



International Crisis Group

# Strategic Framework



2019-2024



# Summary

The world today looks vastly different from the one that existed when Crisis Group was established almost 25 years ago. Rivalries among major and regional powers have grown fiercer. Non-state actors have proliferated. Social media and the internet put information – and disinformation – a click away. Competition for policymakers’ attention is ever more intense. Donors demand more. Faith in conflict resolution has faded along with the optimism that the Cold War’s end brought to much of the world. Many of today’s leaders want wars to be won, not ended.

Our mission – to save lives by preventing, mitigating and resolving deadly conflict – is as relevant as ever. Our method – field research, sharp analysis, practical recommendations and targeted advocacy – remains sound. Our presence on the ground, pragmatism, independence and global reach position us well for today and the future. The past year has seen sharp improvements in our productivity, influence, visibility and fundraising. Demand for our analysis and ideas among policymakers of all stripes is rising. Opportunities still exist to nudge leaders toward compromise – whether through quiet persuasion, public pressure or a combination of the two.

But to exploit such opportunities, we must evolve. To this end, this strategy lays out four principal goals:

- 1. Sharpening our Analysis.** We will improve the already high quality of our work while integrating new methods. That means retaining and recruiting top staff; devoting extra resources to high-priority crises; upping our coverage of major geopolitical trends; ensuring our analysis and recommendations incorporate new angles such as gender, climate, technology and economics; facilitating dialogue among conflict parties; and using data and quantitative resources.
- 2. Enhancing Our Advocacy.** We will target the right people with the right message at the right time. We will run high-profile campaigns to save large numbers of lives, better involve our trustees, and partner with others where advisable. We will appeal to new audiences by balancing long-form reports with shorter, livelier outputs, including video, infographics and interactive web content.
- 3. Investing in Strategic Communications.** We will fortify our media presence to shape the policy debate, mobilise others as force multipliers, and raise Crisis Group’s profile and brand.
- 4. Expanding our Fundraising.** With a focus on sustainability, our expanded private sector, foundations and government fundraising teams will intensify efforts to garner support in pursuit of these goals.

In sum these changes – some incremental, some transformative – represent a significant leap for Crisis Group.



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# I. Our Challenge: Responding to a Changing World

As Crisis Group approaches the quarter-century mark, we face a complex array of conflict actors and disputes, as well as growing competition for perhaps the scarcest of resources: the time, interest and attention of policymakers and opinion shapers.

Changes are stark in five key areas:

- **Geopolitical landscape.** Great power politics, U.S. retrenchment, assertive regional powers, surging nativism and proliferating non-state actors have reshaped today's wars. Western powers and the UN remain critical to our work, but their relative influence has waned.
- **Conflict landscape.** Today's deadliest wars often involve battles for power among factions alongside popular uprisings, separatist struggles or jihadist insurgencies; meddling outside powers; and fragmented armed groups, some chiefly motivated by criminality – against the backdrop of new challenges such as climate change and technological advances.
- **Competitive landscape.** The number and type of organisations making or informing policy – inter-governmental, governmental, non-governmental and commercial – continue to multiply.
- **Media landscape.** Information about most corners of the globe is a click away, which complicates disentangling the reliable from the dubious. Visual sophistication has become more and more important for telling the kind of stories that influence not only opinion shapers but conflict actors themselves.
- **Funding landscape.** The growth of project-specific funding raises demands on staff and narrows our flexibility to respond as conflict dynamics evolve.

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Crisis Group is well-positioned to respond:

- **Strong field presence.** Crisis Group's field research enables uniquely granular, informed and reliable analysis, and is key to our identity and early-warning capacity.
- **Pragmatic policy guidance.** Crisis Group offers realistic and pragmatic recommendations that are grounded in, and integrate, the views and interests of conflict actors and victims.
- **Independence.** We speak with everyone and offer dispassionate analysis viewed as credible even by those who disagree with us.
- **Global reach and access.** We can identify and engage stakeholders worldwide, and at many different levels.

Building on this foundation, Crisis Group has made great strides of late.

- **Outputs.** We have published more reports, briefings and other written products than at any time in the recent past; they come out faster and are more in tune with policymaking and news cycles. We have diversified our output, publishing graphic commentaries, increasing the number of videos, pictures and graphics we put out, and adding thematic work.

- **Influence.** We have stepped up the promotion of our work. We have strengthened our advocacy and communications teams, and initiated our first campaigns.
- **Visibility.** We have enhanced our visibility among policymakers and in the media. Innovations in our work have reinforced our influence with traditional interlocutors and opened doors to new audiences.
- **Finances.** We have raised more money, ending a cycle of recurring deficits and enabling us to lift our salary scale to recruit and retain top talent.

Despite these gains, significant challenges remain. The main question for Crisis Group is how to strengthen our core capacities while building new ones to meet today's demands.



## II. Our Response: Strategic Framework 2019-2024

Crisis Group's organisational strategy for 2019 to 2024 addresses these challenges. Our mission, vision and basic approach – combining on-the-ground research and analysis, pragmatic prescriptions and targeted advocacy – remain sound. But we must evolve.

We envision a significant transformation that will enrich Crisis Group's traditional country-based analysis, the cornerstone of our work, with greater attention to geopolitical trends, key thematic issues and quantitative methods and, where useful, by convening conflict parties. We will extend our advocacy to reach more decision-makers across the globe, including through high-profile campaigns. We will help shape an often-cacophonous policy debate by dramatically enhancing our communications capacity. Described below in broad strokes, our strategy will be subject to reevaluation and adjustment as circumstances warrant and in light of progress against benchmarks during the first two years of the framework.

### A. Mission and Vision

#### **Mission**

Crisis Group's mission is to save lives by preventing, mitigating and resolving deadly conflict. It does so through field-based research, sharp analysis, and pragmatic advocacy that shape the understanding and alter the behaviour of conflict actors and those who influence them.

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#### **Vision**

A world in which fewer people die or see their lives torn apart by war; in which conflict actors cause the least suffering in the pursuit of their interests; and in which outside actors do everything in their power to prevent and end conflicts.

### B. Objective

Crisis Group's objective over the next five years is to more effectively reach and influence the wider and increasingly diverse array of state and non-state actors that play key roles in preventing, mitigating and resolving deadly conflicts.

### C. Goals

To achieve this objective, we will pursue the following four goals. Each will receive high-level attention and oversight.

#### **1. Maintaining and Sharpening our Analysis**

- Over the next five years, we must uphold and improve our conflict analysis while ensuring our research and analytic tools are at the cutting edge.
- Recruit and retain the best regional staff and raise the necessary resources to support the broad field presence that drives our regional coverage and early warning.

- Devote extra resources to conflicts we identify as high-priority – because they exact a particularly grave humanitarian toll; because they are under-reported; because we have a niche role; or because of their geopolitical significance.
- Continue to develop CrisisWatch as a flexible, interactive early-warning tool.
- Stay on top of global conflict trends, cross-cutting issues and cutting-edge methods in conflict analysis. We will integrate these dimensions into our field-based analysis.
  - Conflict Trends. We must take account of major geopolitical trends and how they affect specific conflicts and crises.
  - Cross-Cutting Analysis. We must strengthen our expertise in key thematic areas. We will continue to assess the role of gender, economics and jihadism in conflicts worldwide, to which we will add Climate Change and Conflict (how does climate change provoke, perpetuate and shape conflict?) and Technology and War (what is the impact of new technologies including artificial intelligence, cyberwarfare and social media on the instigation, conduct and resolution of deadly conflict?).
  - Dialogue. In order to strengthen our policy impact and research, we will bring together conflict actors and/or stakeholders when we have real value-added, the actors so request and such convenings help improve our work to bridge divides.
  - New Research Methods. New quantitative resources and techniques – such as satellite imagery, GIS mapping, survey methods and econometrics – will enable our experts to more accurately address conflict risk.

## 2. Enhancing Our Advocacy

Crisis Group’s analytic and policy skills often have surpassed our global advocacy efforts. Resolving crises necessitates more systematised advocacy and engaging a greater variety of actors.

We accordingly will scale up our advocacy. This means identifying:

- The Right Targets. We must identify key levers of influence beyond traditional power centres.
- The Right Time. We need to strengthen our responsiveness to events at an early stage, before a crisis erupts or as it is unfolding, to influence crucial decisions.
- The Right Approach. Not all conflicts warrant the same type of advocacy. For some – where stakes are particularly high and our policy objective is clearly defined – we will undertake full-fledged campaigns. In other cases, advocacy is better achieved via more discrete, lower-profile or more targeted engagement. To enhance our reach, we also will seek to make better use of our trustees and, where advisable, partner with outside stakeholders.
- The Right Outputs. Over the past year, we trimmed our long-form, in-depth reports and balanced them with shorter, timelier and livelier interventions. This will continue, as will our growing use of graphics, video and audio, and interactive web content.

**Campaigns.** Where we have special value-added and the conflict has particular urgency, we will allocate additional investment and focus. We will run several high-profile campaigns per year, which could include more numerous and timely publications, multiple launch events, and greater audio and visual content. Our first campaign, on the Yemen war, running during the first months of 2019, helped head off an assault on the key Yemen port-city of Hodeida, which would have entailed an enormous number of casualties and suffering.

### 3. Investing in Strategic Communications

Greater competition for policymakers' time and donors' resources requires us to significantly boost our communication efforts by:

- Raising Crisis Group's profile and promoting our brand. Crisis Group is in a class of its own – neither traditional think tank nor typical advocacy organisation. We need to ensure that policymakers, other targets of our advocacy and donors know to turn to Crisis Group for the most reliable, up-to-date analysis and most relevant policy recommendations regarding conflict resolution.
- Indirectly shaping views and setting the agenda. The wide and prominent featuring of our analysis and recommendations in the media will indirectly reinforce our influence. We can also mobilise others – NGOs, civil society actors or activists – behind our policy prescriptions.

### 4. Expanding Our Fundraising

Turning this framework into reality will require a major fundraising effort. Our strategic framework is scalable; indeed, we are already planning, even at our current funding level, to move forward next year with the strategy's fundamentals. But robust implementation would necessitate an incremental increase from our current \$20 million to a sustainable \$25 million annual budget. Such growth would require significantly expanding our entire donor base, including governments, private sector and foundations.

Our forthcoming 25th anniversary in 2020 is an important opportunity to jumpstart this process, focusing on several key areas: seeking one or several major donations, including in the form of challenge or matching grants; enlisting or recruiting Trustees to help with fundraising; geographically diversifying our donor base beyond the U.S. East Coast and London; expanding the President's Council by offering greater benefits and requiring higher contributions; targeting select industries (eg, high-tech and extractives); and establishing scaled-up, city-based ambassadors councils (eg, New York, San Francisco and London, plus two other global cities) each with a head or co-head to recruit high net-worth members and organise events.

## D. Theory of Change

By influencing key policymakers and other conflict actors as well as those who shape their views, we contribute to the more effective prevention, mitigation and resolution of conflicts. We achieve impact in three primary ways:

- (I) *Analysis: Our reliable, impartial, field-based research informs decision-makers and key conflict actors and shapes their views about a given conflict.*

- (II) **Advocacy:** *We formulate specific, practical policies for preventing, mitigating and resolving deadly conflict and promote them directly with those who can make a difference.*
- (III) **Agenda-setting:** *We set the agenda within policy-shaping communities and thus indirectly reach, influence and pressure conflict actors.*

## III. Our Organisational Principles

### A. Our Values

#### **Work values**

All Crisis Group work is conducted in accordance with our core values. Our work is:

- Independent and impartial
- Rigorous and meticulous
- Inclusive and pragmatic

Crisis Group and its staff comment on the basis of field research, deliberate analysis and long-term expertise.

Crisis Group seeks to inform the broadest possible audience; since we consider our work a public good, access to virtually all our publications will remain unrestricted.

As part of a wider commitment to an inclusive methodology, Crisis Group promotes gender mainstreaming, viewing it as a central, constituent dynamic of conflict. We will integrate gender sensitivity into report planning, field research and policy development. We will focus on women's and men's different experiences of and roles in conflict; how conflict actors, states and armed groups deploy gender in their mobilisations, rivalries and clashes; and the distinct contributions women and men make in peace making and building.

#### **Institutional values**

Crisis Group's internal culture promotes:

- Teamwork and collegiality
- Accountability at all levels
- Diversity of personnel

As part of its commitment to an inclusive work culture, Crisis Group will pursue gender-, race-, religion-, sexual orientation-, and disability-sensitive management. Relevant practices include carefully designed recruitment procedures, a zero-tolerance harassment policy, clear criteria for performance evaluations to reduce bias, generous parental leave, and equal pay for equal work; pursuing diverse means to increase the presence of underrepresented groups, in part through a voluntary mentorship program for junior staff; and fostering open communication.

### B. Our Priorities

With strong demand for our work and a more diverse range of outputs than ever before, prioritisation is critical.

### **1. Conflict coverage**

In choosing the conflicts we cover and those whose coverage we will drop, we will weigh the impact we could have on a conflict and its victims, the feasibility of the work and the demand for it, and Crisis Group's unique value-added, against the likely investment required, in terms of staff time and capacity.

### **2. Thematic coverage**

We will assess thematic issues along largely the same lines, prioritising those with the greatest impact, feasibility and value-added; those we can best integrate into our analysis of specific conflicts; and those that lend themselves to practical policy recommendations.

Subject to changing circumstances, over the next five years we do not intend to invest in areas other than Climate Change & Conflict, Gender & Conflict, Economics of Conflict, Jihad in Modern Conflict, and Technology & Conflict. We will mainstream these approaches, making them a standard component of our regional work. Should opportunities arise in other areas we will weigh the costs against the benefits of pursuing them, in terms of our value-added, resources, attention and overall balance of our work.

### **3. Written outputs vs. other deliverables**

Analytic conclusions and major policy lines flow primarily from our long-form reports, briefings and other written products. These are the bedrock of our reputation and will remain our primary output. At the same time, we need to be responsive and concise, and engage policymakers in more varied ways, including through our Dialogue Initiative. When considering whether to trade off writing against other methods, we will prioritise those with the widest and greatest impact.

## IV. Conclusion

This strategy lays out an ambitious agenda for the next five years. The changes build on existing strengths and consolidate improvements made over the past year. Some will be incremental. Together, they represent a major transformation for Crisis Group, in some cases dramatically altering how we work to expand our reach and strengthen our ability to resolve, prevent and mitigate deadly conflict. We look forward to working with our partners to turn this vision into a reality.

You can find more information about International Crisis Group  
and how to support our work at

**[www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)**

You can contact International Crisis Group's CEO, Rob Malley, at [rmalley@crisisgroup.org](mailto:rmalley@crisisgroup.org)

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**Cover image**

*Saris* dyed with the outlines of Tamil women searching for family members who went missing during Sri Lanka's three-decade armed conflict, which ended in 2009. Many of the missing disappeared after being abducted by the Sri Lankan military, pro-government paramilitaries or the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). The *sari* reads, "Where is my son?" and records the names of the abducted and dates of their disappearance. Photographed at a private memorial in Sri Lanka's northern province by Julie David de Lossy during Crisis Group field research, April 2019.