combine with economic hardship and lack of socio economic mobility to create an environment with the potential for extremism.

The increase in recent years of activities of groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria highlight the threat in the region. We currently assess that areas of Libya that are not currently under central Government control provide opportunities for extremist networks to establish areas of operations and influence. Our current assessment is that Syria is the major international draw for jihadists.

9. The threat from terrorism to people in many parts of the Western Sahel-Sahara region is immediate, frightening and real. The prospect of another extremist "takeover" of territory somewhere in the Western Sahel cannot be ruled out. However, it is important to maintain a sense of proportion about the scale of the military threat the extremists pose. The precedent of Mali in 2013 suggests that they would struggle to hold territory in the face of any Western-

led intervention. We are aware of no evidence that extremists in the region yet pose an “existential threat” to the West. (Paragraph 72)

The Government agrees with the Committee that while extremists in the region do not currently pose an ‘existential threat’ to the UK, they remain a significant threat in the region. Our assessment remains that extremists in the area are currently not capable of conducting attacks on the UK mainland. Their focus remains on activities within the region, which can still impact on British nationals and interests. Most terrorist groups in the region are motivated by the local struggle, and so do not target UK interests directly. Some groups have intent and capability to attack western interests. There is also a risk that the threat could shift to Europe and the UK in the future. We have seen the terrible impact that terrorism can have on UK nationals and interests overseas, and the role it is playing in driving instability in the region. FCO travel advice gives our best assessment of the terrorist threat, based on the latest available information.

10. UK interests in parts of North and West Africa are vulnerable to terrorism and will continue to be for the foreseeable future, whatever the level of UK engagement in counter-terrorism. It is possible that greater engagement might lead to increased targeting of UK interests, and citizens. However, we agree with the Prime Minister that UK and Western disengagement from the region, and failure to seek to address terrorism and its causes, would in the longer term carry greater risks for the UK. (Paragraph 80)

The Government shares the Committee’s view that UK interests in North and West Africa will continue to be vulnerable to terrorism in the foreseeable future. As the Prime Minister made clear, we judge that the risk of increasing the UK’s profile is outweighed by the importance of tackling the growing threat. We have seen no evidence as yet that the threat to the UK increased as a result of our support to the French intervention in Mali.

We are clear that terrorist groups should not be allowed to establish footholds. This is why we continue to support regional governments’ efforts to respond effectively to the threat, both through security measures and an intelligent political response that addresses the root causes of terrorism in the region. These include political instability, poor governance, and lack of economic opportunities.

Our CT activity is proportionate and focused on those countries where there is a threat to the UK. In financial year 2013/14 we funded £3.8 million of projects to support CT efforts across the region.

These programme funds support activity to build CT capacity in areas such as: strategy and legal frameworks, aviation security, border management and work to counter the ideology that drives violent extremism.

11. We urge the UK Government to remain vigilant on the issue of possible radicalisation within North and West African diaspora communities, bearing in mind that dialogue and positive engagement with these communities could also contribute to an effective counter-terrorism strategy. (Paragraph 81)

The Office for Security and Counter Terrorism's Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU), part of the Home Office, works to identify, analyse and counter the narratives used by radicalisers to target vulnerable members of diaspora communities. RICU provides consultative support to diaspora civil society groups, working with them to increase the capacity of activists to challenge online extremist content effectively, and to provide credible alternatives.

12. The UK's policies on non-payment of ransom money to terrorists may have helped protect vulnerable UK citizens abroad. We acknowledge the Prime Minister's global leadership in seeking to eradicate ransom payments. Countries that continue to flout the ban on payments are guilty of strengthening the terrorists' hand. The UK should continue to discreetly but firmly press its allies to end this practice. (Paragraph 82)

The Government thanks the Committee for its comments in support of the UK's Kidnap for Ransom (KfR) policy. Tackling KfR is a CT priority; our policy seeks to address the strategic problem of terrorist finance and to keep British nationals safer by making kidnapping for ransom unprofitable.

A key part of our policy is persuading other States to take action to address the issue of KfR. Under the UK's Presidency in 2013, the G8 made an unequivocal commitment to reject ransom payments to terrorists. Building on this momentum, the UK sponsored a landmark UN Security Council Resolution on KfR (Resolution 2133), which was unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council on 27 January 2014. While it does not create new obligations, securing the first specific and standalone Security Council Resolution on KfR increases pressure on all Member States not to pay and is an important marker in UK-led efforts to prevent terrorists benefitting from ransoms. This Resolution makes clear the Security Council's determination to secure the release of hostages without ransom payments or political concessions. In addition, and for the first time at the UN, the resolution calls on Member States to work with the private sector to respond to terrorist kidnappings without paying ransoms.

The Government is now capitalising on agreements at the G8 and UN, to secure further multilateral commitment and cement progress in persuading other States to prevent ransoms from being paid. This will include encouraging other States to prevent kidnaps in the first place; to co-ordinate efforts in kidnap response; and to introduce legislation to prohibit payments. We are also working with like-minded international partners, including the AU, to co-ordinate the international drive to eliminate ransom payments.

THE UK'S DIPLOMATIC RESOURCES: RHETORIC VERSUS REALITY

13. Recent events underline the difficulty of monitoring events in the Western Sahel-Sahara region, anticipating crises, and responding to them as they unfold, particularly when diplomatic resources are limited. They also underline that, whilst the Sahara may be a departmental barrier within the FCO, it is not one for terrorists. The UK Government should reflect on weaknesses in analysis that the events appear to have exposed, and how these might be rectified at departmental level. This applies particularly in relation to

intervention in Libya in 2011: considerable resources were expended ensuring that military goals were successfully achieved (for which the Government deserves credit), but there was a failure to anticipate, and therefore mitigate, the regional fallout from the intervention, which has been enormous and, in some cases, disastrous. (Paragraph 99)

The Government agrees that artificial organisational barriers can weaken analysis and policy responses. In recent years, the Government has taken steps to break down any barriers across departments. The government-wide North and West Africa Strategic Approach has led to better understanding the linkages, trends and flows that extend across North and West Africa, including the Sahel-Sahara region.

The Government disagrees with the committee's assertion that there was a failure to anticipate and mitigate the regional fallout from the intervention in Libya in 2011. Extensive post-conflict planning was conducted by the UK and international partners including to establish a UN support mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to assist with the transition. However, Libya is dealing with the historical challenge of vast porous borders compounded by the legacy of 40 years of Qadhafi misrule. The UK and the international community are committed to supporting Libya, but creating a secure and stable state will take time. The EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM Libya), to which the UK has seconded four experts, is working to enhance the security of Libya's borders. The UK has a team of advisers in Libya helping build institutional capacity and developing police and justice reform. In addition, the UK has undertaken to train 2,000 General Purpose Force personnel, as part of an international initiative involving the US and Italy to train up to 7,000. The UK is leading international efforts to support a UN plan to provide support on securing and disposing of Qadhafi era arms and ammunition stockpiles.

14. Looking to the future, the UK's very limited diplomatic resources in and around the Western Sahel will make it difficult for the Government to achieve its ambitions to be more intensively involved in the region and to help shape events as they unfold. The Government should consider increasing its resources in the region and its reserves of specialist knowledge. If not, it should scale back its ambitions—and its rhetoric. (Paragraph 100)

The Government has, in recent years, dedicated greater resources to the Sahel region. For example, the Embassy in Bamako re-opened in 2010 and a decision was made to send additional staff during the conflict in Mali. There remains a stronger UK diplomatic presence in Mali than before the French military intervention. Also, since re-establishing an Embassy in Tripoli following the revolution, we have increased the number of staff we have there. This has been achieved in a co-ordinated way across government resources from the Home Office, HMRC, NCA, MOD and DFID as well as the FCO. It includes regional conflict and CT advisers based in the wider North and West Africa, and the appointment of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for the Sahel, the Right Hon Stephen O'Brien MP. The FCO Africa Directorate has also recently created a team of roaming officers to assist in London and across the Africa network where necessary and could provide a surge capacity in the Sahel region if required. The National Security Council (NSC) have implemented a process to reform decision-making around countries and regions at risk of instability, including the Sahel, creating a clearer, simpler, more strategic

framework that will further strengthen cross-government coherence. To reinforce this change, from April 2015 the UK will establish a new Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), comprising ODA and non-ODA..

The Government is also being more innovative in providing resources to the Sahel region, particularly through international partners. This has included placing staff into MINUSMA and into EU CSDP missions in Mali and Niger, as well as a DFID-funded UK conflict adviser in the EU delegation in Bamako. We are considering further secondments to multilateral organisations in the region, and expect to be able to provide staff to the new civilian CSDP Mission that is being established in Mali this year.

The Government retains significant specialist knowledge to assist in the region. This includes the FCO's Research Analysts, in-house experts who are able to interact with and harness the power of external academic expertise. When recruiting secondees for multilateral organisations such as CSDP Missions we search for individuals with a sound knowledge of the region who are able to add real value to those Missions and to the UK's understanding of events. The FCO Language Centre, re-opened by the Foreign Secretary on 19 September 2013, has reinvigorated language learning in the FCO and will help strengthen the long-term capability of the FCO. We are currently reviewing the total number of speaker slots across our network including the North and West Africa region and taking steps to ensure that all speakers are on track to reach target skill levels.

Nevertheless, it is important that the Government's response is consistent and proportionate with our assessment of to the UK or where the UK's interests are greatest. It is important that we prioritise staffing and resources and ensure this is appropriate across the network.

15. We suggest that the UK Government contemplate an enhancement of its diplomatic profile in Francophone parts of the Western Sahel-Sahara region. This would be consistent with the Government's commitment towards greater engagement with the region. It would appear that a raised UK profile in the region would be welcomed and it seems probable that the UK may be able to offer advice and assistance in a way that some other countries could not. Far from raising the risk of the UK and France wastefully "doubling up" diplomatic resources, we suggest that it will increase opportunities for the two countries to work together fruitfully on security, development and political co-operation in the region, as they have been doing in Mali. (Paragraph 103)

The Government notes the Committee's suggestion for an increased UK diplomatic footprint in the Sahel. As we deepen our expertise in the region and the challenges it faces, we will keep our resourcing under constant review and are indeed looking to increase our staff at the UK Embassy in Abidjan. We are also increasing our co-operation in francophone Africa through other means. This is demonstrated by our relationship with Chad where high level visits by the Prime Minister's Special Representative for the Sahel and Director Africa, and a visit to the UK by President Deby's for the Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference in February 2014, have strengthened ties.

It is also worth noting that since reopening, the UK Embassy in Bamako has established itself as an important actor on the diplomatic stage in both Mali and Niger. Its growing links with the UN, EU, African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and bilateral partners have enabled the UK both to better understand trends and events, and to influence international efforts to bring security and development to the Sahel region. The value of the Embassy has been recognised in concrete terms as the Embassy will be moving to new, improved premises in late 2014. However, there are no plans to open any new Missions in the region.

Following on from the UK's support to the French intervention in Mali in 2013, and given the UK's many shared interests with France in Africa, the Government is committed to deepening its dialogue with Paris on Africa issues, including the Sahel-Sahara region. This is being achieved partly through the UK/France strategic Africa dialogue. In this spirit, the UK has provided military support to Operation Sangaris, the French deployment in the Central African Republic and has supported the establishment of the EU Mission in CAR.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE UK

16. There is a need for a step-change in the co-ordination of international efforts to combat insecurity, and the drivers of insecurity, in and around the Western Sahel. We propose that the UK Government press its international partners for agreement to a common security and stability policy for the Western Sahel. Lead responsibility for securing implementation of the policy should rest with a tripartite leadership of France, the UK and the US, supported by others, including the European External Action Service. (Paragraph 110)

The Government agrees that the international community must co-ordinate its responses to the challenges facing the Sahel. The EU Sahel Strategy and UNISS are clear articulations of this imperative. The UK is working closely with the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) to encourage UN co-ordination in national and regional work to the numerous challenges, particularly with respect to humanitarian and development issues. We also fully support the EU's active role in the Sahel, through CSDP Missions, other EU instruments such as the Instrument for Stability, and the EU Special Representative for the Sahel. The UK Special Representative for the Sahel regularly maintains close contact with colleagues across the EU and more widely to help foster closer co-operation.

The UK also co-operates closely with the US and France (and other bilateral partners) on a wide range of issues relating to security, development and resilience in the region. One such example is the long-term support the UK, and its partners, offers to the ECOWAS Standby Force which formed the majority of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and still forms the backbone of MINUSMA. The UK also engages with the AU structures, which continue to track developments closely through its officers in the Sahel and through periodic sessions of the AU Peace and Security Council.

17. There is an emerging pattern of evidence of the UK and its main partners being unsighted by events in and around the Sahel region. The international community's successive failure, in Mali and in the Central African Republic, to anticipate events and to respond to them speedily as they unfolded, is worrying. We accept that the UK was not the only country to be unsighted by events and acknowledge that its diplomatic resources in both countries are light. We recommend that the UK Government seek to raise at international level the need for more effective early warning systems in and around the Western Sahel region. (Paragraph 115)

The Government accepts that the speed of events that led to the crises in Mali (the army coup of March 2012 and the move south by armed groups in January 2013) and the Central African Republic (Seleka's coup in March 2013) caught local actors and the international community by surprise. However, the UK, and its partners, had identified both countries and wider Sahel region at risk of conflict several years earlier. This was based on a number of factors highlighted earlier by the Committee - weak governance, failure to address historic disputes, ungoverned spaces and organised crime, as well as the presence of terrorist groups in the Sahel region.

The Government is determined to work with international partners, particularly regional partners such as the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), to build on existing national and regional resilience and capacity to anticipate events and respond to them sufficiently early to prevent state structures being overwhelmed. There are a number of examples of this work underway at the moment. The EU External Action Service is coordinating the development of a conflict early warning system based on publicly available data and information provided by EU delegations. The early warning information it generates will be brought to Member States through the Peace and Security Committee, thereby enabling better coordination across EU instruments and Member States.

DFID also draws upon such early warning information to inform programmatic response. DFID's Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department produces a bi-annual assessment of humanitarian risk, based on the global risk register from risk management specialists Maplecroft and incorporating other sources including the Cabinet Office Countries at Risk of Instability, NGO reporting on humanitarian trends, and data from other government departments. This bi-annual assessment is used by DFID humanitarian and geographical policy leads to tackle rising risks and preparedness issues, including with international partners

New DFID funding approved under the Building resilience and adaptation to climate extremes and disasters (BRACED) programme and the Adaptive Social Protection trust fund at the World Bank both have early warning components to them, although initially at least this will focus on climatic risks and information. Other donors such as the US and the EU are already looking closely at early warning-linked funding (the US calls this a Crisis Modifier). DFID will coordinate with other donors in this domain, including reaching agreement on triggers for early action.

In addition to the established longer term analyses of instability/conflict risk, the Government is currently setting up a cross Whitehall rising risks early warning system, which will look at instability risks that are developing in the immediate/short

term timeframe. This improved system will make use of existing source analysis and involve external experts. Crucially, this will be a system that feeds in to the NSC, allowing ministerial/senior official policy decisions on the necessity of, and direction of further action, such as working through the United Nations, or supporting conflict prevention activity in the country at risk. A common criticism of early warning systems is that the early warning is not translated into early action. This system will help us to bridge that gap.

18. Renewed proposals within the African Union for a standby military force are welcome, and we would support the UK and its international partners seeking to assist in building capacity. It is reasonable to assume that it will be some time before there are wholly African solutions to African problems of equivalent scale to those in Mali and the Central African Republic. This places an onus on the UK and its international partners to ensure that contingency plans are in place to deal with future crises. (Paragraph 119)

The Government welcomes the Committee's comments on support for the renewed proposals for an African Standby Force (ASF). The UK has long supported the AU's efforts to build an operational ASF by the end of 2015, to prevent, manage and respond to crises but recognise this is unlikely to be met in some regions. We applaud the positive progress the continent has made over the past decade: in that time ten AU and regional missions have been deployed, including to Mali, Somalia and CAR, and in 2013 more than 30,000 African troops were deployed on UN missions.

In April 2013, the AU commissioned a review of the ASF's development to date. Presented to the AU Summit in January 2014, it concluded that while some of the regions were well advanced, others were unlikely to meet the end-2015 deadline. It made recommendations on the way forward. The Summit agreed on the need for Member States, the AU Commission and the RECs to work towards speedy implementation of all recommendations. As a temporary and complementary measure, the AU has worked up a concept for an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC); a quick-reaction force which could be deployed to stabilise a crisis situation. Twelve AU members have already committed to ACIRC.

In addition to maintaining our bilateral relationships across Africa, the UK, together with other key partners, supports and engages closely with the Peace and Security Department in the AU and the RECs. This includes contributing to the pre-deployment training of African troops deploying on UN and AU peacekeeping operations, and provision of direct support and advice to several of the emerging regional standby brigades. However, developing the capacity of a military force on a continental scale is a complex and ambitious project, and needs the co-ordinated support of a range of international partners. Last year, through our Presidency of the G8, the UK organised a successful Africa Clearing House event in Addis Ababa, to examine developments on building the ASF, and to look at the best mechanisms for donors and partners to contribute in a joined-up way. With other partners, for example France, US, and the UN, we aim to identify and address gaps in key areas of capacity, both in the AU Commission, and within the RECs and the main troop contributing countries. The UK also helps, through the EU, fund the African Peace

Facility, which was set up with the African Union to support African management of crises across the continent.

The UK is helping in other ways too, for example providing planning support for Exercise AMANI AFRICA II, a continental level exercise aimed at validating the operational readiness of the ASF, and demonstrating that the AU can run a full multidimensional peace support operation, to take place later this year.

19. Algeria and Morocco are both key to delivering increased stability in the Western Sahel-Sahara region, and effective bilateral relations with both countries are essential. Partnership with Algeria does present some challenges, particularly in relation to Algeria's security and intelligence services, but we believe that a constructive and effective relationship can be maintained if the UK is realistic in its aims and maintains its red lines on issues of particular importance such as respect for human rights. We note encouraging signs that Algeria is willing to engage with the UK on a more open basis than it perhaps did in the past. (Paragraph 126)

20. Conflict over the Western Sahara issue has had a toxic effect on regional cooperation in North-West Africa, including on security issues. The intensification of the terrorist threat in the region, combined with the gradual generational shift in political leadership, may present an opening for new approaches to resolving the conflict to be tested. We would encourage the UK Government to explore options for helping to bring the different sides together. (Paragraph 127)

Algeria

The Government agrees with the Committee that there is increased openness between the UK and Algeria. We are having increasingly frank and productive discussions on these issues through our Strategic Security Partnership. And, supported by the UK/Algeria Annual Bilateral Strategic Dialogue, the UK is making progress in other priority areas such as trade, which is at its highest point in history, and migration. UK stock is high owing also to the demand for English Language Training and Higher Education co-operation on which we continue to capitalise.

We note the Committee's comments on human rights. This continues to form part of our private dialogue with Algeria. We have seen progress: Algeria has taken a seat on the UN Human Rights Council 2014 and has signed up the Foreign Secretary's PSVI Declaration. We also welcome the constructive role that Algeria is increasingly playing in regional politics.

Western Sahara

The Government is seizing opportunities to encourage all regional partners to see the significant threats of instability in the wider region as reasons to set aside differences and build co-operation and confidence.

We agree with the Committee that the issue of Western Sahara remains an obstacle to greater regional co-operation. The UK continues to support the efforts of the

United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Western Sahara to encourage the parties to reach a mutually acceptable political solution that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. We agree that all opportunities to find a resolution within this framework should be explored.

The UK has a frank dialogue on this subject with all parties involved, contributes fully to UN Security Council discussions, and regularly visits both Western Sahara and the Tindouf refugee camps in order to remain informed about the situation there.

The UK also has a regular dialogue with the Moroccan Government about human rights in Western Sahara. It has welcomed the important steps forward that Morocco has taken to improve human rights in the territory: its announcement that it will soon ratify the Optional Protocol for the Convention Against Torture; its commitments to investigate complaints of human rights violations within 3 months; and the definitive ending of Military Tribunal trials for civilians. These initiatives mark important progress towards Morocco fully meeting international human rights standards. We will continue to discuss remaining concerns with the Moroccan Government.

DEVELOPMENT AID, FOREIGN POLICY AND FRAGILE STATES

21. We agree with both the aims of the UK Government's Building Stability Overseas strategy to integrate foreign, security and development policies, and the premises that inform it. (Paragraph 129)

The Government welcomes the conclusion of the Committee. The challenges of bringing peace, security and development to a fragile or conflict-affected state are both difficult and complex. The Building Stability Overseas Strategy underpins FCO, DFID and MOD work in fragile and conflict-affected states, including through the ACPP. The NSC-led process of bringing departments together to develop cross-government strategies for countries and regions at risk of instability will strengthen this further.

22. We invite the Government to comment on whether its bilateral aid programme for Nigeria is making satisfactory progress against goals set out in the Building Security Overseas strategy and, if so, how this progress has been measured. We also suggest that the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, in its work evaluating DFID's approach to anti-corruption, treat DFID's work in Nigeria as a case study. (Paragraph 133)

The security situation has continued to deteriorate in the north east of Nigeria and in some parts of the Middle Belt. The scale of the problem is enormous, as the ongoing conflict exacerbates the significant development challenges that already exist, which in turn fuel further cycles of violence and lead to further insecurity in the region. DFID's bilateral aid programme aims to disrupt these cycles of violence by investing in upstream prevention in the region, in line with the Building Stability Overseas Strategy objectives. In Jigawa and Zamfara states, the UK is working to support the poorest households in Northern Nigeria through predictable cash

transfers to the poorest households with children under three, thereby reaching 420,000 people. By 2015 we will help to get an additional 800,000 children into education in Northern Nigeria.

As well as investing in basic services DFID funding is helping to build strong, legitimate institutions that are accountable and responsive to citizens in Northern Nigeria, and the UK is also helping to improve public and financial management across the Nigerian system. Through DFID's Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme, we are also working directly to reduce the incidence and negative impacts of violent conflict on vulnerable populations, by improving conflict management mechanisms in target states, including in the North, Middle Belt and Delta regions.

We have drawn the Committee's comments to the attention of the ICAI although it is for them, as an independent organisation, to decide whether to follow this up.

23. We draw these remarks to the attention of the International Development Committee. (Paragraph 134)

We have noted the Committee's comments.

24. We note that the opportunity is currently open to debate the purpose and definition of overseas development assistance, and that the UK Government will be a contributor. We would invite the UK Government to consider whether the current definition has the effect of restricting or preventing the development of aid programmes based around delivering increased security. We also invite the Government to respond to evidence we received during the inquiry that countries of the Western Sahel would welcome non-military development assistance to help strengthen their borders against terrorism and trans-national organised crime. We draw these views to the attention of the International Development Committee. (Paragraph 138)

The UK values the ODA system, which has been important in motivating the quantity and quality of development effort. Given changes to the development landscape, there is an emerging consensus that the ODA definition needs to modernise, particularly in relation to work with the private sector, in order to motivate greater effort. We strongly support the existing requirement that ODA must be provided with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective. We do not want to see a change in this primary purpose. We are aware of some interest in exploring how peace and security activities could be considered in a new international development finance statistical system. There is a need for further work to consider how this might be taken forward.

DFID currently focuses the majority of its bilateral resources to the Sahel in the areas of humanitarian and resilience programming. This includes a focus on support to those affected by conflict and those who have to cross borders to flee conflict.

The Government believes the challenge of improving border management in the Sahel-Saharan region is significant, and is an area where multilateral efforts are best placed to deliver results. That is why the UK has supported the establishment of, and

contributed staff to, EUBAM. EUBAM is already exploring with the EU Civilian Capacity-building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) how the two Missions might collaborate to deliver best effect on border management issues. EUCAP works with both the Nigerien authorities and other international actors to support the developing Sahel Security College, which has the potential to make an important contribution to improving the management of borders across the region. The Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) also seeks to improve regional cross-border co-operation, and GCTF initiatives such as exploring the potential for “hot pursuit” across borders may serve to build trust between regional governments and tackle common threats.

However, the Government would consider any request for other bilateral non-military assistance against UK priorities and resources. Some examples include the NCA who continue to work closely with governments in West Africa to tackle serious and organised crime. Both DFID programming and the Africa Drugs and Crime Fund are supporting an expansion of NCA operational activity and capacity building for West Africa regional law enforcement. As mentioned above, the ACP is co-funding a conflict prevention and border security capacity building project in the Niger/Mali/Burkina Faso region.

25. We are supportive of signals from the UK Government that it is considering an extension of its programme of offering military training to vulnerable countries. We see this as a practical way for the UK to help bolster security and stability in fragile states. We also see it as naturally complementary to programmes to develop improved governance delivered through development aid packages. We are mindful that, in undertaking any such work, it is necessary to be realistic, as success in transmitting values and standards is not assured. We would welcome an update on UK Government policy on the future of the EU Training Mission in Mali. (Paragraph 145)

Military training continues to be an important instrument of the Government’s defence engagement overseas, and can complement the political and development work that the UK undertakes to strengthen resilience in developing countries. Following the withdrawal of UK Armed Forces from Afghanistan there will be opportunity to consider further engagement in such activity. But it is too early to determine where, and in what shape, this may take place. Also, and a number of important questions, not least funding, will need to be worked through.

The EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) has successfully trained four Malian Battlegroups, approximately 2,200 soldiers, and an important element of the training has been education in International Humanitarian Law aimed at improving the standards and values of Malian Armed Forces. Due to the success of the EUTM’s first 15-month mandate, EU Member States have agreed to extend this Mission for a further two years. This will enable the training to be deepened and reinforced, and enable the Malians to establish their own sustainable training arrangements from 2016 onwards. The UK has agreed to continue providing trainers partnering with the Republic of Ireland to support the EUTM as it moves into its second mandate.

26. The crisis in Mali raises questions about the administration of development aid in fragile countries. There is evidence that development aid appears to

have become part of the problem rather than part of the solution in Mali, inhibiting the development of responsive and responsible government and entrenching corruption in its political culture, in a manner inconsistent with the Government's Building Stability Overseas Strategy. We are also concerned to ensure that development aid programmes in Mali and elsewhere are better monitored in future. Mali remains a fragile democracy affected by internal political tensions, as well as the threat of terrorism. (Paragraph 151)

Although DFID does not have a bilateral development programme in Mali, we are working with other donors to ensure that development aid effectively addresses the needs of all of the citizens of Mali, and supports the processes through which the government will be perceived as being more efficient and more legitimate. DFID does use its influence in Mali to ensure that development initiatives are conflict sensitive and contribute to political accountability, legitimacy and inclusiveness and have seconded a conflict adviser into the EU delegation in Mali to that end.

27. We consider that the FCO has a role in relation to monitoring these projects alongside DFID, particularly where (as in Mali) DFID does not have a direct bilateral relationship with the country concerned. We also suggest that the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, in its work evaluating DFID's funding of multilateral aid and the scaling up of aid spending, consider treating Mali as a case study. (Paragraph 152)

The Government believes collaboration between departments is essential. For example, the FCO, DFID and MOD are working closely together in the Stabilisation Unit and ACPP (and this will be extended further under the new CSSF arrangements). However, it is important that clear divisions of responsibility remain in some areas, to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

Embassies and High Commissions across the world provide assistance and support other government departments where they have no bilateral presence.

28. We draw these comments to the attention of the International Development Committee. (Paragraph 153)

We have noted the Committee's comments.

29. There is clear evidence that high population growth in the developing world is often linked to political instability and to the spread of radical or extremist views. We suggest that recent events in the Western Sahel may provide further evidence of that correlation. While we are concerned that DFID do not acknowledge this link, we commend the UK Government for prioritising increased access to family planning in the developing world and call on it to ensure that the issue remains on the international agenda. (Paragraph 158)

We will continue to prioritise increasing access to family planning in the developing world, and to ensuring that women and girls are able to decide, freely and for themselves, whether, when and how many children to have. At the London Family Planning Summit in 2012 ("FP2020") the UK Government committed £516 million over 2012-2020; this will enable an additional 24 million girls and women in the

world's poorest countries to use voluntary family planning information, services and supplies. This includes support to global and country programmes working in North and West Africa.

30. We urge the UK to press for greater clarity from the EU on its policies for handling increased migration to Europe from Sahelian countries, and in particular on whether, when potential immigrants are located on boats in the Mediterranean, they are turned back or ushered to safety. (Paragraph 161)

The Government shares the Committee's concerns about the dangers to those travelling across the Sahel and Mediterranean to reach Europe, which were highlighted once again by the deaths off Lampedusa in October 2013. We are working with our European partners to develop the EU's response to this issue, in particular through the implementation of the actions agreed in the context of the Task Force Mediterranean. These actions were agreed by the EU and Member States in December 2013, and set out a coherent approach to this complex issue, with a focus on preventative action upstream in third countries of origin and transit.

The responsibilities of the Task Force include the co-ordination of existing activity and the development of new actions. These aim to tackle illegal immigration, dissuade migrants while respecting fundamental rights, and support protection in the region for those who require it. One such project is the development of information campaigns designed to deter potential migrants from risking their lives attempting to enter the EU illegally.

Whilst the Government supports most of the actions proposed by the Task Force Mediterranean, we remain concerned that some proposals such as the relocation of refugees within the EU and access to EU asylum in third countries are likely to be counterproductive. We continue to raise our concerns with our EU partners. Similarly, we believe that the enhanced maritime patrols in the Mediterranean, intended to save lives, have acted as a 'pull factor' leading to further attempts at perilous sea crossings, a concern we raised during the Task Force negotiations last year. We have seen no evidence of 'push backs' of migrants in the course of these maritime operations.

Co-operation with third countries takes place under the EU's overarching external migration policy framework (the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility). It includes support and capacity building through instruments such as the EU's Mobility Partnerships with Tunisia and Morocco. Proposed future co-operation with third countries includes enhanced efforts to tackle the organised criminal networks facilitating many of these dangerous crossings. In this context, it is important to distinguish between people smuggling and trafficking in human beings: many of those migrants attempting to reach the EU illegally by the land and sea route from sub-Saharan Africa are smuggled but not trafficked.

CONCLUSION

31. Analysis and policy-making about terrorism and insecurity in the areas covered by this report suffers from a lack of information on some key issues. We consider that increasing the gathering, and analysis, of information and

intelligence on terrorism in and around the Western Sahel should be a priority for the UK Government and its international partners. (Paragraph 163)

As we have made clear, we take the threat from terrorism in the region seriously. The UK is working through our network in the region, and closely with key partners such as France, the US and EU to increase and share our understanding of the region and threats.

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