

Conflict Prevention and Resolution in a Multipolar World: Priorities for the G7

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Introduction

In October 2022, the G7 met in Germany to discuss the group's role in conflict prevention and resolution. This meeting followed its May 2022 communiqué, which pointed to a 'fundamentally changed strategic and security environment' following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and resulted in a [statement](#) by the G7 presidents on 4 November. In this context, the war in Ukraine punctuates a steady trend of geopolitical fracture and growing tensions over the past 15 years. Increasingly, geopolitics has come to be less defined in binary, zero-sum terms, with the current situation better understood as a transitional period where many of the familiar patterns and centres of power are put into question. One observer called this a moment of 'Westishness,' characterized by ambivalence about the role of American military hegemony, deep interdependence of Eastern and Western actors (e.g. European reliance on Russian oil and gas, American debt and trade dependence on China), and a proliferation of risks without a clear set of structures or rules to manage them.¹ As the 2022 OECD States of Fragility report notes, we are in an 'age of crises' for which the current system is poorly prepared.²

This year's G7 meeting constitutes an opportunity to take stock of the changing geopolitical landscape, better understand the interlinked causes of violent conflict, and

articulate a set of policy options for the G7's conflict resolution role globally. Specifically, it is a chance to understand how the G7 countries can achieve their peace and security goals via investment in the multilateral system. While there are of course a range of actions the group can take on its own, or as individual states, this paper focuses on how it might gain leverage and outcomes via the multilateral system.³

This paper, developed by United Nations University's Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) in support of the G7 meetings on peace and security, (1) offers an analysis of today's conflict trends, (2) highlights the roles of negotiated, non-military settlements to disputes, (3) argues the business case for G7 engagement in multilateral conflict resolution; (4) maps the multilateral conflict resolution architecture and the UN Secretary-General's call for a 'New Agenda for Peace'; and (5) proposes a framework for G7 policymaking that will position the group to engage with multilateral conflict resolution for the coming period. The overarching message of this report is that the G7 can more effectively reduce the risks of large-scale violent conflict through targeted investments in multilateral peacemaking and peacebuilding, including via the New Agenda for Peace process.

1 Jeremy Cliffe, "The War that Changed the World," New Statesman, August 2022, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/ukraine/2022/08/ukraine-invasion-six-months-that-changed-world>.

2 OECD, [States of Fragility 2022](#) (Paris: OECD, 2022).

3 See International Crisis Group "7 Priorities for the G7," available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb007-7-priorities-g7-managing-global-fallout-russias-war-ukraine>.

1. The Global Conflict Landscape

After a steady decline through the 1990s and early 2000s, global conflict trends have increased significantly over the past two decades, driven in large part by an expansion in the number, scale, and impact of civil wars. From 2011 to 2017, there was a sixfold increase in battle-related deaths in civil war, with 2015 the deadliest year since the end of the Cold War.⁴ While these numbers reduced slightly from 2017 to 2020, the past two years saw a steady increase in global battle related deaths.⁵ Characterized by high rates of relapse and growing intractability, these trends suggest that risks of large-scale violent conflict – within and between states – remain a major factor in global stability. Indeed, the war in Ukraine may point to a far more volatile period than seen in recent history, with the likelihood of great power confrontation higher than at almost any time since the end of World War II.⁶

One of the most important global trends has been the transition from a unipolar world order – largely revolving around the hegemonic influence of the United States – to a multipolar reality. The rise of China is one key aspect of this multipolarity, offering actors around the world an alternative to American political and economic dominance, while the growth of India, Brazil, and other Global South actors also points to a broadening of the playing field. Russia's significant role in conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, its use of proxy forces like the Wagner group in a range of settings, and its aggression in Ukraine have deeply unsettled longstanding patterns with the West.

In this context, there is no purely Western solution to today's most intractable and complex conflicts, from Yemen to Libya, and from Mali to Ukraine. Even in settings of longstanding Western investment in political stability and security (e.g. Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, and Yemen) there has been little progress towards Western ideals of liberalism

and improved governance over the past 20 years.⁷ Instead, ambiguity and uncertainty have opened the door to a range of potential initiatives and actions by non-Western actors in diverse settings. This can be tested by asking the following illustrative questions: Is China positioning for an invasion of Taipei, and what would be the US response? Does Russia have ambitions beyond Ukraine?⁸ Is India's longstanding position vis-à-vis Russia shifting as it becomes an increasingly influential power on the world stage?⁹ And perhaps most crucially, where does the global commitment to the non-use of nuclear weapons, which has held for 70 years, now stand?

The fact that there are no easy answers to these questions points to the overriding challenge of today's world order: uncertainty. Champions of a rules-based world order are confronted with a far more complex set of interdependent questions where it is not possible to rely on norms of democratic governance, social liberalism, and an assumption that the legal underpinnings of the global system will hold. As international sanctions are creating a set of interrelated global shocks and a reshuffling of energy dependencies, the likelihood of further disruptions to longstanding norms is very high.

These global trends have an outside importance for the G7, which remains a deeply influential body in world affairs and has advanced norms of liberalism, open markets, and representative democracy for decades. While it has lost some of its relative economic clout in recent decades (e.g. it no longer commands 44 per cent of global GDP as it did 22 years ago), it still controls roughly 30 per cent of global GDP and continues to hold two-fifths of the voting rights at the World Bank and IMF.¹⁰ The G7 also funds the majority of humanitarian responses globally, and has taken crucial and influential positions on responding to recent conflict trends.

4 Sebastian von Einsiedel, Louise Boseth, Cale Salih, Wilfred Wan, and James Cockayne, *Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2017); Julie Jarland, Håvard Møkleiv Nygård, Scott Gates, Emilie Hermansen and Vilde Bergstad Larsen, *How Should We Understand Patterns of Recurring Conflict?* (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2020).

5 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2022: Armaments, Disarmament, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

6 For a set of forward looking trends, see Adam Day and David Passarelli, *Governing Uncertainty* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

7 Susan L. Woodward, *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

8 Mary Ilyushina, Cate Cadell, Dan Lamothe, David L. Stern, and Timothy Bella, "Commander hints at Russian Ambitions beyond Ukraine," Washington Post, 22 April 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/22/russian-ambition-beyond-ukraine/>

9 International Crisis Group, "India's Response to Russia's War in Ukraine," International Crisis Group, 5 July 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/india/indias-response-russias-war-ukraine>.

10 International Crisis Group, "7 priorities for the G7: Managing the Global Fallout of Russia's War on Ukraine," Reliefweb, 28 June 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/7-priorities-g7-managing-global-fallout-russias-war-ukraine>.

In this context, the G7 should pay particular attention to the following shifts in the character of violent conflict worldwide, potentially adapting its conflict resolution approaches to better achieve its strategic goals:

Return of great power confrontation. The wars in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen have contributed to the return of great power confrontation (if indirect), where major military states have exhibited a greater willingness to involve their own forces directly in conflicts. What is sometimes referred to as the ‘internationalization of intra-state war,’ describes this dramatic shift to outside involvement in civil conflicts. Whereas in 1991 only 4 per cent of civil wars involved outside military forces, that number had multiplied tenfold by 2015 to 40 per cent.¹¹ This has been accompanied by an increasingly dangerous rhetoric by major powers, including recent Russian threats to use nuclear weapons in the context of the war in Ukraine and escalating US-China discourse around Taipei. Lacking a meaningful forum for de-escalation in the Security Council,¹² these points of contention could spill over into more generalized instability. This presents a major challenge to the G7, which has seen its members sidelined in some of the most important conflict resolution processes (or indeed directly involved in the fighting), and where its ability to deliver sustainable peace outcomes via negotiated settlements has been consistently undermined by regional actors. The war in Syria offers perhaps the best example of this, but G7 influence over the wars in Yemen, Libya, and Mali has also been under strain due to the direct involvement of other outside actors.

New risks of escalation. Great power confrontation has been accompanied by a growing number of escalation risks, in particular around under-governed areas like cyber, outer space, and nuclear weapons. Scenarios where anonymous cyberattacks threaten strategic weapons sites, or where an attack on an early warning system in outer space triggers a large-scale response, all indicate the real possibility that small points of conflict could spiral into wider forms of violence.¹³ In particular, the increasing entanglement of

nuclear weapons with conventional technologies has created uncertainties over the potential use of so-called tactical nuclear weapons and/or the blurring of the longstanding norm against nuclear weapons use.¹⁴ This presents an immediate set of risks to G7 members as a group and as individual states, given that G7 members possess and are increasingly reliant on the most advanced technologies in the world. But without a forum to deconflict in the case of an incident or negative trend, G7 members could be exposed to a range of scenarios which could unintentionally escalate into large-scale confrontation. The uncertainty over governance regimes and the lack of norms and rules around the use of technologies only adds to these risks.

Diversification of conflict actors. The growing willingness of states to involve themselves in internal wars beyond their boundaries has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the number and type of non-state actors involved in today’s wars. The prevalence of state-aligned proxy militias, mercenaries, and non-state armed groups has created new sources of instability and deepened the channels of resources driving conflict. Lack of clear governance structures for these actors means they often escape more traditional constraints, leading to greater civilian risks and more frequent violations of human rights.¹⁵ Indeed, blurred lines between conflict and non-conflict zones, alongside a willingness of conflict actors to target civilian sites, have driven significant increases in civilian deaths and suffering. Civilians constituted 90 per cent of wartime casualties last year, while 140 million people were driven into acute food insecurity.¹⁶ For the G7, this presents a range of inter-related challenges. First, the foundations of the G7 are largely state-based, following a set of principles around a state-centric liberal order, economic growth via state capacity development, and addressing conflict risks with traditional state-to-state multilateral structures. This does not mean G7 members individually have not evolved their policies – indeed, there have been significant shifts in some members’ approaches to non-state actors – but as a whole the rise of non-state actors means that the G7 may need to begin

11 Uppsala Conflict Data Program Dataset 2016, available at: <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/>.

12 Richard Gowan, *Minimum Order: The Role of the Security Council in an Era of Great Power Competition* (New York: United Nations University, 2018).

13 See, Nina Tannenwald, “Life beyond Arms Control: Moving toward a Global Regime of Nuclear Restraint & Responsibility,” *Dædalus* Vol. 149 No. 2, (Spring 2020): 205-221; Wilfred Wan, *Nuclear Risk Reduction: A Framework for Analysis* (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2019).

14 Lyndon Burford, “A Risk-Driven Approach to Nuclear Disarmament,” European Leadership Network, June 25, 2019, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/a-risk-driven-approach-to-nuclear-disarmament/>.

15 See, Adam Day, Vanda Felbab-Brown, and Fanar Haddad, *Hybrid Wars: How Paramilitary Groups Shape Post Conflict Transitions* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

16 United Nations, “Ninety Per Cent of War-Time Casualties are Civilians, Speakers Stress, Pressing Security Council to Fulfil Responsibility, Protect Innocent People in Conflict,” Press Release, 25 May 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm>.

thinking in more networked, less traditional state-to-state terms. How can G7 investment (both political and financial) in conflict resolution meaningfully reflect the role of non-state armed groups that often legitimately control large territories? How can the G7 better engage with private sector actors who may be crucial in resolving conflicts? These are questions that should drive a policy-level discussion within the G7.

Transnational organized crime. Since the 1990s, the growth of large transnational criminal networks in regions like the Sahel and large parts of Latin America has facilitated the flow of people, arms, and resources to drive conflict risks.¹⁷ Organized crime not only fuels conflict, it also weakens state governance capacities and undermines the institutions that could contribute to conflict resolution. Moreover, transnational criminal networks tend to operate in a blind-spot of international conflict resolution, often treated as national criminal issues to be addressed by host states, or at most, addressed through the context of counter-terrorism measures when there are links to violent extremist groups. The growing importance of transnational crime and corruption has direct implications for the G7s conflict resolution approaches. Often underpinned by the offer of large development investments, how can the G7 address the fact that settings like Somalia, Mali, and elsewhere often routinely see up to 80 per cent of development and humanitarian assistance go missing due to corruption?¹⁸

Political unrest in a digital age. Violent demonstrations – a good indicator of large-scale political dissatisfaction and unrest – have increased dramatically over the past 15 years, growing by roughly 50 per cent globally since 2008.¹⁹ This indicator worsened in 126 countries, highlighting widespread dissatisfaction with political leadership in every region of the world. Increasingly too, growing rates of

misinformation and disinformation campaigns are driving political polarization and risks of violence to new highs, as technological advancements have accelerated social movements.²⁰ Here, the G7 commitment to open, liberal democracies is under direct pressure (and may actually be witnessing a period of decline at home in some countries). Globally, mounting rates of authoritarianism and crackdowns on political opposition present a difficult challenge, as they often occur below the international radar, with few multilateral tools to respond. Effective conflict resolution will likely require the evolution and deployment of a new range of tools to better anticipate and respond, including (1) using data to anticipate unrest and other social indicators of conflict;²¹ (2) exploring forms of ‘digital diplomacy’ in conflict resolution;²² and (3) identifying how technologies can work to address issues of horizontal inequality and exclusion that drive many of today’s conflicts.²³

Military spending. Counterintuitively, military spending as a percentage of GDP has actually dropped in the past 15 years, with falling armed service rates in 112 countries and proportional drops in military spending in 94 nations.²⁴ Spending on nuclear and heavy weapons has also fallen, with 108 nations reducing their overall holdings. However, many of these positive changes happened roughly a decade ago and have begun to reverse, with significant shifts expected as a result of the war in Ukraine. If NATO countries meet their current pledges, their spending will rise by 7 per cent in the coming few years alone, likely driving global militarization rates up as well. Increases in military spending usually lead to proportional drops in spending on issues like education, social services, and ODA, all of which are crucial in addressing underlying causes of violent conflict.²⁵ As the economic sanctions on Russia continue and belts are tightened as a result of oil prices, the cuts to social spending are likely to run even deeper. This places G7 members in a

17 For excellent studies of the links between crime and conflict, see Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (<https://globalinitiative.net/>). See also, International Institute for Security Studies (IISS), *The Armed Conflict Survey 2019* (London: IISS, 2019).

18 Adam Day, Vanda Felbab-Brown, and Fanar Haddad, *Hybrid Conflict, Hybrid Peace: How militias and paramilitary groups shape post-conflict transitions* (New York: United Nations University, 2020).

19 Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2022* (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022).

20 See, Josh A. Goldstein and Shelby Grossman, “How disinformation evolved in 2020,” Brookings Institute, 4 January 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-disinformation-evolved-in-2020/>; Hadil Abuhmaid, “Growing-up in the age of fake news,” UNESCO Courier, 2021-2, <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2021-2/growing-age-fake-news>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/26/technology/government-disinformation-cyber-troops.html>.

21 Daniel Pearson and Adrien Detges, “How big data could anticipate violence and promote peace,” World Economic Forum, 14 December 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/12/big-data-could-help-anticipate-violence-and-put-peace-in-its-way>.

22 Abdelhafidh Abdeleli, “Digital diplomacy in the era of Covid-19,” Swissinfo.ch, 18 February 2021, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/business/digital-diplomacy-in-the-era-of-covid-19/46374914>; Ahmed Eleiba, “Digital technologies: fueling conflict but catalyzing peace,” à propos, November 2022, <https://www.swisspeace.ch/apropos/digital-technologies-fueling-conflict-but-catalyzing-peace/>.

23 United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018).

24 Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2022* (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022).

25 See United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018).

difficult position. On the one hand, they are committed to a robust military response to Russia, and all signs indicate that spending will follow this commitment. But this is already having a negative impact on other key G7 priorities including: (1) a doubling down on fossil fuels that undermines climate commitments; (2) an increase in the military spending of G7 competitors, potentially leading to a new global arms race and greater risks; and (3) a withdrawal from ODA, which is a crucial aspect of G7 conflict resolution processes. The result is a G7 that may have fewer conflict resolution resources at its disposal at a time when they are most needed.

Climate-insecurity. The accelerating rate of climate change is acting as a risk multiplier in many parts of the world and is contributing to insecurity and instability in a number of ways. Climate-driven shocks to livelihoods – e.g. erratic rainfall, drought, flooding, destruction of riverine land, and extreme weather – have driven millions into greater levels of poverty, with growing evidence of increases in violent conflict in many affected areas.²⁶ In some regions, climatic factors are a principal cause of population displacements, contributing to rapid and often unplanned urbanization, and rising rates of criminality and unrest.

These trends combine with other factors, such as rapid demographic growth in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, to place enormous stresses on infrastructure and state governance capacities.²⁷ The G7 is likely to face a growing array of spending priorities as the number of climate-related shocks continues to grow, and many of these will take place in areas already suffering from endemic cycles of conflict.

Conclusion – a complex conflict ecosystem with deeply entrenched patterns. One of the most important outcomes of this set of trends is that conflicts have become more intractable and less likely to be solved via traditional means.²⁸ Many regions have experienced instability lasting multiple decades, with little prospect for a political solution in the medium term. Looking forward, the next five years are likely to see continuation of these dynamics with deeply entrenched conflicts in Yemen, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Central African Republic, and Syria. There is a high likelihood that these conflicts will receive less international attention and financial support, as attention and resources increasingly focus on the pandemic recovery and the war in Ukraine.²⁹

26 See, Adam Day and Jessica Caus, *Conflict Prevention in an Era of Climate Change*, (New York: United Nations University, 2020; Joshua Busby, *The Field of Climate and Security: A Scan of the Literature* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2019).

27 Janani Vivekananda, Janpeter Schilling, and Dan Smith, “Climate resilience in fragile and conflict-affected societies: concepts and approaches,” *Development in Practice*, Vol. 24 No. 4 (2014): 487-501; Jürgen Scheffran, Peter Michael Link, and Janpeter Schilling, “Theories and Models of Climate-Security Interaction: Framework and Application to a Climate Hot Spot in North Africa,” in *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict: Challenges for Societal Stability*, eds. Jürgen Scheffran, Michael Brzoska, Hans Günter Brauch, Peter Michael Link, and Janpeter Schilling (Berlin: Springer, 2012): 91-131; Jürgen Scheffran, Michael Brzoska, Jasmin Kominek, P Michael Link, and Janpeter Schilling, “Climate Change and Violent Conflict,” *Science* Vol. 336 (2012): 869-871; Ole Magnus Theisen, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Halvard Buhaug, “Is Climate Change a Driver of Armed Conflict?,” *Climatic Change* Vol. 117 No. 3 (2013): 613-625; Nils Petter Gleditsch, “Special Issue on Climate Change and Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 49 No. 163 (2012): 1-145.

28 See, James Fearon, “Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 41 No. 3 (May 2004): 275-301.

29 Interview with two major European donors indicated a high likelihood of further ODA cuts as resources were directed to Ukraine.

2. The Fragile Peace Dividend of Negotiated Settlements and International Conflict Resolution

Since the end of the Cold War, the number of wars that end in clear military victory have declined to close to zero.³⁰ Instead, the dominant mode of conflict resolution has become negotiated settlements, often with international mediators and sometimes with the involvement of G7 members. There is a clear body of evidence indicating that negotiated settlements brokered with international support can have a meaningful impact on conflict reduction and longer-term sustained peace.³¹ Recent studies have indicated that international mediation can, on its own, lead to a significant reduction in levels of violence during conflict.³² A halt in large-scale hostilities, even if temporary, can have enormous economic benefits,³³ open the door to significant investment in governance institutions,³⁴ and pave the way to more sustained conflict resolution via nationally-run processes. The World Bank has found that conflict resolution can have an enormous impact on global economic growth, helping to boost trade and increase opportunities for foreign direct investment (both key priorities for the G7).³⁵ Investment in conflict prevention and resolution is of clear benefit to all countries, given the enormous costs of violent conflict globally.³⁶

In this context, the past 20 years have seen a worrying trend that runs against these findings: roughly 60 per cent of conflicts resolved via negotiated settlement have later

relapsed into conflict.³⁷ This high rate of relapse points to a broader historical trend: most wars take place in settings that have a relatively recent experience with war. For example, the 2011 World Development Report found that 90 per cent of civil wars since 2000 occurred in countries that had experienced civil war in the past 30 years, while other studies have shown that the predominance of new conflicts have been recurrent rather than new onset.³⁸

One explanation is that negotiated settlements may be inherently less stable than military victories. Several scholars have pointed to the fragility of the kind of political settlements arrived at during negotiated peace, suggesting they may prolong conflict risks rather than address them.³⁹ However, a more persuasive argument appears to be that civil wars themselves create the conditions for their own recurrence. Civil wars tend to be fought over the state itself, often resulting in widespread destruction of state institutions, deep polarization amongst communities, and massive underdevelopment.⁴⁰ Negotiated settlements, which tend to focus on an elite bargain that may only temporarily address a dispute amongst two leading political factions, have little chance of leading to the kind of deeper transformations in a country's political settlement. Indeed, the literature on elite bargains indicates a fairly limited long-term effect on underlying conflict dynamics.⁴¹

30 Experts cite Sri Lanka's defeat of the Tamil Tigers as one of only a small number of recent cases.

31 See, Laurie Nathan, *Mandating Peace: Enhancing the Mediation Sensitivity and effectiveness of the UN Security Council*, Discussion Paper, (Berlin: Federal Foreign Office, 2020).

32 Kyle Beardsley, David E. Cunningham, and Peter B. White, "Mediation, Peacekeeping, and the Severity of Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol 63 No. 3 (2018): 1682-1709

33 Institute for Economics and Peace, *Economic Value of Peace 2021: Measuring the Global Impact of Violence and Conflict* (Sydney: IEP, 2021).

34 Erin McCandless, Flora Smith, Beth Prosnitz, and Genine Babakian, *Peace Dividends and Beyond: Contributions of Administrative and Social Services to Peacebuilding* (New York: United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2012)

35 Malcolm Knight and Norman Loayza, *Measuring the peace dividend* (Washington DC: World Bank, 1996).

36 Estimated at more than USD 14 trillion annually. See "How High is the Cost of War Around the World in 2019?" Vision of Humanity, last accessed 18 November 2022, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/how-does-war-and-violence-affect-an-economy>.

37 Scott Gates, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård and Esther Trappeniers, *Conflict Recurrence*, Conflict Trends 2 (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, February 2016).

38 See, Scott Gates, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård and Esther Trappeniers, *Conflict Recurrence*, Conflict Trends 2 (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, February 2016).

39 Edward Luttwak, "Give War a Chance," *Foreign Policy*, 1989; Jeffrey Herbst. "Let Them Fail: State Failure in Theory and Practice: Implications for Policy," in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert Rotberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

40 Charles T. Call, *Why Peace Fails: The Causes and Prevention of Civil War Recurrence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

41 See, Christine Cheng, Jonathan Goodhand, and Patrick Meehan, *Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict*, UK Stabilisation Unit Synthesis Paper (London: UK Stabilisation Unit, 2016); Christine Bell, *What we talk about when we talk about political settlements: Towards Inclusive and Open Political Settlements in an Era of Disillusionment*, Political Settlements Research Programme Working Paper 1 (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2015), p.16; Thomas Parks and William Cole, *Political Settlements: Implications for International Development Policy and Practice*, Occasional Paper No. 2 (San Francisco: The Asia Foundation, 2010); Christine Bell and Jan Pospisil, "Navigating Inclusion in Transitions from Conflict: The Formalized Political Unsettlement," *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 29 No. 5 (2017): 576-593.

Moreover, a growing body of scholarship underscores the very limited success of post-conflict statebuilding and peacebuilding. In many cases, international interventions aimed at extending state authority and building state capacity in the aftermath of conflict have a range of unintended consequences, including enabling authoritarian tendencies, creating heavy dependencies on outside support, and failing to address underlying conflict dynamics.⁴²

Here, the research on elite bargains offers some especially important lessons for the G7's conflict resolution approaches, in particular in their interactions with the multilateral system. First, many negotiated solutions 'bake in' the polarizing, unequal political settlement that initially gave rise to conflict. In settings like Yemen's 2011 constitutional process, South Sudan's 2013 peace agreement, or Mali's 2015 peace process, the privileging of elite parties and the reduction of a peace process to a narrow agenda may in fact trigger renewed rounds of violence, or allow for a metastasizing conflict that spreads to other actors.⁴³ These kinds of conflict resolution pathways are highly susceptible to elite capture, particularly when international actors like the G7 and the World Bank pour resources into state-only implementation processes. Recent research has demonstrated that a large portion of internationally-led conflict resolution processes have resulted in political settlements that actually embolden authoritarian tendencies, in large part due to the capture of international funding.⁴⁴

Second, there is a growing body of evidence that the long-term success of negotiated settlements depend on their inclusivity, specifically in terms of offering political and economic stakes to traditionally excluded groups.⁴⁵ As one study found, inclusive settlements function to transform

indivisible zero-sum issues (such as control over territory or access to resources) into divisible issues that can become part of a power-sharing arrangement (such as parliamentary seats).⁴⁶

This leads to perhaps the most important takeaway regarding negotiated settlements: the outbreak of violent conflict creates a set of costs and deeply entrenched patterns that are extraordinarily difficult to end via traditional means. Whether negotiated solutions, military victory, or the deployment of peacekeeping forces are used, the likelihood of sustainably managing conflicts after they have broken out into large scale violence is relatively low, while the costs of war are enormous. Instead, what some have called the 'conflict trap' describes the high likelihood that countries undergoing a civil war will become mired in vicious cycles of underdevelopment, uneven growth, unfair politics, and the militarization of political systems.⁴⁷ Escaping the conflict trap is almost always a multi-decade process, requiring intensive investment, with high risks of unintended consequences.⁴⁸

From the G7's perspective, investment in early conflict resolution and prevention is the most likely to generate meaningful returns. Interventions that stop widespread violent conflict before it escalates can avoid these vicious cycles and allow for political settlements that are far more likely to generate equitable power and resource sharing, democratic institutions, and positive relations with other countries. Equally important, the G7 will need to consider how to ensure that its conflict resolution approaches address the problems of inclusivity and elite political settlements described above. Simply investing in liberal models of governance and assuming that Western approaches will eventually take hold in today's conflict theaters is not an option.

42 Susan Woodward, *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Sarah von Billerbeck and Oisín Tansey, "Enabling autocracy? Peacebuilding and post-conflict authoritarianism in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 25 No. 3 (2019): 1-29; Michael Barnett and Christopher Zürcher, "The Peacebuilder's Contract: How External State-building Reinforces Weak Statehood," in *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, eds. Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk (London: Routledge Press, 2009); Adam Day, *States of Disorder, Ecosystems of Governance: Applying Complexity Thinking to UN Statebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

43 See, Christine Cheng, Jonathan Goodhand, and Patrick Meehan, *Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict*, UK Stabilisation Unit Synthesis Paper (London: UK Stabilisation Unit, 2016).

44 Adam Day, Sarah von Billerbeck, Oisín Tansey, and Ayham Al Maleh, *Peacebuilding and Authoritarianism: The Unintended Consequences of UN Engagement in Post-Conflict Settings* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

45 See United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018).

46 See, Christine Cheng, Jonathan Goodhand, and Patrick Meehan, *Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict*, UK Stabilisation Unit Synthesis Paper (London: UK Stabilisation Unit, 2016).

47 For an excellent description of these dynamics, see Rachel Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security* (New York: Vintage Books, 2018). See also Richard Gowan, "The Peacekeeping Quagmire," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer/Fall 2015): 31-38.

48 See, Adam Day, Sarah von Billerbeck, Oisín Tansey, and Ayham Al Maleh, *Peacebuilding and Authoritarianism: The Unintended Consequences of UN Engagement in Post-Conflict Settings* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

3. The Business Case for G7 Engagement with Multilateral Conflict Resolution

The business case for G7 engagement in conflict resolution is unequivocal. The economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2021 was estimated at USD 16.5 trillion, equivalent to ten per cent of the world's economic activity.⁴⁹ Violent conflict has a broader impact on the global economy as well, driving down productivity, reducing business confidence, inhibiting trade, and requiring costly post-conflict investments. The result is lower GDP growth, a less predictable economy, higher levels of unemployment, and greater risks of inflation. While the most acute economic costs are borne by conflict-affected countries, the global average is an 8.5 per cent loss of GDP due to violent conflict, and even the most peaceful countries (including several G7 members) experience a 4 per cent drop in GDP.⁵⁰ One study found that global GDP would be at least 14 per cent higher absent violent conflict.⁵¹

Conversely, countries that have improved in peacefulness since 2000 have seen an average of between 1 and 2 per cent increases in GDP per capita when compared with countries that have not improved in peacefulness; when compounded over a 20-year period that amounts to a 30 per cent difference in GDP growth.⁵² Even a 2 per cent reduction in the global impact of violent conflict could offset all ODA (which is predominantly from G7 members) in 2019.⁵³ A 10 per cent reduction in levels of violent conflict would be equivalent to adding three new economies the size of Norway, Ireland and Belgium to the world.

If successful, conflict resolution and peacemaking offer a very cost-effective pathway to the potentially enormous benefits of peace. Firstly, the costs of mediation and political

engagement are extremely modest, comprising a tiny fraction of the costs of managing conflict.⁵⁴ And though the track record of the UN's efforts to resolve conflict is patchy, the benefits of reaching a sustained political settlement are extraordinary. Where a negotiated settlement results in a power-sharing agreement (the most typical outcome for a political resolution of a civil war), studies have shown at least a 10 per cent reduction in the intensity of violence.⁵⁵ Where such a power-sharing agreement is embedded in a broader peace agreement (e.g. involving resource sharing or other power-sharing elements), the impact is even higher, with up to a 30 per cent reduction in the intensity of violence. In a country the size of Mozambique, the economic benefits of such a power-sharing agreement are roughly USD 4.5 billion in immediate gains. But, if the country is able to escape repeated cycles of violent conflict, the gains jump to USD 82 billion, with positive knock-on effects globally.⁵⁶

This means that even relatively modest investments in successful forms of conflict resolution will have outsize economic benefits, not only for those affected countries, but also for G7 countries and the world. The opposite is also true: continued prioritization of militarization and investment in a war economy is clearly linked to greater levels of violent conflict, downward growth trends, and a vicious cycle of spending that is difficult to exit. As a recent report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute indicates, there is a clear case for balancing spending between military and other priorities,⁵⁷ and this paper argues for investment in conflict resolution as potentially one of the most cost-effective means of bolstering global GDP.

49 Institute for Economics and Peace, [Global Peace Index 2022](#) (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022).

50 Institute for Economics and Peace, [Economic Value of Peace 2021: Measuring the Global Impact of Violence and Conflict](#) (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021).

51 Olaf J de Groot, Carlos Bozzoli, Anousheh Alamir, and Tilman Brück, "The global economic burden of violent conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 59 No. 2 (2022).

52 Institute for Economics and Peace, *Economic Value of Peace 2021: Measuring the Global Impact of Violence and Conflict* (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021).

53 Ibid.

54 See, Tilman Brück, Corinne van Burg, Lea Ellmanns, Neil T. N. Ferguson, Philipp Lustenberger, and Alexandre Raffoul, *The Cost of Talking Peace: A political and economic analysis of financing peace negotiation and mediation processes* (Basel: Swiss Peace Foundation, 2020); See also, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, *Multi-Year Appeal Annual Report 2021* (New York: United Nations, 2021).

55 Hannes Mueller and Christopher Rauh, *The Peace Dividend of Power-Sharing: Quantitative Evidence on the Reduction of Political Violence through Negotiation*, (Berlin: German Federal Foreign Office, June 2022).

56 Ibid.

57 Elizabeth Sköns, Michael Brzoska, and Wuyi Omitoogun, [The Human Security Case for Reblancing Military Expenditure](#) (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2022).

4. The Multilateral Conflict Resolution and Prevention Architecture

While the G7 has a variety of bilateral conflict resolution options available to its members, the group has a strong political and economic investment in the multilateral system as a priority set of institutions for addressing the risks of violent conflict. This section provides a brief overview of the multilateral conflict resolution and prevention architecture, with a view to informing G7 policymaking.

The UN was formed in the aftermath of WWII and was largely designed to prevent unilateral acts of aggression, consolidating global security decision-making in the collective response of the Security Council. In the 75 years since the founding of the UN, this basic structure has not changed: the Security Council has primary responsibility for identifying and responding to threats to international peace and security, while only in exceptional circumstances are other organs of the UN directly involved.⁵⁸ This bedrock of international order has been of central relevance to the G7, providing a structure and processes to advance its principles of liberal order, democratic governance, and open markets.

However, from the end of the Cold War until today, there has been a significant evolution in the UN's practices around conflict resolution and prevention, in large part in response to the changing nature of armed conflict described above. Key moments in that evolution of multilateral conflict resolution and peacebuilding include:

An expanded scope of conflict resolution. After the end of the Cold War, there was a surge in activity by the Security Council. In the early 1990s alone, the Council adopted over 200 resolutions, launched fifteen new peace operations, and became an active player in the resolution of a wide range of conflicts.⁵⁹ Importantly, whereas the Council had previously only considered inter-state conflicts as threats to international peace and security, the 1990s saw an increasing willingness to take on intra-state civil wars. Today, it is taken as a given that the Security Council may act in the case of civil wars that have an impact beyond

their boundaries, as evidenced by its attempts to resolve conflicts in Mali, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya, and Iraq. This expansion, however, is not unlimited: attempts to include the 'responsibility to protect' doctrine in the UN system – which would have allowed for interventions in the case of large-scale protection failures by the state – foundered in the early 2000s. Today, the basis for UN intervention in conflict remains the Council's determination of a threat to international peace and security.

A spectrum of peace operations. Over the past 50 years, the UN has evolved a broader range of peace operations to lead conflict resolution and peacemaking in many contexts. On the far end of the spectrum, today's multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations (such as those in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, South Sudan, and CAR today) have been tasked with increasingly demanding roles, including protecting civilians in ongoing hostilities, supporting large-scale stabilization and extension of state authority, national-level security sector reform, and support to complex political processes absent a peace agreement. Indeed, under the 'Action for Peacekeeping' initiative, there has been a concerted push to make peacekeeping options more focused on achieving and sustaining political solutions to conflicts.⁶⁰ But the UN has also developed a range of other peace operations, including: (1) smaller, civilian-only peacebuilding missions (although there have been few of these in recent years); (2) police-focused rule of law missions; (3) special political missions designed to support a political process; and (4) regionally-based special envoys. The growth of regional prevention offices in settings like West Africa/Sahel, Central Africa, the Horn of Africa, and West Asia means the UN now has a far greater static presence in many conflict-affected regions, and has shown itself able to respond to many conflict risks at an earlier stage.⁶¹ Furthermore, the work of entities like the verification mission in Colombia and Hodeidah, peacemaking by special envoys, and the accountability team focused on Daesh all show a wide range of innovative UN peacebuilding efforts.

58 See, e.g. the General Assembly's Uniting for Peace resolutions.

59 Mats Berdal, "The Security Council and Peacekeeping," in *The United Nations Security Council and War: The Evolution of Thought and Practice since 1945*, eds. Vaughan Lowe, Adam Roberts, Jennifer Welsh, and Dominik Zaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 176.

60 See, Adam Day, Aditi Gorur, Victoria K. Holt, and Charles T. Hunt, *The Political Practice of Peacekeeping: How Strategies for Peace Operations Are Made and Implemented* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

61 See, Adam Day and David Passarelli, *Stress Testing the UN's Regional Prevention Approaches* (New York: United Nations University, 2022).

The growth and demise of the ‘standard treatment’ for conflict resolution.

The post-Cold War management of the international order increasingly relied on the so-called ‘standard treatment’ for civil wars, comprised of (1) the use of international mediation to end conflict; (2) the deployment of a peace operation to provide a security guarantee to the peace agreement; and (3) investment in post-conflict peacebuilding.⁶² This functioned fairly well in the more permissive environments of 1990s conflict resolution, allowing Western powers to support a wide range of successful conflict resolution processes. Since around 2003, however, the standard treatment has struggled to gain traction as a sustainable conflict resolution formula. Instead, a combination of uncooperative host governments, endemic forms of violence, and regional meddling in internal conflicts has rendered the standard treatment a fairly ineffective tool for today’s conflicts. Here, unfortunately, UN doctrine has lagged behind reality: today’s approaches to mediation, conflict resolution, and the deployment of peace operations often continue to track closely to the standard treatment, despite decades of evidence indicating poor outcomes. The rarity of achieving peace agreements today also renders the standard treatment a challenging starting point for conflict resolution.

The centrality of peacebuilding. Whereas early UN doctrine envisaged a role only in conflict prevention, peacemaking, and management, Secretary-General Boutros Ghali’s 1993 Agenda for Peace introduced the concept of ‘post-conflict peacebuilding’ to the UN system.⁶³ Peacebuilding is based on a recognition that violent conflict results from a range of social, political, and economic factors, many of which must be addressed via capacity development, inclusive political processes, and non-military means. Over time, peacebuilding has expanded to become a central pillar of the UN’s conflict prevention, management, and post-conflict recovery. The centrality of peacebuilding to prevention was recognized in the 2016 twin General Assembly/Security Council resolutions on Sustaining Peace, and is demonstrated by the establishment and growth of the Peacebuilding Support Office, Peacebuilding Fund, and Peacebuilding Commission.⁶⁴ While this growth in

peacebuilding has allowed for greater ‘upstream’ efforts at conflict resolution, the UN and its partners continue to face serious challenges, including under-investment by donors, endemic governance shortcomings that do not improve despite long-term capacity-building, and an overall lack of adequate attention paid to measuring and evaluating impact.⁶⁵ At worst, there is some evidence that peacebuilding may at times unintentionally enable the very tendencies of authoritarianism and exclusion that could drive repeated cycles of conflict.⁶⁶

Challenging regional partnerships. Over time, the UN has become increasingly connected to regional and subregional organizations around conflict prevention priorities, most visibly in its partnership with the African Union (AU).⁶⁷ This is a recognition of the importance of subsidiarity, requiring wherever possible that conflicts should be resolved at the lowest possible level, often with regional actors in the lead. Over the past decade, the UN has invested significantly in its regional relationships, developing a sizeable UN/AU office in Addis Ababa, and significantly increasing its regional presence in all five regions globally. The 2016-18 UN reform of the peace and security architecture crystallized this regional emphasis, creating new regional bureaus in the UN secretariat, enhanced regional strategies for key conflict-prone regions, and bolstering the UN prevention offices in regions like the Sahel, Central African Republic, and the Horn of Africa. However, this emphasis on regional partnerships has coincided with a decline in some of the most important conflict resolution and prevention roles of some regional organizations. Since the death of PM Zenawi in Ethiopia in 2012, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been unable to build the kind of regional coherence necessary to address repeated coups in Sudan and civil wars in both South Sudan and Ethiopia. The Economic Commission for West African States (ECOWAS), which earlier had taken robust economic, political, and military engagements to prevent and manage escalations in violent conflict in Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Mali between 2009 and 2015, has shown itself far less able to respond to recent conflict risks in West Africa. And most recently the war in Ukraine has demonstrated the challenges to regional

62 See Richard Gowan and Steven Stedman, “The International Regime for Treating Civil War,” *Dædalus* Vol. 147 No. 1 (Winter, 2018): 171–184.

63 See UN Secretary-General and Organization of the Islamic Conference, *An agenda for peace: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-building: report of the Secretary-General* (New York: United Nations, 1993).

64 For a good summary of this evolution, see “The Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace Agenda,” Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 5 March 2021, https://www.daghammarskjold.se/hrf_faq/peacebuilding-sustaining-peace-agenda/.

65 Nb., a joint Germany/UN Peacebuilding Fund impact evaluation project may address this final challenge in some respects. See Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund, *Synthesis Review 2020* (New York: United Nations, 2021).

66 Adam Day, Sarah von Billerbeck, Oisín Tansey, and Ayham Al Maleh, *Peacebuilding and Authoritarianism: The Unintended Consequences of UN Engagement in Post-Conflict Settings* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

67 See website of the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU), available at <https://unoau.unmissions.org/>.

cooperation in Europe. As such, the UN's emphasis on regional solutions to conflict risks is facing a serious set of questions that have yet to be answered.

Geopolitical fracture, a crisis of legitimacy. These changes have taken place in a period of growing geopolitical tensions and a withering of the Security Council's ability to respond to conflict risks. This was most evident in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but also during the 2011 intervention in Libya, where deep fault lines within the P5 were exposed. Partially also as a result of direct involvement by major powers in the conflicts of today, the Council has shown itself largely unable to act in the face of large-scale atrocities in Syria, Yemen, and now Ukraine. Indeed, today the Security Council only appears able to agree on a fairly limited set of issues: re-mandating existing peacekeeping missions, authorizing some limited humanitarian interventions in conflicts, and imposing multilateral sanctions, largely in counter-terrorism contexts.⁶⁸ This has led to a 'crisis of legitimacy' for the Council and a tendency for major powers to pursue bilateral conflict prevention and management approaches rather than multilateral ones. As the Ukraine conflict demonstrates, even the extremely successful deployment of the Secretary-General's good offices has been restricted to deals around grain – a crucial issue that has saved thousands of lives, but not a meaningful part of a conflict resolution process thus far.

A worrying retreat on disarmament. Crucial to the UN's conflict prevention and management is its disarmament architecture, a range of institutions and treaties designed to reduce the threat posed by small arms and weapons of mass destruction.⁶⁹ Here, the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is a cornerstone of the multilateral system, designed to prevent the proliferation of weapons, oversee global disarmament, and allow for the peaceful use of nuclear power. When combined with a range of bilateral agreements (e.g. START), the NPT has been one of the most important reference points for the non-use of nuclear weapons. Worryingly, there are signs that the global commitment to the NPT may be eroding, most notably in the context of Russian threats to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. The mid-2022 review of the NPT highlighted the growing risks of escalation and the need for concerted action to prevent escalation.

Gaps in the multilateral prevention architecture. While the UN Charter has shown itself to be highly adaptable to

emerging threats over time, today there are some significant shortfalls in the global governance of security threats. These include: (1) a lack of comprehensive or enforceable obligations and commitments around cyberwarfare; (2) the absence of a governance architecture for the risks posed by AI-driven technologies, most notably lethal autonomous weapons systems; (3) the lack of early warning/action mechanisms for bio-threats; and (4) lagging responses to the increasing security threats posed by climate change. More generally, the UN appears to be suffering from a sustained period of retreat, where Member States see less need to rely on longstanding multilateral forums to address security risks. Perhaps the greatest gap in the UN's prevention architecture is its growing shortfall in legitimacy with much of the world. At the same time, the need for global cooperation to address conflict risks has never been more evident.

In this context, the Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda* report can be considered an attempt to revitalize multilateralism at a time of geopolitical fracture and withdrawal, making the case for more collective, collaborative approaches to the major risks facing us today. Within *Our Common Agenda*, the Secretary-General calls for a 'New Agenda for Peace' offering a six-pillar approach to addressing today's prevention priorities and hopefully addressing some of the above-mentioned gaps:

1. **Reducing strategic risks:** In addition to a recommitment to the principles of collective security, the Secretary-General calls for stronger commitments to the non-use of nuclear weapons and a timeline for their elimination, a ban on cyberattacks on civilian infrastructure, and a range of actions to reduce risks around new technologies.
2. **Strengthened international foresight:** The Secretary-General articulates a set of steps to improve the UN's foresight capacities and long-term thinking, better linking it to crisis response capacities in the case of major risks.
3. **Responding to all forms of violence:** Recognizing that large-scale conflict actually accounts for a relatively small number of civilian casualties when compared to criminal and interpersonal violence, the Secretary-General calls for a more holistic approach to violence reduction and prevention.
4. **Investing in prevention and peacebuilding:** The costs saved by prevention should lead Member States to invest more heavily in it, possibly shifting resources from military budgets to more social spending. The New

68 See, Richard Gowan, *Minimum Order: The Role of the Security Council in the Era of Major Power Competition* (New York: United Nations University, 2018).

69 For an overview, see <https://www.un.org/en/observances/disarmament-week/agenda>.

Agenda for Peace also calls for greater investment in the Peacebuilding Fund and the Peacebuilding Commission, while proposing that climate-driven risks be prioritized.

5. **Supporting regional prevention:** In recognition of the central role of regional actors in conflict prevention, the New Agenda for Peace calls for greater investment in regional arrangements and for peace operations that address regional risks.
6. **Putting women and girls at the centre of security policy:** Building on the existing Women Peace and Security Agenda, the Secretary-General calls for gender equality to be placed at the heart of security policy.

The New Agenda for Peace is currently being worked on within the UN by the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, and the Offices of Disarmament Affairs and Counter Terrorism. This in turn will feed into the Summit of the Future in late 2024, a Member State-led process which should result in a Declaration for the Future. How to take advantage of this new initiative is the question for the upcoming G7 meeting on peace, and the subject of the final section.

5. A Framework for G7 Conflict Resolution via the New Agenda for Peace

Drawing on the above analysis, this section offers a policy framework for the G7 to engage in conflict resolution and peacemaking. Its starting point is that the world is unlikely in the short-term to return to earlier periods of relatively high degrees of multilateral cooperation. If anything, there will continue to be downward pressure on the UN, shrinking political space for multilateral solutions, and risks that are increasingly unmanageable via traditional tools of multilateralism. This is not a reason to turn away from the UN, but rather to invest in areas where the multilateral system is best placed to deliver on conflict resolution. In this context, G7 members will need to identify issues of potential common ground – including with so-called ‘spoilers’ and strategic competitors – and gradually look to build trust, work towards win-win solutions, and shift away from the kind of polarization that tends to drive militarization and escalatory dynamics. There is no heavy-handed approach that will deliver peace in today’s multipolar world. Crucially, the G7 will need to demonstrate that investing in political settlements to conflicts are not only better for conflict-affected countries and the G7 itself, but also a sound investment globally.

The Secretary-General’s *Our Common Agenda* report, and specifically the New Agenda for Peace, offers the G7 a strategic opening to engage more effectively on conflict resolution and help achieve the kind of political settlements that can have cascading benefits around the world. Specifically, the G7 can build on four of the priority areas within the New Agenda for Peace to develop a global conflict resolution strategy that helps to re-emphasize the constructive role of the UN and works against the current trends of nationalism and inter-state rivalry.

1. **Invest in peacemaking, prevention, and peacebuilding, showing where it works for all.** One of the priority areas of the New Agenda for Peace is to encourage greater use of and investment in peacebuilding. At its heart, peacebuilding is about the kind of inclusive political settlements that can lead to sustainable ends to violent conflict, breaking the ‘conflict trap’ and resulting in outside economic benefits for all. However, given today’s geopolitical tensions, there is a risk that peacebuilding is seen as a Global

North imposition of liberal governance structures around the world, particularly given that a large proportion of the funding comes from G7 and aligned states. Moreover, the UN could produce a far more robust evidence base showing how its peacebuilding activities generate a reduction in violent conflict, rather than speaking in vague terms about ‘catalytic effects’ and ‘hinge functions.’ To address this, G7 members could:

- a. Request (and offer to pay for) the UN to produce more detailed impact assessments of its peacemaking and peacebuilding work, demonstrating how it contributes via support to national actors to reductions in violent conflict, and identifying which activities produce the greatest impact.
- b. Indicate that the G7 will increase investments in those activities demonstrated to have increased sustained power-sharing arrangements and reduced violent conflict in the medium-term.
- c. Include funding for impact assessments in all conflict resolution programming, while also demanding that project documents articulate a clear theory of change linked to power-sharing and inclusive political settlements.
- d. Commission an independent report on the global benefits of investing in UN-led conflict resolutions.

2. **Support regional organizations as conflict resolution actors.** The New Agenda for Peace will likely call for an expanded and deepened relationship between the UN and regional organizations. However, as described above, this comes at a time when many regional and subregional organizations are falling well short of their hoped-for conflict prevention roles, and where many regions are suffering from external meddling that fuels ongoing conflict (e.g. Syria, Mali, and Somalia). In line with its existing policy on regional cooperation,⁷⁰ the G7 could echo the demand for strengthened regional conflict resolutions, and look specifically to support greater cohesion and common purpose within regional organizations. Specific steps could include:
- a. A regional transparency initiative that provides resources for regional organizations to track and report on militarization and insecurity, consolidating a common factual basis for regional policymaking;

⁷⁰ G7, G7 leaders’ Communique (Elmau: G7, 2022), <https://www.g7germany.de/resource/blob/974430/2062292/9c213e6b4b36ed1bd687e82480040399/2022-07-14-leaders-communique-data.pdf?download=1>.

b. Support ‘regional dialogue platforms’ that bring together key regional actors (political, economic, and security) to discuss security developments, common risks, and required resources.

3. **A strategic shift towards common security.** The *Our Common Agenda* report calls for a renewed emphasis on strategic weapons and disarmament. It is extremely unlikely that the G7 will engage on any major disarmament initiative given today’s geopolitical tensions. Indeed, it appears most likely that G7 military spending will increase in the short-term, despite the clear evidence above that shifting away from military spending would likely have a hugely beneficial impact globally. This risks a policy trajectory in the direction of mutually-assured-destruction and deterrence, leading to still further militarization, and reductions in spending on precisely the kind of activities that are proven to be most likely to reduce risks of violent conflict. As laid out in this year’s Olof Palme Commission report,⁷¹ the rise of nuclear weapons in the context of Ukraine could be used to re-energize a narrative of ‘common security,’ based on a recognition of the need for all states to feel safe as a precondition for global stability. Common security, and treating peace as a global public good that requires investment, is a crucial starting point that can lead away from cycles of increasing militarization.

4. **Look forward, build in flexibility.** One of the crucial lessons from the above conflict trend analysis is that

things change quickly, often in unexpected ways. Few pundits anticipated the rapid fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban last year, or the successive coups in Sudan, or the scale of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (or indeed the resilience of the Ukrainian response). As a combination of new technology, climate change, and rapidly shifting geopolitical alliances evolves, these changes are likely to accelerate, and the need for future-oriented approaches to conflict will become even more acute. And it also means that conflict resolution will need to be more flexible, iterative, and reflective than ever before. In line with the Common Agenda’s emphasis on foresight, the G7 should:

- a. Support the new foresight and futures capacities within the UN system (e.g. the Futures Lab, the call for a special envoy for future generations);
- b. Invest in collective foresight activities based on global risks, rather than nationally-driven reports;
- c. Build greater flexibility and adaptability into peacebuilding and conflict resolution programming, allowing for iterative approaches where immediate feedback on impact is incorporated into shifts in engagement.⁷²

Taken together these policy considerations would allow the G7 to recognize the crucial importance of conflict prevention and resolution to its strategic aims, the clear value in investing in multilateral approaches, and a set of priority actions that could advance that investment in peace.

71 See “Common Security 2022,” Common Security 2022, accessed November 18 2022, <https://commonsecurity.org/about-common-security-2022/>.

72 For a good overview of this idea, see Cedric de Coing, “Adapting peacebuilding,” *International Affairs* Vol. 94 No. 2 (March 2018): 301–317.

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