Integrated Strategies for Long-Term Stability:

Outcomes and Recommendations

On 15 October 2026, Mensen Met een Missie, Search for Common Ground and GPPAC organised a roundtable meeting at Nieuwspoort, The Hague, under Chatham House Rule. It brought together Members of Parliament, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, research institutes, Dutch NGOs and peacebuilders from Ukraine, South Sudan and Palestine.

Against a backdrop of growing geopolitical instability, global democratic backsliding, and an increasing emphasis on military deterrence and short-term security responses, participants reflected on what works to foster societal resilience, reduce security risks, and increase stability and peace sustainably in conflict-affected states. The event also gave us the opportunity to discuss the recent cross-party parliamentary resolution in the Netherlands on the 4D approach: Development, Diplomacy, Defence, and Democracy.

The round table's central message is that Dutch security policy needs to shift from only reactive crisis response to also include sustained conflict prevention and peacebuilding. That requires all 4 D's to be planned, funded and governed as one coherent, complementary effort rather than as parallel silos.

Key take-aways

1. Sustainable security requires addressing the drivers of conflict, not only its symptoms.

- **Peace means more than the absence of violence.** Insecurity is driven by root causes such as poor governance, exclusion, injustice and unresolved grievances. Military means can contain violence but cannot heal trauma, reconcile communities or restore livelihoods. Community dialogue, mediation, trauma healing and livelihood support are not soft interventions but practical investments in stability. 4D is a matter of "both/and": soft power complements defense and one cannot be replaced by the other.
- **Peacebuilding must begin before conflict ends and continue beyond peace agreements.** Participants cited a high risk of conflict relapse, with the first two to four years after a conflict identified as a critical window. How a war ends shapes whether peace holds. Withdrawing attention early raises the eventual cost. Institution-building cannot wait for a ceasefire**.** Accountability, justice, inclusive dialogue and local institutions need investment during conflict, so that there is something to build on once an agreement is signed. Waiting for "the end of the conflict" was described as an outdated model.

- **Peace and recovery must be connected in response**. Attacks on water and energy systems can have cascading effects across borders, on displacement and on community trust. Communities need both immediate humanitarian assistance and the means to rebuild livelihoods, trust and local institutions. This calls for a humanitarian–development–peace nexus to be applied, in the same places, in a coherent response, not as sequential interventions. Generational trauma must be addressed alongside peacebuilding. Education and culture were identified as drivers of healing and reconnection.

2. Societal resilience, democratic institutions and public trust are essential security capabilities.

- **Trust, civic space and social cohesion are security capabilities.** Aggressors deliberately target public trust, using disinformation and identity manipulation to separate people from each other and from institutions. The same tactics target EU and NATO societies, so this is not only a “third-country problem”. Participants highlighted Russian efforts to reshape historical narratives in Eastern Europe at Ukraine's expense as an example of this threat.
- **Building resilience requires investment in people and relationships.** Disinformation can be countered, including through trusted messengers and offline channels such as radio. Two further points were raised. Citizen engagement in security policy is a democratic principle that informs that policy and holds it accountable. Education, public trust and strong community relationships are also essential to strengthening societal resilience.
- **Democratic societies must find ways to respond effectively to hybrid threats without undermining their values.** This raises important questions for policymakers about how to strengthen coordination and information-sharing while safeguarding privacy rights and democratic accountability.

3. Locally-led peacebuilding is indispensable to lasting stability.

- **Local actors are central, not peripheral.** Local peacebuilders, women, youth and faith actors often hold legitimacy where state institutions are weak or absent, for example as mediators and bridge builders. Their relationships and contextual knowledge enable them to mediate tensions, build trust and connect divided communities.
- **Local peacebuilders face significant risks but also create pathways for constructive engagement.** Peacebuilders face risks, including being targeted as "normalisers" or “traitors”. Where hope is eroding, they help channel anger into constructive options such as advocacy, creative expression, politics and research.
- **Local peacebuilders must be recognised as partners in decision-making.** Their expertise should inform programme design, funding decisions and political dialogue, while their efforts complement and strengthen accountable public institutions. This also requires connecting locally-led initiatives to national and international policymaking

4. The challenge is not a lack of interventions, but a lack of coherence, sustained investment and political commitment.

- **The problem is coordination, not activity.** The Netherlands already does a great deal, including long-term, locally led, adaptive programming, in response to the 2023 IOB evaluation, for example via the 8-year Contributing to Peaceful and Safe Societies Programme Grant managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The gap lies in leadership, structure and synergy *across* ministries, parliamentary committees and platforms; for example, the Defence Committee was not involved in the development of the new integrated security strategy. Coordination also needs specificity: it can be organised per context or theme, not around "global peacebuilding".
- **Funding balance is the decisive test.** With defence budgets expanding and EU preparedness taking priority, the risk is that development and peacebuilding become the junior partner in 4D. The relative share of funding matters as much as the absolute amount allocated, and should be made visible in policy and budget decisions.
- **The business case for conflict prevention and peacebuilding must be made more convincingly.** Securing Europe is not possible without contributing to stability beyond its borders, so prevention serves Dutch strategic interest and can cost less financially than intervention and recovery (while also reducing the human cost of violence elsewhere). Audience research presented at the meeting shows broad public support for peacebuilding, driven by a desire for stability, but limited understanding of its link with ODA. Participants disagreed on how far rational arguments persuaded different political audiences. Some argued that the case must also rest on defending democracy, human rights and the rules-based order.

Recommendations

To the Dutch government

1. Make the 4D approach operational, not only declaratory.

- **Strengthen interministerial coordination.** Assign clear leadership and a coordination structure across Foreign Affairs, Defence, Foreign Trade and Development, and other relevant ministries, including Justice and Security and the Interior, particularly on issues such as democratic resilience and disinformation. Organise coordination per country, region or theme, with joint context analyses, a shared vision and complementary objectives. Build on existing mechanisms, such as the Steering Group Missions and Operations (SMO), exploring how their mandates and participation could be broadened to support integrated approaches to conflict prevention, development and democratic resilience.
- **Focus where the Netherlands adds value, and act with partners.** Follow the IOB lesson of realistic, focused goals, and work through the EU and with regional and international actors rather than alone. Prioritise coordinated approaches around specific countries, such as Ukraine or Syria, or themes such as disinformation.
- **Strengthen cross-sector dialogue and knowledge exchange.** Encourage relevant ministries to pool resources to support existing knowledge platforms (such as the former Knowledge

Platform Security and Rule of Law) that facilitate cooperation and exchange between defence, diplomacy, development, civil society and research institutions.

2. Invest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding before, during and after conflict.

- **Continue to fund prevention, not only crisis response.** Step up multiyear, flexible and locally led funding for peacebuilding, mediation, reconciliation and conflict prevention, including core funding that keeps civil society independent. Invest before and during conflict, and stay engaged through the critical years after it ends.
- **Use diplomacy consistently.** Support inclusive and credible political processes and the implementation of peace commitments. Press for civilian protection and accountability for impunity, together with regional and international partners.
- **Connect peace with recovery.** Apply the humanitarian–development–peace nexus by combining humanitarian aid with support for livelihoods, trauma healing, trust-building and local institutions.
- **Safeguard a balanced and predictable budget allocation across the 4Ds.** Protect the relative share of development, peacebuilding and democracy support as defence spending rises, and make that ratio visible in budget documents.

3. Put local peacebuilders at the centre of efforts to build lasting peace and stability.

- **Put local peacebuilders at the centre.** Include local civil society, women, youth, faith and community leaders in programme design, political dialogue and funding decisions, as partners rather than implementers at the margins. Support their independence and protection, particularly in contexts where engaging in dialogue exposes them to threats or accusations of disloyalty.
- **Connect local expertise to national and international policymaking.** Ensure local peacebuilders can engage directly with policymakers and that their experience and contextual knowledge inform political processes, policies and funding decisions. Strengthen their connections with accountable public institutions.

4. Strengthen societal and cognitive resilience as essential parts of integrated security.

- **Treat trust and cognitive resilience as security capabilities.** Integrate social cohesion, civic space and counter-disinformation work into security strategies at home and abroad. Address how privacy rules can hinder information sharing within the EU and NATO, while safeguarding privacy, fundamental rights and democratic accountability.
- **Invest in relationships between people to enhance societal resilience.** The social dimension of resilience based on trust, cohesion, and strong communities is essential to prevent tensions, strengthen democratic resilience and make societies sustainably resilient. Support education, trusted local messengers and accessible communication channels, including radio, to counter disinformation and strengthen public trust.

To the Dutch parliament

1. **Reduce committee fragmentation.** Explore ways to organise joint sessions or briefings of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Foreign Trade and Development committees on integrated security.
2. **Use the 4D resolution as a monitoring tool.** Ask the government to report on how 4D shapes country strategies, interministerial coordination and budget allocations, including the balance between the 4 Ds.
3. **Bring defence and military voices into the 4D debate.** Their support for a broader approach strengthens the case beyond the development and diplomatic community. Encourage exchanges between military representatives, diplomats, development actors, civil society and local peacebuilders, building on existing knowledge platforms and networks.
4. **Carry 4D to the EU level.** Promote the approach in EU debates on preparedness, security and strategic autonomy, and in inter-parliamentary fora such as the IPU.

To civil society and knowledge institutions

1. **Build the business case with evidence.** Combine prevention-cost data, relapse figures and concrete local impact stories, for example, mediation that secured the release of hostages, to show that peacebuilding is an investment, not an expense. Make the link between development assistance, peacebuilding, democracy and security more visible, demonstrating how ODA contributes to stability and serves Dutch and European security interests.
2. **Coordinate through existing networks.** Strengthen existing networks such as GPPAC rather than creating new platforms; communities of practice matter more than additional documents.
3. **Advocate for local leadership and protection.** Press for local peacebuilders' meaningful role in decision-making and for the protection of those targeted for their work. Ensure their experiences and expertise inform national and international policymaking.
4. **Promote citizen engagement in security policy** and integrate trauma healing, education and culture into peacebuilding and recovery programming.

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