

The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund

Diverting aid and undermining human rights





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December 2017

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Layout: revolt.design.org

Cover image: Royal Marine unloads aid in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

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Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ASI	Adam Smith International
CSSF	Conflict, Stability and Security Fund
DFID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NPF	Nigerian Police Force
NSC	National Security Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Introduction

The UK government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) raises all kinds of questions about the future of UK aid, the nature of the UK's relations with states abusing human rights and the government's openness with the public. Established in 2015, the CSSF is a £1 billion annual pot of money operating in dozens of countries which supposedly promotes the UK's national security interests. Yet our analysis highlights such fundamental problems with the CSSF that we believe a complete overhaul is needed.

This report highlights three fundamental problems with the CSSF:

- It is increasingly using aid money to fund military and counter-terrorism projects which do not appear focused on what aid should be about: eradicating poverty and promoting inclusive development.
- It is funding 'security' forces in several states involved in appalling human rights abuses, thus the UK risks complicity in these violations.
- It is not transparent. Despite some improvements made to the Fund this year, programme details are scant and some appear to be misleading.



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Nigerian police unit deployed to AMISOM.

2. What is the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund?

The government says that the CSSF provides development and security support to countries which are at risk of conflict or instability and where the UK has key interests. Through the CSSF, “the UK and our international partners are more secure from threats such as terrorism, corruption and illegal migration or trafficking.”¹ Established in April 2015

and guided by the priorities set out in both the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review and the UK’s 2015 aid strategy, the CSSF currently promotes projects in over 70 countries and employs 360 staff.² The CSSF’s strategic direction is set by the National Security Council (NSC) which is chaired by the prime minister and includes several secretaries of state.

Examples provided by the government of CSSF-funded projects (as presented on the government website):³

- building sustainable peace/conflict transformation – for example, in Colombia the UK are supporting the government to prepare and implement post-peace agreement plans
- crisis and stability – for example, in Georgia, the CSSF supported the establishment of a National Crisis Centre that has been used in response to events such as the April 2016 clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh
- protecting UK interests and nationals (serious organised crime, counter-terrorism, migration and modern slavery) – for example, CSSF funded justice advisers played a key role in the seizure of the Tanzanian registered ship MV Hamal off the coast of Scotland, resulting in the largest cocaine seizure in UK history
- strengthening global security/effective and accountable security actors – in Afghanistan, for example, the CSSF is helping develop Afghan state capability to provide security and rule of law, counter violent extremism and organised crime
- women, peace and security – for example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo the CSSF supported the investigation and prosecution of combatants for war crimes, including sexual violence
- defence engagement – in Nigeria, for example, the CSSF has been supporting the Nigerian Army in how to deal with improvised explosive devices left by Boko Haram.

The CSSF has a fairly large budget which has risen from £1.03 billion in 2015/16⁴ to £1.13 billion in 2016/17⁵ and to £1.16 billion in 2017/18⁶. A further increase is planned – to £1.32 billion in 2019.⁷ The increase in spending is directly related to Brexit, according to the government, which states: “the outcome of the EU referendum means that the CSSF has an even greater role in ensuring that the whole of government demonstrates that Global Britain is engaged in the world.”⁸

Much of the CSSF’s funding comes from the aid budget. The government notes that the CSSF is “the only government fund which uses both defence spend and official development assistance (ODA) to deliver and support security, defence, peacekeeping, peace-building and stability activity.”⁹ In 2016/17, £518 million or 47 per cent,

counted as aid.¹⁰ The government notes that this funding makes the CSSF the 21st largest aid fund in the world.¹¹

The CSSF funds the UK’s contributions to the UN peacekeeping budget and some of the UK’s deployed military activity overseas, which together was worth around £535 million in 2016/17.¹² Aside from this, spending is discretionary, to be spent on whatever projects the government decides upon.

Outsourcing the Fund

The CSSF outsources the running of many of its projects to third party organisations. There are 75 approved suppliers who can be awarded these contracts, including a mix of NGOs, think tanks and private corporations.¹³

Adam Smith International

On the list of approved suppliers is the private for-profit development consultancy company Adam Smith International (ASI). Until recently, ASI was one of a small group of 11 private firms that wins the majority of consultancy contracts from the Department for International Development (DFID). ASI became a multi-million pound company thanks to DFID, its primary customer, which has awarded the company at least £450 million in UK-aid funded contracts since 2011.¹⁴ But in 2017, ASI was at the centre of a scandal in which it was accused of exploiting documents leaked from DFID and attempting to falsify evidence to a parliamentary inquiry. The Commons International Development Select Committee said the company’s behaviour was “deplorable” and “entirely inappropriate.”¹⁵ As a consequence, ASI is currently not receiving

any new UK aid-funded business and ASI executives have resigned from the company.

However, ASI is involved in at least two on-going CSSF projects and is in receipt of government funding from departments other than DFID. ASI said in 2016, before the scandal broke, that it was a leading implementer of projects financed by the CSSF in “several UK priority countries including Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan and Nigeria.”¹⁶ The government’s CSSF project documents make no mention of ASI’s involvement in Afghanistan or Nigeria, but they do for Syria and Somalia.

ASI has a £14 million project in Syria, funded entirely with aid money, which “aims to bolster local security inside Syria, strengthen the country’s neighbours at its borders, contribute to our counter terrorism and countering

violent extremism goals by combating the emergence of environments permissive to extremists, and manifest the continued UK commitment to an enduring and sustainable political settlement.” The project also helps “support the effectiveness and legitimacy of moderate actors on the ground and support the moderate opposition to keep extremists in check.”¹⁷ ASI’s website mentions a project in Syria running until 2016 that delivered services in

“opposition-controlled” areas of the country,¹⁸ although it is not clear if this is the same project mentioned by the CSSF.

In Somalia, ASI is one of three implementers of a £939,000 CSSF-funded project which is providing technical advisers to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and small-scale governance and public services delivery activities.¹⁹

Criticism and reform, but not enough

In early 2017 an all-party parliamentary group of MPs and peers - the joint committee on the National Security Strategy - released a critical report on the CSSF. It stated that, while the Fund was supporting some valuable projects, “there is a risk that the CSSF is being used as a ‘slush fund’ for projects that may be worthy, but which do not collectively meet the needs of UK national security.”²⁰ The committee especially noted that the objectives, operation and achievements of the CSSF are “opaque” and that “it is impossible for us to tell whether the Fund is meeting the government’s goals or having the intended impact on the ground. This is because government failed to provide sufficient evidence for the committee to carry out any evaluation.”²¹ It added:

“There is no central source of information to explain how the Fund works. There are no published criteria on which programmes and projects are funded. There are no published measures of the impact of CSSF-derived activity. And who has responsibility for the Fund’s management? No single minister is responsible – or accountable. The jury is still out. ... While we appreciate the need to maintain security, government must bring forward plans to make the Fund more transparent. The publication of a

detailed annual report for this financial year would begin to answer some of our questions.”²²

In an especially damning indictment, the committee also stated: “The CSSF method of allocating funds appears to involve awarding grants without any strategic assessment of the needs of the country concerned.”²³

Since the committee report was published the government has made some reforms to the CSSF and says that it is undertaking a “rapid review” of its governance and structures in light of the committee’s criticism.²⁴ The government now publishes some information on the CSSF online including its official guidance for the Fund,²⁵ an annual report (the first one was published in July 2017)²⁶ and summaries of some CSSF regional and country programmes.²⁷

However, it is clear that there remain major problems with the CSSF, some of which were not mentioned or little analysed by the parliamentary committee. The three main problems are:

- The increasing diversion of UK aid towards security and counter-terrorism
- Support for countries which are undermining human rights
- Ongoing secrecy and lack of transparency.

3. Diversion of aid

Latest figures show that 4.5 per cent of the UK's total aid budget is now being spent through the CSSF.²⁸ Much of this aid money is, however, being used to fund questionable projects that appear to be more about promoting the UK's military or security interests than they are focused on promoting development or eradicating poverty. Many of these projects only count as aid now that the main rule-making body, the OECD, has changed the international aid rules, partly thanks to lobbying by the UK government.

Although 47 per cent of the CSSF's spending in 2016/17 was classified as aid, only 11 per cent of its total spending was undertaken by the Department for International Development (DFID); 63 per cent was led by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and 19 per cent by the Ministry of Defence (MoD).²⁹ Thus the CSSF is, in effect, transferring aid money from DFID to other government agencies. On the current trajectory, more than a quarter of Britain's overseas aid will be spent by ministries other than DFID by 2020.³⁰ Opposition MP Diane Abbott claims that the refrain "can we ODA that?" is now common in the corridors of the FCO and the MoD.³¹

The CSSF blends aid spending with non-aid spending which, the government claims, "enables a wider range of departments to deliver on what the NSC instructs them to do overseas and enables a more holistic and integrated UK approach to conflict and instability."³² The government also

claims that its use of aid and non-aid in the same projects is complementary and reinforcing. It gives the example of Somalia where DFID has used aid money to support stipend payments to the Somali police while the CSSF has allocated non-aid spend to help develop the Somali national army.³³

Yet supporting the Somali police with the aid budget is probably not what most people in the UK understand the aid programme to be about. Since 2002, legislation has been in place to require UK aid to be spent with the objective of reducing poverty. Global Justice Now's view is that aid should indeed be focused on eradicating poverty, promoting inclusive development and reducing inequality. Unless these are the explicit priorities, aid should not be used to support military, police training or counter-terrorism.

But under the CSSF, aid is becoming increasingly securitised, to be deployed where the government wants to promote its military, security or counter-terrorism interests. If the UK wants to support such projects it should not be doing so via the aid budget as it blurs the line between promoting development objectives and narrowly-defined national interests. This is especially the case in aid-funded projects led by the MoD, but also the FCO. The danger is that UK aid is being increasingly skewed towards areas where there is a national self-interest, rather than the where the developmental need is greatest.

Case Studies

Questionable 'aid' projects

Global Justice Now has reviewed the information published by the government on CSSF funded projects. We highlight eight projects below, all of which focus on supporting the police, military and counter-terrorism in

developing countries, and all are at least partly funded by aid but are led by either the FCO or the MoD. For these reasons we believe they are fundamentally problematic. It is not clear from the information the government provides on these projects that development is the overwhelming priority.

Continues...

Sierra Leone

The sum of £2.31 million, of which £1.37 million is aid, has been allocated to provide training to the Sierra Leonean military and police in a project led by the UK's MoD. The government states that it will provide training at senior levels "to build professionalism and capacity" including support to strengthen community policing and "public order management."³⁴ It is unclear from the (brief) information provided by the government, which parts of this programme are supported by aid and non-aid. It should be noted that the OECD rules explicitly forbid aid to fund measures to "control civil disobedience."³⁵

Nigeria

A pot of money worth £5.16 million – of which £4.4 million is aid – is assisting Nigeria's military, security and justice system. Of this, £2.5 million in aid is being provided as "strategic assistance" to the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). The government states that this funding "will support the deployment of NPF to northeast Nigeria to enable the military to pursue frontline operations in the fight to degrade Boko Haram." From the same fund, £765,000 of aid money is supporting the Nigerian National Security Architecture which involves promoting public engagement on security issues and strengthening civilian oversight of the security sector. Some £300,000 of aid money is also part of a £1.1 million sub-component aiming to improve the "governance and effectiveness of the Armed Forces of Nigeria."³⁶

Sri Lanka

The CSSF has a £2.32 million programme for Sri Lanka, allocated to "strengthen democracy and the rule of law" but which includes police reform and training. All of this allocation except £185,000 is counted as aid.³⁷

Iraq

The CSSF has a £9.1 million fund, of which £7.5 million is counted as aid, for Iraq. It is aimed at promoting security sector reform, "explosive

threat management" and technical assistance to counter violent extremism, among other areas. The information provided by the government does not say which of these elements are supported by aid and non-aid.³⁸

East Africa

Some £3.9 million in aid is supporting an FCO-led project to counter violent extremism in East Africa. This work includes research on the drivers of violent extremism in the region and supporting Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda "in drafting and implementing their national (countering violent extremism) strategies across government departments and in regional states."³⁹

United Nations

UK aid money is being used to fund Commonwealth and UN action against terrorism and violent extremism. In one project, £500,000 is allocated to support UN member states on "strategic communications for preventing violent extremism."⁴⁰ This is likely to mean media work. In another project, some £5.17 million is supporting multilateral peacekeeping, including the deployment of UK military and police officers to UN field missions, to build police and military capacity. It is unclear which elements of this programme are being supported by aid and non-aid.⁴¹

NATO, the EU and OSCE

A £2.6 million pot of money, which includes £650,000 in aid, is supporting capacity building for NATO, the EU and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to "tackle security and stability challenges" in Europe and internationally. The money appears mainly to support government civil servants to be deployed to these multilateral institutions. It is unclear which part of this is funded by aid, and it is not possible to gauge from the scant information provided how this programme supports development objectives.⁴²

	Lead department	Amount (£)
Capacity building of Sierra Leonean military and police ⁴³	MOD	£2.31m (of which 1.37m is aid)
Support to Nigeria's military, police and justice sectors ⁴⁴	FCO	£5.16m (of which 4.4m is aid)
Sri Lanka strengthening democracy programme including police training ⁴⁵	FCO	£2.32 m (of which £2.135m is aid)
Iraq 'security and justice programme' ⁴⁶	FCO	£9.1m (of which £7.5m is aid)
Support to countering violent extremism work in East Africa ⁴⁷	FCO	£3.9m (all aid)
Support to multilateral peacekeeping, including deployment of UK military and police officers to UN field missions ⁴⁸	FCO	£5.17m (of which £2.67m is aid)
Capacity building for NATO, the EU and OSCE to 'tackle security and stability challenges' in Europe and internationally ⁴⁹	FCO	£2.6m (of which £650,000 is aid)

Changing the aid rules

Much of the CSSF's aid spending for the military, police and counter-terrorism is only legal since the OECD changed the rules on aid spending. In February 2016, the OECD agreed to expand the definition of official development assistance (ODA or aid) to include limited forms of spending on the military, police and counter-terrorism. This move was widely criticised by civil society groups as it was considered likely to divert funds away from focusing on poverty and development. The UK played a key role in securing the OECD's rule changes.⁵⁰

The new rules allow ODA to support civilian oversight and democratic control of the military but not to provide direct military aid. Military training is not allowable as aid except for "training under civilian oversight and with a clear developmental purpose for the benefit of civilians"⁵¹ and only in certain areas, such as training in human rights, international law and in civilian oversight. The new rules continue to exclude the majority of activities associated with combatting terrorism from aid, apart from where "they are led by partner countries

and their primary purpose is developmental." Eligible activities include areas such as education, working with civil society groups to prevent radicalisation and building the capacity of security or justice systems to prevent terrorism.⁵²

We believe that the scant information that the government publishes on its aid-funded CSSF projects does not enable proper scrutiny of whether these projects are really consistent with the OECD's new rules. But from the information that is currently available, we are concerned that some of these projects could risk falling foul of these rules. The Nigeria project mentioned above, for example, which is majority funded by aid, clearly describes the deployment of the Nigerian police force for operational purposes. It is difficult to ascertain what the developmental impact of this work is.

But the UK government wants to go even further in changing the aid rules. The Conservative Party's 2017 election manifesto was explicit on this point, stating, "we do not believe that international definitions of development assistance always help in determining how money should be spent, on

whom and for what purpose. So we will work with like-minded countries to change the rules so that they are updated and better reflect the breadth of our assistance around the world. If that does not work, we will change the law to allow us to use a better definition of development spending, while continuing to meet our 0.7 per cent target.”⁵³

This is part of a worrying shift towards UK aid being spent much more in the ‘national interest’ rather than on poverty reduction.⁵⁴ The UK Aid Strategy, published in 2015, states that the aid budget will be restructured to tackle “great global challenges – from the root causes of mass migration and disease to the threat of terrorism and global climate change – all of which also directly threatens British interests.”⁵⁵

As Global Justice Now noted at the time the new aid strategy was published, never since DFID was created as an independent department in 1997 has a government strategy so clearly linked aid spending with the UK’s defence and foreign policy objectives.⁵⁶

Priti Patel, who was the secretary of state for international development until November 2017, made clear her vision for UK aid as a tool in Britain’s wider policy agenda that can be used as part of the country’s ‘soft power’. “British soft power is exactly where DFID and our aid and other relationships around the world, come together to deliver in our national interest and deliver for Britain when it comes to free trade agreements but also life post-Brexit.”⁵⁷



© UN Photo: Isaac Billy

UK troops in Juba as part of United Nations mission in South Sudan.

4. Risking complicity in human rights abuses

The CSSF is funding projects in several states where human rights are being abused, meaning there is a clear risk that CSSF funding may in effect be contributing to those abuses. Some of the funding for these projects comes from the aid budget, some comes from non-aid funds, while in other cases, such as Bahrain and Ethiopia, it is not clear whether it is aid money or not. This is because the

government has incomplete reporting of its CSSF projects, and lacks transparency over where all the CSSF money actually goes. Regardless of whether or not CSSF projects come from the aid pot, the government should not be channeling money in to 'security' forces of government known for not upholding human rights.

Case Studies

Funding for torture and repression?

Bahrain

Amidst a deepening crackdown on pro-democracy campaigners, the human rights climate in Bahrain has deteriorated in recent years. According to Human Rights Watch "The authorities prosecute and jail prominent human rights activists and political opposition leaders, dissolve political opposition groups, and strip the citizenship of dissidents."⁵⁸ The CSSF provided £3.52 million in technical assistance to Bahrain over the last two years.⁵⁹ In 2015 the CSSF funded training that taught Bahraini police how to "command and control" demonstrators, including sessions on using "less than lethal options" such as water cannons and dogs, as well as "evidence gathering and tactical advice."⁶⁰

In January 2017, following a freedom of information request, it was revealed that a £2 million CSSF technical assistance programme was funding 11 projects in Bahrain (the government does not provide details for how much of this is aid money).⁶¹ These included a contract with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons to build the capacity of Bahrain's National Preventive Mechanism against torture and funding an ombudsman for the Bahraini

prison system. The NGOs Reprieve and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy said that this ombudsman has "repeatedly failed to investigate torture allegations" including in cases where allegedly forced confessions had resulted in death sentences.⁶² Sayed Alwadaei, director of advocacy at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, has said, "UK involvement goes beyond technical assistance, forming a spider's web across Bahrain's prisons, police, judiciary and now parliament, despite the majority of opposition leaders languishing behind bars, an unprecedented crackdown on civil society and a sharp deterioration in human rights. The UK is managing repression in an authoritarian regime, paid by the taxpayer."⁶³

It has also been reported that British lobbying, paid for by the CSSF, helped to water down a UN statement on Bahrain that was set to criticise its human rights record. In September 2015, the CSSF funded a UK delegation visit to Geneva to lobby representatives from the UNHCR as well as other countries' missions and experts from NGOs, arguing that human rights in Bahrain were improving. The UN statement which eventually emerged was considerably softer than was expected.⁶⁴

The UK government's view is that its projects in Bahrain "encourage progress on human rights" and help to build more

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accountable institutions. It says that “any training provided by or on behalf of the UK Government fully complies with our domestic and international human rights obligations”⁶⁵

Burma

The CSSF has allocated £403,000 to be spent between 2016-18 on funding courses for the Burmese military focused on governance, accountability, ethics, human rights and international law according to the government.⁶⁶ The training has also involved 19 Burmese military officers visiting the UK.⁶⁷ The government has said that no aid is part of this funding.⁶⁸

The UK suspended military aid to Burma in September 2017 after some 400,000 people in the country’s Rohingya community were forced flee to Bangladesh in the face of a brutal military offensive by the Burmese Army.⁶⁹ The support was suspended only after a three week ethnic cleansing campaign. Rohingya sources estimate that 5,000 or more people have been killed, tens of thousands are internally displaced and tens of thousands of homes have been destroyed.⁷⁰

The CSSF funding for Burma appears to have been very lax on human rights considerations. In answer to a parliamentary question in January 2017, the government claimed it “does not hold information” on whether the Burmese military officers being trained were among those accused of committing human rights violations against the Rohingya.⁷¹ The government also states that, although the educational training provided to the Burmese army aims to promote an awareness of the role and responsibilities of the military within a democratic system and that respect for human rights is “implicit” in the programmes delivered, “there is currently no specific programme module within this training which focuses on the issue of human rights.”⁷²

Ethiopia

Since 2016, the Ethiopian security forces have killed hundreds of protesters and detained

tens of thousands amid draconian restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and association. Torture remains a serious problem in detention centers and the government has not conducted meaningful investigations into these abuses.⁷³ Andargachew ‘Andy’ Tsege, from London, an opponent of the Ethiopian regime, was arrested in Yemen in June 2014, imprisoned in Ethiopia and given a death sentence. While Tsege has languished on death row, the British government has been supporting ‘security’ projects in Ethiopia.⁷⁴

CSSF funding has been used to bolster the Ethiopian security forces. A freedom of information request revealed that half a million pounds has been spent on a postgraduate degree programme in ‘security sector management’ for Ethiopian officials and £546,500 has been given to the Ethiopian Peace Support Training Centre.⁷⁵ Ethiopian officials have said that “90 per cent of the senior officials currently serving in Ethiopia’s intelligence institutions have completed their master’s degree in the UK on subjects related to security”, adding: “the courses are fully financed by the UK government.”⁷⁶

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is another state being funded by the CSSF. A £2.32 million pot of money, most of which is from the aid budget, running from March 2016 to March 2018, is partly allocated to police training and reform. Led by the FCO and MoD, the programme says that it aims to deliver training that “respects human rights” and strengthens democracy and the rule of law.⁷⁷ However, torture by the Sri Lankan security services, including the police, is widespread. According to a 2017 report by UN special rapporteur Ben Emmerson, “the use of torture has been, and remains today, endemic and routine, for those arrested and detained on national security grounds. Since the authorities use this legislation disproportionately against members of the Tamil community, it is this community that has borne the brunt of the state’s well-oiled torture apparatus.”⁷⁸

Sudan

CSSF documents show that the UK is providing £400,000 in assistance to strengthen the capacity of the Sudanese armed forces “to improve governance and accountability, and to generate a greater respect for human rights and the rule of law.” The Fund even includes £10,000 set aside for visits to the UK.⁷⁹ All of this project is funded from the non-aid allocation of the CSSF.

Supporting the Sudanese military is a particularly surprising destination for UK money given that Sudan’s head of state, Omar al-Bashir is the subject of an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court on five counts of crimes against humanity that were committed during the war in the Darfur region.⁸⁰

Other countries

There are several other controversial cases of CSSF funding. The CSSF is currently providing a £10 million fund for Egypt (almost all of which is aid money) to promote a range of economic reform, governance, counter-terrorism and migration projects.⁸¹ **Egypt** is undergoing a

human rights crackdown, under the military regime that took power in July 2013. It was also reported in early 2016 that the CSSF was to fund the donation of military vehicles to the **Bulgarian** government to help police its borders despite allegations that they would be used to capture and return refugees at the country’s borders with Turkey and Serbia.⁸² The government does not publicly report on this Bulgaria programme, so it is not clear if this is aid or non-aid funds. The CSSF also funds “strategic communications and media operations” for the “moderate armed opposition” in **Syria**. According to a source with knowledge of the contracts, Britain is essentially running a “Free Syrian Army press office.”⁸³ Which is a controversial project given the levels of bloodshed in Syria, and the near impossibility of ensuring that arms don’t fall into the hands of extremist groups. We do not know if this project was funded from aid as the government has not made the information available. But since April 2017, the CSSF has allocated at least £38 million in aid to similar programmes in Syria funding both security and resilience programmes.⁸⁴



© Connor Ashleigh/AusaID

Soldiers from the Sri Lankan Army.

5. Secrecy and lack of transparency

In 2017 the government took some steps to improve transparency surrounding the CSSF. Yet some fundamental problems remain. One basic question is: where does the CSSF actually work? The government gives contradictory figures for the number of countries the CSSF operates in. In March 2017, Amber Rudd, the Home Secretary and a member of the NSC, reportedly told parliament that the CSSF worked in 40 countries, a figure which was repeated by the parliamentary committee.⁸⁵ Yet the government's guidance on the CSSF issued only four months later, in July 2017, states that it works in "over" 70 countries but then lists a selection of countries numbering only 41 plus the UK's Overseas Territories.⁸⁶ The CSSF's annual report also says it works in 70 countries and provides a map highlighting some of those countries, although not clearly.⁸⁷

The parliamentary committee scrutinising the CSSF was not even told which countries the funds were being spent in. It was told the names of the countries had to remain secret because those that received funds would be "embarrassed" and those that did not would be "jealous."⁸⁸

The recently-published first annual report of the CSSF is a short (20 pages) document which provides only a one page description of the Fund's work in different programme areas, and highlights a handful of project examples. But it does not provide a complete list of all the projects being funded by the CSSF. Neither does the annual report clarify which projects are funded by aid and which are not, or give details on the amounts of funding going to which countries.

The government has published 'programme summaries' on its website for CSSF projects. The summaries provide some details on projects for 2017 and beyond but do not provide details for all projects since the CSSF commenced, nor is it clear if these programme summaries are a complete list of all current CSSF projects. Moreover, it is often unclear which elements of these programmes are being supported by aid and non-aid.

The government says that "monitoring results is a core part of programme management in the CSSF" and that all programmes are required to complete an annual review.⁸⁹ These annual reviews are however not published.

Furthermore it is not clear that the CSSF is giving accurate figures for its projects or whether it is being totally open about the nature of the projects in its descriptions of them. For example, according to ministerial replies to parliamentary questions, the CSSF has spent around £403,000 in the three years 2016-18 funding courses for the Burmese military, as noted above. However, the summary for the Burma programme published on the government's website does not put figures against any explicit training programme for the military. It does mention "strengthening Burma's peace process through mediation and negotiation skills training for key stakeholders" (allocated £372,409) or the "roles and responsibilities of the modern military within a democratic system" (allocated £246,200). It is unclear whether these are the training programmes referred to, but in any case these figures do not equate to the £403,000 noted above.⁹⁰

It has mainly taken freedom of information requests and investigative research to find out what the UK is funding in Bahrain. The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy notes that CSSF projects are basically shrouded in secrecy and states, "information that has been made available has been piecemeal and has often contained inconsistencies. Information is often released arbitrarily ... The FCO refused to release requested information on UK and Bahraini bodies or individuals providing or receiving CSSF-funded training."⁹¹

Likewise, details have been hard to obtain for the Egypt programme. In 2015/16 the CSSF provided £650,000 for direct engagement with the Egyptian police and criminal justice system, including programmes relating to juvenile detainees. Yet further details on this were refused by the FCO on the grounds that it was not in the public interest. Reprieve notes that "Ministers are well aware of rights abuses by Egyptian courts and prisons,

including against juveniles” and that it was “deeply disturbing that the government refuses to release any information about its work with these serial human rights violators.” In a letter sent to Reprieve in response to its request for further information about the CSSF’s support for security initiatives in Egypt, the FCO said that “providing further detail

about the projects could jeopardise the trust and confidence in us by the Egyptian government and therefore our ability to both protect and promote UK interests in the future.”⁹²



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A man waves an Egyptian flag in front of riot police during Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

6. Policy Recommendations

The government should:

- Reconfirm that all projects funded by aid will be focused on the purpose of poverty reduction and promoting development. Although the OECD aid rules may allow it, we do not see why the UK should be using its aid budget to fund projects involving the police or the military except in very exceptional circumstances where development priorities can be shown to be primary. The onus should be on the government to demonstrate this publicly for CSSF-funded projects.
- Immediately stop all UK funding support, whether aid or non-aid, to security forces abusing human rights except where it can be clearly shown, using independent evidence, that such support will help those states curb their human rights abuses.
- Make the CSSF fully transparent by publishing the full project list, annual reviews of individual programmes and more responsive answers to freedom of information requests. We do not accept the argument that projects details can be routinely withheld for purposes of 'national security'; this is a recipe for ongoing secrecy.



Priti Patel MP talking to a group of Royal Engineers.

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