International Crisis Group

Strategic Framework 2016–2018

2016–2018
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A. Summary

Crisis Group aspires to be the preeminent organisation providing independent analysis and advice on how to prevent, resolve or better manage deadly conflict. We combine expert field-based research, analysis and engagement with policymakers across the world and seek to effect change in the crisis situations on which we work. We endeavour to talk to all sides and in doing so to build on our role as a trusted source of field-researched information, fresh perspectives and advice for conflict parties and external actors.

The challenges of today’s world

Founded in 1995, Crisis Group enters its third decade at a uniquely complex moment. In recent years there has been a notable increase in the occurrence of armed conflict, including major wars, as well as in the number of its victims. Violent extremism, climate change, economic crises, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, organised crime, unauthorised or misapplied use of force, the massive violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights and population shifts of a magnitude not seen since the end of the Second World War have emerged as phenomena that challenge the existing array of institutional, policy and legal tools. The retreat of traditional powers’ influence in some theatres and the return of great power tensions in others are changing the practice of diplomacy. Like transnational threats, they hugely complicate the task of conflict resolution. (See Annex I: Context).

A combination of heightened security risks and mounting sensitivity to the presence of NGOs in some countries has introduced new challenges in terms of the access of field-centred organisation such as Crisis Group. At the same time the continuing revolution in communications and information technology has contributed to dramatic changes in the media and its uses. A significant decline in the international media covering our issues from the field is balanced by a no less notable increase in the use of social media as a tool of communication and a means of content dissemination. The former places increased demands on our field staff, while the latter challenges us to take full advantage of existing and emerging communications platforms. Meanwhile, changes in the funding environment have complicated our efforts to ensure a secure funding base for the future.

Finally, a large number of institutions – intergovernmental, government and from civil society – crowd the field of conflict prevention and response. None matches Crisis Group in the depth of our granular, non-partisan analysis and the breadth of our access from the field up to the highest policy levels. However, our unique contribution cannot be taken for granted. Nor can we aspire to have impact in isolation of the many other organisations and entities who work from different perspectives to promote a secure and sustainable peace, and the factors that underlie it: dialogue and negotiation, more inclusive politics, the better provision of basic public goods and services, and representative and accountable institutions that uphold human rights and the rule of law.

These shifts in the global environment call for Crisis Group to respond with realism and imagination, and a readiness to introduce profound changes in the way we work.
**Our strategy**

Between 2016 and 2018, we shall pursue **three goals**, in accordance with our mission. We seek (i) to inform conflict prevention, management and resolution efforts through independent research and analysis of deadly conflicts in their local, transnational and strategic dimensions; (ii) to contribute to change through sharpened policy prescriptions for conflict prevention, management and resolution and engagement with those who can act upon them; and (iii) to shape the international debate regarding what it means to prevent, respond to and resolve deadly conflict in the 21st century – a new politics of peace.

We shall achieve these goals by:

- **Becoming more agile.** We will continually revisit our strategic priorities, focusing on those situations – first-order conflict situations and those beneath the radar – where we can make a difference; respond to the new global environment by working more systematically on cross-cutting and transnational issues, “connecting the dots” that emerge from our field reporting; and improve the timing and diversity of our work.

- **Becoming more global.** We will engage more effectively with local and regional actors and powers, even as we maintain our capacity for high-level global advocacy; develop local partnerships to enhance communications, outreach and policy delivery in the regions we cover; design a fellowship program to train and mentor local analysts; and make more proactive use of international networks through our Board of Trustees.

- **Becoming more visible.** We will strengthen our brand recognition, visibility and coherence; refine the means by which we deliver our product, including through a new, more interactive website; raise our media profile and extend our use of new communications channels and social media networks; target local media and publish our work promptly in translation; and, engaging with multiple stakeholders and partners, use our convening power to bring together decision-makers and shape the policy debate.

To underpin these initiatives, Crisis Group commits to:

- **Becoming more effective.** We shall diversify our production, which is understood to include our reports but also a broader range of publications and other forms of policy engagement; reinforce our managerial capacity in line with the requirements of our new and more demanding business model; introduce greater decentralisation to our regional programs, and a more flexible approach to staffing; strengthen investment in security; reinvigorate our training program, including to improve our capacity to reflect a gendered perspective across our work; and strengthen our Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) to integrate lessons learned and better explain our impact.

- **Becoming more proactive in fundraising.** With the support of the Board of Trustees, we shall redouble efforts to secure the necessary funding to close the deficit we have carried in recent years and provide a platform for gradual programmatic growth; engage more dynamically with government donors; increase the proportion of our work supported by project funding; pursue new funding streams in or from the regions in which we work; and seek new opportunities for foundation and private sector support.
B. Vision

A world in which deadly conflict is better understood, prevented and resolved at the global, regional and local levels, so that affected populations experience greater, more sustainable peace, security and development.

C. Mission

Crisis Group works to prevent and resolve deadly conflict around the world by informing and influencing the perceptions and actions of policymakers and other key conflict actors. To this end, we endeavour to talk to all sides and provide expert, independent field-centred research, analysis and policy engagement.

D. Principles

Crisis Group recognises that saving lives is the central goal of all efforts to prevent, transform and resolve deadly conflict and that dialogue and negotiation, more inclusive politics, the better provision of basic public goods and services, and representative and accountable institutions that uphold human rights and the rule of law are constituent elements of a lasting peace.

It is committed to:

- Its independence
- Research that is expert, meticulous and inclusive of all conflict stakeholders
- Impartiality, balance, and timeliness in its analysis and reporting
- Bold, principled and practical policy prescriptions
- Persuasive and credible engagement with decision-makers
- Collaboration with partners where appropriate
- Bucking orthodoxy when required
- Vigorous, imaginative and sophisticated media outreach
- Rigour and transparency in everything it does
- Staying the course

Crisis Group does not aim to be:

- A diplomatic mediator
- An issues-based campaigner, beyond the cause of conflict prevention
- An organisation based on membership funding
- A commentator on subjects it has not researched in the field
E. **Method**

Crisis Group’s methodology is evolving to respond to the changing demands of today’s world. It must systematically integrate the national, transnational, regional and global dimensions of increasingly multi-dimensional conflicts, and our advocacy evolve accordingly. **Prioritisation** is critical to our ability to focus resources and effort on those issues where we are best placed to make a difference and to promote consistent and transparent decision-making on significant new activities and expenditures. Priorities are set within particular conflicts or country situations, within our regional programs, and across the organisation. They are identified in our annual workplan, but revisited and revised on a rolling basis (see Annex II: Theory of Change).

Within this framework, our methodology is centred on the following five pillars:

1. **Expert field research and analysis**

   Crisis Group’s credibility is founded on its field research. Our analysts are based in or near many of the world’s trouble spots, where there is concern about the possible outbreak of conflict, its escalation or recurrence. In many cases their expertise rests on long years of engagement. They talk (to the extent possible) to all parties, find out what is happening and why, and research, as they do so, the best possible policies to address it. An analyst who meets the warring parties will typically exchange views with representatives of regional powers and international actors in their headquarters and capital cities. In the process, he or she may open and promote channels of communication between conflict parties and/or external stakeholders. Our reports consider the actual and potential role for other countries and intergovernmental bodies like the UN, European Union, the African Union, the Association of South East Asian Nations and the Organization of American States, as well as sub-regional organisations.

2. **Effective advocacy and policy engagement**

   Crisis Group’s task is not merely to understand and explain conflict but to identify the means to prevent, contain and resolve it. In a deeply divided world there can be no assumption that powers will rally around the common goal of peace, so new approaches have to be explored. This involves a clear sense of the leverage that can be applied, whether political, legal, financial, or, in some cases, military. Some tools require action by the national government or local actors; some require the commitment of other governments or international organisations and coordination between them. Some will be within the current marketplace of received ideas; others will be over the horizon but nonetheless the right way forward. Success rests partly on deploying the right arguments — which should be bold but not sensational — and partly on ensuring that we adopt the most effective means to deliver them. It rests on engaging with people with credibility and influence — national governments and local actors in conflict-affected countries, global centres of power in China, Europe and the U.S., and increasingly with rising regional actors — as well as others who influence them, not least the media. The research process itself can play an important role in influencing policy.
3. **Independence**

Crisis Group understands its independence to have three critical dimensions. First, we cover those issues that merit the world’s attention, irrespective of whether they are receiving it or not. Thus we cover the challenges of religious radicalisation in Cameroon and the insurgency in southern Thailand, alongside the Iran nuclear talks and the crisis in Ukraine. Second, we speak to all parties when we can and accurately convey their views, even as we might disagree with them. We endeavour to present fairly the picture of the world as conflict actors and others in or close to a potential conflict or crisis see it. We recognise the value of a gendered perspective in our work and seek to reflect the perspectives of those most affected by deadly conflict. Third, we approach a problem free of ideology. We are not a human rights or humanitarian organisation (even as we champion respect for human rights and the rule of law for both normative and pragmatic reasons); nor are we, as a matter of principle, against the use of force, although we are wise to the acute dangers behind such action (as our statement in advance of NATO’s bombing of Libya is sombre testament to). Our constituents are the victims of conflict and we seek, simply – although with the humility to recognise that the task is anything but simple – to chart the path to a sustainable peace.

4. **Communication**

Building outwards from its most distinctive product, the long-form analytical reports we write on the 40-plus conflicts, crises or issues we cover in depth, Crisis Group delivers its public messages by a variety of means. These include op-eds and interview citations in the most prominent international and regional media; publications at the local and regional level in a variety of languages; blog and video entries on our website; Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media; targeted mass mailing of our reports and other written output to the contacts in our extensive data base; and public speaking at conferences, roundtables and other events. *CrisisWatch*, our monthly early-warning tool, maintains a public watching brief on more than 70 conflict situations, and alerts the world of impending crisis or conflict resolution opportunities.

5. **Partnerships**

In an era of multiplying and fragmented conflicts, transnational threats, increased connectivity and burgeoning civil society activism in favour of more peaceful and more democratic societies – all too frequently against formidable odds – Crisis Group recognises the need to extend its reach and impact through partnerships. These will include partnerships with other organisations working internationally with expertise complementary to our own field-centred research as well as local organisations with whom we partner to broaden our networks and capacity to shape the debate. In some cases we may consider co-branding of our work, although not at the price of surrendering our independence. A third element of our approach to partnerships is provided by increased attention to interaction with organisations that form part of the broader ecology of conflict response, but with operational or other focuses (human rights, mediation, peacebuilding, the economy or environment for example) different to ours. Only through combined efforts and reaching critical mass can we effect change.
F. Strategy

Much has changed in the twenty years since Crisis Group was established. Armed conflict is again on the rise. Although power is characterised by its diffusion, crises are increasingly hitting in less peripheral regions such as Ukraine or Turkey and involving bold actions by great powers. This poses a new set of challenges for an organisation that was built on the assumption that great power power-politics are mute, frozen or possibly extinct.

Meanwhile, many increasingly influential regional powers are themselves fragile, and most wars now have difficult regional or even geostrategic dimensions. Some parts of the world, penetrated by armed groups espousing radical ideologies, or with criminal motives, appear chronically unstable. Interconnectivity means that instability or grievances can quickly resonate elsewhere; in some instances faster communications hinder strategic thinking. International law and institutions have been contested, and norms and ideologies – of state sovereignty, democracy, the liberal free market, international justice, and multilateralism – that once appeared heading toward broad acceptance appear under some strain. The notion of a genuine “international community” appears ever more distant. Traditional tools of conflict prevention and management are struggling to keep up.

At the same time, many foreign ministries in the most developed countries are cutting back: resource constraints, politics and security increasingly hinder the ability of state representatives to access the unvarnished views of all conflict actors. Reductions in foreign news offices, combined with the explosion of social media, make securing reliable, independent analysis all the more challenging.

In recent years, Crisis Group has responded to emerging or deepening crises by reconstituting our North Africa project and expanding into North Caucasus, Mexico and Ukraine. But a degree of strain has been apparent. We are still perceived as an essentially Western organisation, notwithstanding our international reach and networks. We work in an ever more crowded and competitive arena, and our field research can be complicated by host state sensitivity to the presence and activities of NGOs, heightened security risks, or some combination of the two. Meanwhile, the traditionally country- or conflict-based focus of our work is not always the most effective means of unpacking the increasingly regional or transnational nature of today’s conflicts. Finally, the donor climate is challenging. In response to a budget shortfall we introduced an unavoidable round of cuts in 2013, but by FY 2014-15 we again were carrying a sizable deficit. In mid-2015, we undertook a new round of carefully targeted cuts, less sweeping than in 2013, but painful nonetheless.

Yet the trusted and balanced voice that Crisis Group represents is no less important than at its foundation. More diffuse manifestations of power are more difficult to navigate but open possibilities for more creative diplomacy. To be effective, this must be rooted in an understanding of the local drivers of conflicts, the range of actors, the motives and interests of those fighting, and the role of external forces. At a time when responses are increasingly determined by short-term threat protection and therefore securitised, our emphasis on the political foundations of peace, on the need to hear the views of all involved actors, fulfils an essential role.
Between 2016 and 2018, and in accordance with our mission, we shall pursue **three goals**. We seek (i) to inform conflict prevention, management and resolution efforts through independent research and analysis of deadly conflicts in their local, transnational and strategic dimensions; (ii) to contribute to change through sharpened policy prescriptions for conflict prevention, management and resolution and engagement with those who can act upon them; and (iii) to shape the international debate regarding what it means to prevent, respond to and resolve deadly conflict in the 21st century – a new politics of peace.

We shall work toward these goals by becoming:

1. **More agile**

To become more agile we intend to:

   a) Hone our capacity to prioritise, including attention to a mix of conflicts we know to be at the top of the international agenda, those places at risk, and the hidden or forgotten conflicts in which we believe we have the potential to make a difference. We recognise that this will involve difficult choices between the breadth and depth of our coverage and policy engagement.

   b) Develop our capacity to respond rapidly to fast-moving events when we are well placed to do so, as well as our ability to link analysis to the formulation and delivery of policy advice.

   c) Respond to the new environment of interconnected conflicts and other threats to peace and security by drawing on analysis across different countries and programs to develop work on cross-cutting or transnational issues (ie violent extremism, migration, drug policies), recognising that our comparative advantage lies in our ability to build outwards from our local research and analysis.

   d) Develop partnerships with organisations with international reach and expertise to further the scope of our field analysis.

   e) Adopt more flexible practices for delivery of our analysis and policy, through increased participation in workshops, preparation of options papers, and round tables that bring together parties in conflict or their proxies.

2. **More global**

To become more global we intend to:

   a) Maintain our capacity for global advocacy, but expand engagement with actors and institutions not yet sufficiently targeted, such as important regional and sub-regional organisations and capitals (for example Abuja, Algiers, Brasilia, Delhi, Doha, Jakarta and Riyadh).

   b) Uphold our international identity, including through globally inclusive content in our outputs.

   c) Extend our engagement in policy discussions and capacity to reach out to a range of local interlocutors through use of our convening power, and partnerships with suitable organisations in each of the regions we cover. Our aim would be for a diverse political mix, in order to safeguard our independence.
f) Explore the possibility of establishing an organisation-wide fellowship program to support our efforts to hire, mentor and train young analysts from the regions where we work.

d) Increase the diversity of our Board of Trustees and make more proactive use of it to open doors and facilitate outreach in the regions where we work.

3. More visible

To increase our visibility and impact on policymakers we are developing a new communications and outreach strategy to:

a) Strengthen our brand recognition, visibility and coherence; this will include consideration of the benefits of a new tagline and logo, and a redesign of our flagship reports and briefings.

b) Roll out a new, more interactive, website, with the potential to become a platform for open debate on unfolding crises, engaging our board members and extended networks.

c) Raise our media profile, including in major non-Western regional and local media, and increase the distribution of our products through new media channels, such as social media networks and video features, acknowledging that we need different products for different audiences.

d) Make our reports and briefings and other outputs more accessible to local audiences by increasing the proportion translated into local languages, and produced in local languages first or simultaneously.

e) Empower and train field staff and office managers in the use of Twitter, podcasts, videos, photos and targeted mailings to project contacts, as well as in how to present on camera and in public.

4. More effective

To more effectively and efficiently deliver on our mandate we intend to:

a) Diversify our production, which is understood not only as the publication of reports, but to include derivative products, events promoting our work, and policy engagement. This will encompass shortening our standard lengths of reports and briefing – allowing for longer reports when the need arises – while maintaining the highest levels of quality, including through more regular use of peer reviews.

b) Improve our management systems throughout the organisation by: reinforcing our managerial capacity in line with the requirements of our new and more demanding business model, after assessing our needs in consultation with senior staff and recognising that this may involve reinstating the position of Chief Operating Officer or an equivalent senior position; gradually introducing greater decentralisation to our regional programs and a more flexible approach to our staffing table (incorporating a more diverse mix between permanent staff, fixed-term contracts and consultancy arrangements); introducing criteria for judging and rewarding performance that are transparent and inclusive of all activities; and a strengthened investment in staff and contacts’ security.
c) Reinvigorate a professional development and training program, to include induction training; strengthening program and project directors’ ability to fulfil their multi-faceted roles; reinforcing the writing and analysis of local analysts; and enhancing our capacity to reflect a gendered perspective across our work.

d) Hold regional staff retreats every twelve or eighteen months and, resources permitting, an all-staff retreat in the next two years.

e) Strengthen our Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices to ensure that: i) we more effectively capture and learn from our external successes and failures, and adapt our strategies accordingly; and ii) we institute mechanisms to assess our progress in achieving the terms set out in this framework.

5. More proactive

To be more proactive in fundraising and development we will:

a) With the support of the Board of Trustees and our supporters on the International Crisis Group Council redouble efforts to secure the necessary funding to close the deficit and provide a platform for gradual programmatic growth.

b) Engage more dynamically with our core government donors, including through the formation of a new informal donor group that will meet twice a year, and in other events such as workshops, and work to extend our base of government donors.

c) Expand our private-sector funding by increasing the number of individual donors, and optimising our engagements with the corporate sector.

d) Pursue new funding streams, including project funding and funding in or from the regions in which we work; in time, support programs with additional resources for this task in order to help diversify, secure and effectively manage new streams of funding.

e) Develop an internal working culture in which all staff support and contribute to development and fundraising, including by sharpening our ability to explain the impact of our work, seeking out new local funding opportunities, and joining forces with partners where appropriate.

G. Contingency Factors

A number of contingency factors will influence our ability to implement our Strategic Framework successfully. Some, obviously, relate to resource generation, while others are more intrinsically connected to the political and conflict environments in which we work.

They include:

- Unexpected changes in government funding if one or more core donors cut or reduce funding dramatically.
- Disappointment in the private sector, if our efforts to build more sustained support fall short of our goals.
• Major fluctuations in currency exchange, which could adversely affect our revenue predictions.
• Difficulty in retaining or hiring of staff with the skills necessary to maintain the excellence required in Crisis Group’s work.
• A serious security incident, with potentially devastating human, financial and reputational costs.
• A significant worsening of our access to critical countries or conflicts.
• A costly libel case or other legal action against us.

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ANNEX I: CONTEXT

Since Crisis Group’s last drafted a Strategic Framework, in 2010, the global context has changed dramatically. The first two decades after the end of the Cold War saw a sustained decline in armed conflict. This was, at least in part, the consequence of an upsurge in international activism and engagement, with Crisis Group often playing a vital role. Over recent years, however, the frequency of armed conflict, including major wars, has risen, as has the number of its victims, both fatalities and other casualties and numbers of displaced.1 Wars are also becoming more intractable.

The double shock provided by the cycle of uprising, revolution, counter-revolution, and fragmentation that swept across the Arab world in 2011 and the erosion in relations between Russia and the West – at its most acute and dangerous in the Ukraine crisis, and in Russia’s recent bombing of Syria – marks a new era of instability. It comes as threats including the rise of violent extremism, climate change, economic crises, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, organised crime, the unauthorised or misapplied use of force, large-scale displacement and massive violations of IHL and human rights severely challenge traditional institutional, policy and legal tools for crisis management.

Looking ahead, Crisis Group must frame its strategy to adapt to this changing conflict environment, and to new operational demands.

The environment

1. A diffusion of power

The rise of new centres of financial and political power and an increase in geopolitical and socio-economic interdependence contributes to a redistribution of power. The U.S. is less overwhelmingly dominant, except in military capacity it has become more reluctant to use. Europe is still struggling to recover from an economic crisis and is largely absorbed by internal problems and the threats that assail its periphery. Meanwhile, China, India, Japan and Russia are increasingly active; regional organisations and a set of middle powers – Algeria, Australia, Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, for example – play a more influential, even dominant, role in their own neighbourhoods (in the case of Iran and Saudi Arabia in ever-more stark competition with each other). Some powers in the Global South and East (as in the West) are comfortable engaging with Crisis Group and taking advantage of our analysis and ideas; others less so. These multiple players, some with global reach, some with only regional influence, but strong interests, work together on some issues while contesting others, contributing to a much more flexible, but also less predictable world.

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1 In 2014, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program recorded 40 armed conflicts – up by six from 2013, and the highest number of conflicts reported since 1999 – as well as the highest number of battle-related deaths in the post-1989 period. Therése Pettersson & Peter Wallensteen, ”Armed conflicts, 1946–2014″, Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 52(4), July 2015, pp. 536-550.
2. **The weakening of the state**

The state has declined as the dominant actor of the international system. Its writ is slim in large swathes of territory. In the world’s most troubled regions, particularly across parts of Africa and the Middle East, many states are chronically weak, at war, collapsed or facing cycles of low-intensity violence. Even those that appear reasonably strong are often, to varying degrees, brittle; one symptom of this is the growing sensitivity to the presence of international NGOs (including Crisis Group) and pressure on national civil society. Competing legitimacies – of the ballot, of religious groups, of ethnicity – undermine the prospect of inclusive, accountable and resilient governance, and challenge the good intentions of outsiders. Meanwhile, the relative power of non-state actors – whether legitimate like corporations or illegitimate like criminal networks – grows. And as transnational crime and corruption open new markets for looted or illicit goods, criminal activities and motives can drive or extend wars even more than in the past, and distinctions between crime and politics, between criminal and political violence, diminish. Borders are becoming harder to control, or are simply ignored, as events in Ukraine and the Middle East, the migration crises in the Mediterranean, South East Asia and Central America, or the rising tensions in the East and South China Seas, all demonstrate. Conversely, as the state weakens, so in some regions it retrenches; this is perhaps most visible in the West as insecurity – both physical and economic – triggers a shift away from collective responses to collective challenges and toward a more introverted, securitised understanding of external policies in response to perceived threats of terrorism and instability.

3. **Increased interconnectivity**

A growing number of conflicts are characterised by groups with local motivations but global connections. This reflects a broader trend: a world much more interconnected, where faster communications mean the local and global are intimately related. It can also lead to responses to breaking events being formulated and carried out without a deeper understanding of the conflict’s primary drivers and actors. What happens in one part of the world – a savage beheading in Syria, for example, or the kidnapping of school girls in northern Nigeria – can resonate far beyond. In such a connected world, no border force or fence, no “homeland” security can safeguard islands of peace and stability. The transnational nature of many non-state threats means that conflicts spread quickly and defy a state-centric response. This is particularly evident in both jihadi militancy and global anti-Muslim sentiment (for example the clear links between Western discourses and anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar and Sri Lanka). It is relevant to the increasing opportunities opened up for armed groups by transnational criminal networks. It poses challenges for Crisis Group’s practice of focusing research and analysis on a single country or conflict, as well as a concentration of advocacy on state actors with diminished influence.

4. **Rising fragmentation and violent extremism**

Extremist groups have expanded their reach from the Sahel through the Horn of Africa and the Middle East; elsewhere they aggravate African crises, deepen instability in South Asia and threaten the security of states – in the West, but also in regions such as Central Asia and North Africa – whose citizens have been drawn toward jihad. The Islamic State’s sectarianism, foreign fighters, control of territory, harsh rule and horrific tactics are not new (and in-
Indeed many of its opponents have themselves perpetrated enormous violence on civilians. But the scale of its advance, its military prowess, the resources under its control, the speed with which foreign fighters have arrived and the range of countries they come from pose an unprecedented challenge. In other contexts, groups nominally affiliated to al-Qaeda, though now with little direct operational connection, and other groups like Boko Haram, exploit state weakness or collapse, often tapping anger at local grievances and profiting from counterproductive responses by local and Western governments. At the same time, protracted wars have seen armed groups, often driven by criminal as much as political motives, fragment and proliferate, further complicating efforts to find mediated solutions.

5. Mounting ambivalence about intervention

The optimism of the 2005 World Summit and its endorsement of the “Responsibility to Protect” now seem distant. Scepticism of intervention has followed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the particular circumstances surrounding NATO’s intervention in Libya, and South Sudan’s independence and then descent into conflict. While China, Russia and G77 states remain suspicious of the West’s motives in favouring intervention, doubt is growing in the West about putting troops – at least Western troops – on the ground to shape the future of another country; from DR Congo to Haiti, the enterprise of state-building appears ever more difficult. In Africa, meanwhile, the use of force against groups defined – usually by the government – as “spoilers” is increasingly seen as an essential part of conflict management by both regional actors and more distant powers, as is the involvement of the neighbours in the fighting. Traditional peacekeeping is poorly suited for situations where there is no peace to keep, but peace enforcement – military action – without a political strategy appears equally inadequate. As multilateral institutions struggle to respond to shifting power dynamics and alliances, global leadership and governance are wanting. More than ever, smart politics should be the indispensable force multiplier, but coherent political strategies are elusive in an increasingly divided and fragmented international community.

6. Challenges to democracy

The remarkable global spread of democratic governance over recent decades has also slowed, with some countries backsliding and opposition to reform hardening in parts of the world. This is partly self-interested: dictators are reluctant to cede power. It is also partly attributable to economic problems in the West, particularly Europe, which have taken the shine off its political systems. But opposition is also based on experience. First, although some recent elections have ushered in change, even if tentative (in Sri Lanka and Nigeria for example), too often they represent fierce winner-takes-all struggles for power, spark political crises, or empower the winner to the loser’s detriment. Second, while the denial of political and civil rights and the lack of plurality have been major underlying drivers of recent crises, events over the past few years, especially in the Arab world, reinforce the difficulties of moving peacefully from authoritarian to democratic rule. Crisis Group has traditionally viewed plural, open

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2 One positive development in this regard was the report of the High Level Panel on Peace Operations submitted to the UN Secretary-General in June 2015, which put a number of these challenges squarely before the international community.
societies as more resilient – even while recognising that no single model exists – so questions over the continued advance of democracy pose ideological and practical challenges.

7. Dialogue and inclusion

Within this difficult environment, there have nonetheless been some positive developments. The bright spots, even if still fragile – the Iranian nuclear file, Colombia’s peace talks, Tunisia’s transition, U.S.-Cuba relations – all show the value of dialogue, negotiation and political inclusion, however difficult and unpopular. Where classically structured peace processes are possible, they have been demonstrated to have a better chance of prospering when all main groups have a seat at the table, when concessions are made as a result of negotiations not as a precondition for them, and when an eventual agreement includes commitments for the long haul.

Operational demands

8. A revolution in communications and social media

The continuing revolution in communications and information technology has contributed to dramatic changes in the media and its uses. A significant decline in the international media covering our issues from the field is balanced by a no less notable increase in the use of personalised social media, as a tool of communication in itself and a means of content dissemination. (Facebook and Twitter have become critical tools for any information-based organisation.) The former places increased demands on our field staff, while the latter challenges our communications team to take full advantage of existing and emerging communications platforms. Success in maintaining visibility and impact is predicated on being endorsed by others considered to be powerful, by multiple postings of messages on different platforms, and continually reaching new audiences that are often very fragmented. Shorter attention spans require briefer versions of everything, yet there remains a strong and influential market for timely and high quality long reads.

9. Increased competition

A large number of organisations – intergovernmental, governments and non-governmental – crowd the field, while a no less varied array of think-tanks, some of them well-resourced, publish opinion and reports based on field research or seek to carry out early warning. The big human rights organisations exceed our global reach, while their issues lend themselves to a campaigning advocacy we cannot and do not aspire to match. Political and conflict-risk assessment has proliferated within the private sector. Humanitarians conduct and promote their own conflict analysis. And non-official mediators draw on their first-hand familiarity with conflict parties to inform the substance of the peace processes with which they are involved. Some regional-based organisations are attractive to donors, even without our expertise; global networks in the south and east are developing their capacities. No single organisation matches Crisis Group in its breadth of access from the field up to the highest policy levels, or the depth of our granular analysis, but our unique contribution cannot be taken for granted. Yet nor can we aspire to have impact in isolation of the many other organisations and entities who work from different perspectives to promote a secure and sustainable peace.
10. **Shifting funding environment**

A complex funding environment is accentuated by the fact that Crisis Group’s core products – independent analytical reports, briefings and other publications – are produced for the common good and are freely available on our website, even as, of course, they cost money to research, edit, produce and disseminate. While many government donors tell us that they value our work highly we are not – in contrast to more operational organisations – funded as an extension of their direct foreign policy interests. Nor does our staunch defence of the global good necessarily adhere with many states’ prioritisation of their own national security, which many states are defining ever more narrowly. Meanwhile, donors are under increasing pressure to demonstrate immediate impact, and at times have questioned the tailored value we add to their own resources – even as they increase demands for in-person contacts with our analysts. Some donors in both public and private sectors indicate a desire to move toward models of funding based primarily on projects or services that assume a bespoke product. We embrace the potential to secure project funding when it aligns with our mission and priorities, but heading too far in this direction carries risks. It would be complicated for reasons related to capacity; it could represent a threat to the very independence that most of our funders prize; it could impact our broader reputation, and the security of our analysts.
ANNEX II: THEORY OF CHANGE

Crisis Group’s theory of change holds that expert field research and analysis, tailored recommendations, and well-timed advocacy and engagement with conflict actors and policymakers can lead to better prevention, resolution or management of deadly conflict.

In practice, our theory of change is applied by the development of specific strategies in each of the situations of conflict or crisis in which we work. Beyond this, our approach to the theory of change requires unpacking to reflect (1) our evolving understanding of advocacy; (2) the importance of prioritisation; and (3) the varied means by which we assess our impact.

1. Changing approach to advocacy

Crisis Group was founded at a moment of transatlantic triumph, with a presupposition that most key advocacy would be required in Brussels, New York and Washington D.C. These are still critical, and complex, targets but there is now far greater appreciation of the importance of engagement with additional global and regional powers. This is reflected in:

a) Our presence in Abuja, Bishkek, Beijing, Bogotá, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, London, and Nairobi and the engagement with conflict actors and decision-makers that takes place across all programs, frequently as an intrinsic element of research.

b) Our pursuit of a more integrated approach to engagement, advocacy and outreach in our efforts to insert ourselves into the policy debate, including through the active involvement of our Board of Trustees.

2. Prioritisation

Prioritisation is critical to our ability to focus resources and effort on those issues where we are best placed to make a difference and to promote consistent, and transparent decision-making on significant new activities and expenditures. Priorities are set within particular conflicts or country situations, within our regional programs, and across the organisation. They are identified in our annual workplan, but revisited and revised on a rolling basis. To do so we need constantly to be asking ourselves the following questions:

a) Does a conflict or crisis have potential to contribute to the overall deterioration of the strategic environment, or to lead to significant loss of lives?

b) Do we have potential to influence policymakers or conflict actors in accordance with our mission? Who are our primary interlocutors and how and when should we engage them?

c) What impact are we seeing to achieve, and how can we assess it?

d) Will we add unique value or can others reasonably supply what is needed? Are we well placed, in terms of staff capacity, contacts and other considerations? Should we consider partnering with others?

e) Is our engagement financially achievable and sustainable? Can it be covered from existing resources? If not, how can we seek funds to cover it, and how long would that take?

f) What are the risks, if any? Reputational risks? Risks to other Crisis Group commitments, programming, and units? Risks to staff or partners, including security risks?
3. **Assessing our impact**

We have extensive anecdotal evidence from peace negotiators, foreign ministries, intelligence services, international organisations, civil society, academia and the media as to the value of our work in shaping thinking, but public credit is more difficult to secure. Meanwhile, while we are committed to improving the monitoring and evaluation of our work, the nebulous world of conflict management means that it is challenging to draw on quantifiable evidence of impact beyond access to key conflict actors and media mentions. In addition to the relatively few examples of “pure” impact we can cite (our work on war crimes in Sri Lanka or the nuclear talks on Iran, for example), Crisis Group understands its capacity to have impact on a given situation in six distinct ways:

a) We inform discussion.

b) We raise issues, or forgotten conflicts, that others do not discuss.

c) We sound the alarm.

d) We bring forward ideas to argue for policy change or nudge the debate in a different direction, with our analysis often first bucking orthodoxy but then gradually becoming conventional wisdom.

e) In some circumstances the trust our analysts have gained of all parties encourages the exchange of insights about new ways to achieve peaceful outcomes; and

f) We open channels of communication between conflict actors and external stakeholders.