

Strategic Framework

Summary 2016-2018

Contents

A. Introduction.....	2
B. Vision	2
C. Mission.....	2
D. Principles	2
E. Method.....	3
F. Strategy	5
Annex I: Theory of Change	6

A. Introduction

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, organised crime, unauthorised or misapplied use of force, massive violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws 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.

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.

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; and
- Staying the course.

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 multidimensional conflicts.

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 and stakeholders – men and women, 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.

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, Russia 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 conflict in Syria 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 understand gender as a constituent dynamic of conflict and its resolution and are committed to the principled position that women, as men, should play their full role in all aspects of conflict prevention, peace negotiations, and post-conflict reconstruction and governance. We also recognise that women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, and in many situations conflict actors and/or agents of change and peacebuilding. 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; commentary 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 database; 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 crises 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. Only through combined efforts and reaching critical mass can we effect change.

F. 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 channels of communication 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.

ANNEX I: 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, Delhi, 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 seeking 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.