



Wilton Park



Image: Tania Schimmell

Conference report

Stabilisation after 2014: lessons from contemporary operations

Wednesday 25 – Friday 27 June 2014 | WP1337

In association with:



FORSVARSMINISTERIET
DANISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF DENMARK





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Introduction

Purpose of the conference and report

1. The Stabilisation Unit and Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) in the United Kingdom UK, together with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence, in association with Wilton Park, convened a conference to explore lessons from recent stabilisation engagements and best practice relating to current and future interventions. The conference was informed by the recent revision of Danish policy on stabilisation and integration and the new UK Approach to Stabilisation.
2. The conference examined stabilisation in a wide context, both spatially and temporally, with a view to establishing a common approach and shared principles derived from operational experience and lessons from the last decade and beyond. The conference was intended to provide insights and help shape future engagements by:
 - Confirming the evidence base for stabilisation and establishing a common understanding of the principles of stabilisation;
 - Delineating stabilisation activities from longer term development;
 - Increasing policymakers' awareness of stabilisation lessons;
 - Informing the next Stabilisation Leaders Forum in October 2014.
3. This report synthesises the discussions based on case studies of how stabilisation has been applied and has contributed to conflict prevention, termination and resolution. It outlines some of the challenges and dilemmas facing civilian-led stabilisation operations in non-permissive environments where security considerations are paramount.
4. From the outset it is clear that stabilisation matters – it matters because governments often come to the international community seeking support to promote and strengthening their stability. This is an area which involves thousands of people across civilian and military organisations working for a number of governments which spend billions of dollars to promote stability. It matters because several partner nations support and deliver stabilisation activities in a range of countries affected by conflict; these same partners support the UN Security Council which has mandated 29 multi-lateral missions to undertaken activities to support stability and a further 16 to carry out explicit stabilisation activities.
5. It is also clear that stabilisation is complicated, messy, and difficult to accomplish, because of the situations on the ground it is trying to affect, and because of the complexity of political interests attached to its operations and goal setting. There are no perfect solutions. Still, that is no excuse for non-reflection. The conference and its report were meant to be an honest examination and analysis of how we can learn and exchange knowledge in order to improve our efforts.

The Danish and United Kingdom approaches to stabilisation

6. The conference opened with a briefing on the new Danish and UK policy and guidance on stabilisation. Whilst there are some key differences in the Danish and UK perspectives there was significant agreement about two aspects of stabilisation activities; firstly they are ultimately a political endeavour, stemming from political objectives and aspirations meant to have political effects on the ground. Irrespective of the activities carried out this remains the central component of any stabilisation activity. Secondly, that the nature of the environments where stabilisation is delivered and the complexity of the problems that stabilisation seeks to address it is inevitable that stabilisation should be applied in an integrated or cross governmental manner¹, and is likely to engage by extension a range of multi-lateral agencies and partners.
7. Areas of variation between the two perspectives primarily stem from how narrow or broad the remit of stabilisation activities is. For the UK there is a narrower definition focuses on tailoring different activities to have political effects including the early stages of work on; physical security; adapting security, governance and justice arrangements; ensuring the population can meet its most fundamental needs. Within each of these areas most stabilisation activity is focused on supporting political settlements which will allow longer terms activities to be undertaken. For example focusing on stabilising the security sector rather than pursuing full scale Security Sector Reform.
8. The Danish perspective includes all of the early stabilisation activities in common with the UK approach Danish stabilisation also some longer term activities such as; Security Sector Reform, Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration, Civil-military national and regional capacity development in conflict prevention and crisis management; countering violent extremism, addressing organised crime and counter-piracy activities. The Danish stabilisation efforts are designed and implemented together with other Danish initiatives and efforts such as an active diplomacy and broader development cooperation such as regional programmes and the Danish Country Programmes in coinciding geographical areas.
9. Importantly for both governments stabilisation shapes and should transition in to longer-term statebuilding, peacebuilding and development processes and is most effective when delivered in an integrated approach involving multiple departments and bilateral, regional, and multilateral partners, and sequencing different instruments (peace enforcement, stabilisation, diplomacy, and development aid) appropriately.

Anglo-Danish funding mechanisms

10. The conference discussed Anglo-Danish funding of stabilisation and considered both best practice and why recent changes have been implemented by both governments and to what purpose.
11. A recent Danish evaluation of their cross-departmental funding mechanism suggested the first phase of the Danish Peace and Security Fund (PSF) was especially focussed on developing a firm basis for integrated action within the Danish government. Danish stabilisation policy is functional, it doesn't define stabilisation but it does define how government actors work together.
12. During its first phase, the 2010-14 period, the PSF has progressively supported:
 - Enhanced interaction and trust building among Danish officials;
 - The inclusion of a greater number of Danish actors in stabilisation activities;
 - The development of structures for cross government working;
 - Common agreement around certain PSF priorities, approaches and activities in

¹ For the UK this is referred to the Integrated Approach and the Danish government refers to Integrated working, for other NATO partners it is referred to as Comprehensive Approach.

support of peace and stabilisation in selected priority country and regions.

13. By establishing joint regional and country programmes the PSF has provided the basis for coherence and alignment behind strategic objectives in a given context, as seen for example in its joined up approach to countering piracy. The evaluation team considered that the challenge for the Danish government is now to build on what they have achieved during this first phase of the PSF in developing an integrated approach and to take the performance of the fund to the next level and to improve its focus on producing positive stabilisation outcomes.
14. In its paper on integrated stabilisation engagement Denmark defines stabilisation as encompassing those activities that lie at the nexus between security and development in fragile and conflict-affected states. The evaluation team actually thinks that this rather open definition has served Denmark well, giving it the flexibility to respond to a range of issues and situations using the PSF. The evaluation determined that it is more important than having an extensive definition of stabilisation is for Denmark to consistently bring all of its instruments – that is both its financial instruments and its political instruments – together behind its strategic objectives in a given context.
15. While the evaluation identified some very clear examples of how PSF funding has been used in conjunction with other instruments to achieve Danish strategic objectives, it did not see evidence of this occurring consistently. This is an important point in relation to the conference's discussion about the UK approach to stabilisation. Namely that there is great value in clarifying the centrality of politics in achieving key stabilisation objectives. This may be implicit in Danish policies but it may also need greater emphasis in relation to Danish policy frameworks and guidance.
 - In the opinion of the evaluators the fund has six comparative advantages which should influence programming for the next phase (2015-17, 1 billion Danish Kroner):
 - First, its capacity to combine Official Development Assistance (ODA) and non-ODA funding, making it particularly well suited to working at the nexus of security and development
 - Second, its facilitation of agency to agency approaches
 - Third, its ability to facilitate bringing to bear a broad range of Danish instruments, capacities and perspectives.
 - Fourth, the regional focus of many PSF activities.
 - Fifth, the extent to which the PSF supports cross government conversations around key priorities and interactions, both at HQ and in the field.
 - Sixth, the availability of un-programmed funding which facilitates responses to windows of opportunity or emerging issues.
16. The conference identified the importance of understanding that stabilisation requires not only financial but also human resources. Here it is apparent that Denmark is facing challenges at three levels: secretariat, stabilisation adviser and programme management. An insufficient cadre of dedicated staff both at embassy and HQ (particularly within the secretariat) places a significant risk on the ability of the fund to secure a return on investment and to fulfil its objectives.
17. Finding the balance between programming stabilisation funds over a period of several years versus retaining unprogrammed funds to enable rapid response to changing situations and emerging crises remains an ongoing discussion. At present a large proportion of PSF funds are allocated at the outset of each three year period. This limits the fund's ability to respond to evolving contexts and new crises in situations where un-allocated funds have been expended. At the same time, a larger proportion of unallocated funds risks a proliferation of interventions across a wide variety of issues and geographical areas, thereby undermining the opportunities for achieving impact.

This does not need to be the case so long as 1) this risk is understood and managed, including by ensuring that the role and focus of fund interventions and relationship to other instruments in any given context is defined and strategically anchored within a broader integrated approach and 2) that there are clear criteria guiding the use of un-allocated funding.

18. The current UK joint fund, the Conflict Pool will be end this financial year and will be replaced in April 2015 with the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The Fund will increase the amount of direct programme funding for activities by approximately £300m to approximately £600m². In addition the Fund will broaden the engagement across HMG to include all participants in the National Security Council (NSC). Alongside the expansion of the Fund the NSC has driven a process of cross-departmental strategy making which will allow, for the first time, the most senior parts of the UK government to look across the totality of UK engagement on a particular country or region. It is expected that the NSC will play a significant role in determining the allocation of resources for the CSSF in support of the country and regional strategies.
19. It is expected that a broader range of activities than are currently undertaken by the Conflict Pool will be funded. As a result activity on conflict prevention, security sector reform, stabilisation, through to aspects of defence engagement will continue. There will be additional requirements to fund activities relating to overseas policing and areas of priority for the Home Office. In the new fund there will be a greater emphasis on responding rapidly to crises, however, the proportion of non-ODA spending will reduce as a proportion of the overall fund.
20. There is an ongoing lessons process which is seeking to capture lessons from the Conflict Pool spending review period (2012-2015) and to identify recommendations for the improvement of the delivery of activities through the CSSF. Key areas of focus include identifying programme wide impacts, strengthening programme management capacity and overcoming departmental stove pipes through the integrated delivery of activities supporting corporate HMG objectives

Partner perspectives

21. The conference received presentations from the United Kingdom's Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG), the Director General of Canada's Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) and from a senior researcher at the Centre for Military Studies in Copenhagen giving their perspectives on the British and Danish approaches to stabilisation, their own recent experience and how they are repositioning to address contemporary challenges. Further reflections on the US experience on stabilisation and current thinking around political settlements was given by representatives from the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO).
22. Within the United Kingdom's armed forces experience from recent operations, notably in Iraq and Afghanistan, has confirmed the principle that conflict is 'about' and 'amongst' the people necessitating a radical rethink in how the military operates in such a complex environment.³ A people-centred approach is not CIMIC and is instead about establishing the needs of the population and operating in wholly integrated fashion. As a result organisations such as the MSSG and its parent formation, the Security Assistance Group (SAG), which have been specifically developed to lead civ-mil activities and champion an integrated approach both within the military and with civilian partners, are going through a process of transition and adaptation. Security capacity building, information and influence activities, soft targeting and psychological operations all fall under the SAG's remit as well as having a very close relationship with intelligence. Career structures (especially in Defence Engagement), language and

² The overall fund is for £1.033bn, however this includes the UK's assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping missions which changes in value year on year because of exchange rate fluctuations.

³ Smith, R., 2005. *The Utility of Force*. London: Allen Lane

culture training, civilian inputs into military exercise and closer relationships with civilian agencies in government and outside such as academia all need to be prioritised and given greater prominence across Defence, something which is hoped will happen in the next Strategic Defence and Security Review. The military now recognise there is a need to incorporate civilian advisers at every level. It has been recognised that future engagements require deep contextual understanding from the outset of any operation and this cannot be established once operations have begun necessitating a persistent presence within embassies and multilateral institutions like the United Nations in order to maintain their level of local knowledge.

23. Although START was created in 2005/6 it is currently being restructured and will be given a new mandate later in 2014 with a greater focus on democratic transitions and personal freedoms in the context of crisis response and humanitarian activities. Historically the Canadian definition of stabilisation has been much broader than that of the United Kingdom, which has at times been problematic as it has led to a blurring of focus and a tendency to fund a diverse and loosely directed range of activities simply because it was expedient to do so. The Task Force became a transactional centre rather than determining inputs to situations and conducting proper planning and strategy formulation, unfortunately this is a situation from which START has yet to extract itself. An additional difficulty has been the tendency to be drawn into crisis response rather than attempting to address state fragility and engage more in conflict prevention. This has been compounded by the tendency to respond on the basis of geography – driven by domestic political demands – rather than by addressing areas which genuinely require stabilisation.
24. START intends to take a more focussed approach combined with more specialised capacity and through relying more on contracting/external partners rather than trying to have the means to do everything internally. This will entail forming new strategic partnerships with nations such as Israel and the UAE as well as identifying more implementing partners in the private sector. START is also considering how to make better use of their embassies and consulates, which are currently under-utilised and rarely empowered to lead on stabilisation activities. While the Task Force accepts that cross-government co-ordination and collaboration are desirable it also recognises that they are inherently difficult and highly politicised, not least because Canada has yet to develop an integrated approach in the same way as Denmark and the United Kingdom. An additional challenge for START is that while they recognise the paramount importance of first hand field experience they currently have no deployed personnel and have lost this repository of knowledge. This may be possible to overcome by creating tailored units capable of deploying on a smaller scale in countries like Haiti for example.
25. From a Danish military perspective the role of the military in stabilisation and the wider stabilisation agenda has undergone significant changes since the aftermath of the invasion in Iraq in 2003. A community of practice has been created cutting across professional origins in military, diplomacy, development, NGO's and beyond. Increased learning has contributed to formalisation of tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) in a first comprehensive and then integrated approach. The military component is part of this integrated architecture, and the stabilisation agenda in these areas have clearly improved.
26. Two elements, however, have diminished the military role in stabilisation. First, the shift from downstream to upstream focus has concurred with a different level of ambition in the security line of operation. The consequence has been a marked shift from Western ground forces to an increasingly indirect use of force, be it through local partners or through special operations forces. Arguably, the use of air power, stand-off weapons and drones fits with this development as well. Second, the very professionalisation of the stabilisation agenda seems in some ways to have resulted in bringing stabilisation and development assets closer, rather than integrating all of the three components.

27. In addition, a combination of budget pressure from the financial crisis and the post-Afghanistan strategic reorientation means that military organisations too have retrenched to perceived core tasks (of warfighting), in effect de-emphasising the lessons painfully learned on stabilisation. On that note, both the rapprochement between the civilian components of the stabilisation agenda and pure military trends risk leaving military components of stabilisation as orphans. Another concern from an explicitly military perspective is that a softer form of stabilisation is emerging, increasingly defined in parallel to use of military force e.g. for counter-terror purposes, leaving Western aggregate responses disintegrated, rather than integrated. Even so, stabilisation including military components remains strategically relevant: Russia's destabilising hybrid warfare tactics in Ukraine is one example, MENA insurgencies another.
28. Within the United States the question is being asked, 'Is Stabilisation dead?' There is a real concern about the future of this approach not least because of the historic experience of interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Current events in Iraq and the perceived collapse of the Iraqi security apparatus in the face of IS aggression has recast the whole enterprise as 'an abject failure' and the outcome will deeply affect what happens next in respect of this debate. As a result the US is no longer talking about democratisation but merely about stabilisation now. Unsurprisingly, however, budgets are being reduced. Within the US there is a need for improved conflict analysis and joint understanding, and more rapid responses for diplomats to have. The focus should be on this, rather than defining or redefining stabilisation; above all it requires different ways of thinking about the politics. Stabilisation is inherently political, but the tendency has been and is to focus on technical responses which reduce political problems to technocratic programs and bureaucratic processes. The incentives within government all drive towards this, so acting politically is difficult at best. The real challenge is to think about monitoring and evaluation and explicitly how do we measure progress towards a political settlement.
29. In many respects the most important things about a political settlement are the ones which are hardest for external actors to influence. There is a need for power analysis and political actor analysis (usually referred to as political economy analysis) – something which is important for the development community to understand. Development bodies must add conflict and peace objectives to their regular work. There is a pressing need to push greater understanding to underpin this in order to tie local level dialogues into the larger national level. At the super-national and regional level the United States has assessed that it is currently not well-placed or sufficiently organised to achieve this. Relationships across borders are very influential but the US bureaucracies are not set up for this – even to do the analysis, much less the implementation. The national optic that the US can apply has had unintended impacts on broader super-national dynamics e.g. Sunni-Shia relationships causing considerable harm and souring relations across the Middle East and North Africa region as a consequence of relatively negative outcomes in Iraq and elsewhere.

The primacy of political settlements in stabilisation

30. The case studies that were discussed on the second day were framed by a session on the primacy of political settlements in stabilisation. As noted above the recent Danish and UK policy and guidance has highlighted that ultimately stabilisation is an explicitly political intervention. Whilst this is often recognised activities frequently proceed without sufficient connection to domestic political direction or to political realities in host nations. We have a tendency to focus on technical delivery. Many incentives (results management, traditional partners, focus on formal institutions etc.) drive towards this, so acting politically is a challenge.
31. 'Political settlement' is a term which has developed considerable traction and currency in the last few years. It is not a reference to political agreements and peace processes or treaties but something rather deeper around the creation of an accepted political

order, something which implies a level of legitimacy. It is about power, inclusion and exclusion and levels of contestation. Therefore, in places without a settlement where political processes are violently contested, security elements are under developed and it is hard for the international community to get beyond security issues not least due to the perception of rising levels of risk.

32. Weaknesses in stabilisation are not simply technical or a limitation of the tools we have available. It is also about the political choices around how much effort and resource we are looking to apply. The most important things about a political settlement are the ones which are hardest for us to influence. Further whilst relationships across borders are very influential, our bureaucracies are not set up to engage them – even to do the analysis to understand them, much less the implementation.
33. We need to recognise there are historical and cultural restrictions placed on our implementation partners by their own bureaucracies and we must ensure there is a political impetus behind their work at all times. Strengths and weaknesses of the approach taken by the UK in support of a nascent political settlement in Jubbaland which led to the formation of the Interim Jubbaland Administration in South-Central Somalia illustrate this point. This highlighted the fact that the interventions may be relatively modest and not require large amounts of funding – but the important aspects were to be responsive and be able to constantly recalibrate political messaging and delivery capability to support a political process.
34. Even in this relatively successful example it is important to be wary of the intense political pressure to ‘do something, do anything’. Care must be taken about backing the wrong horse – everyone backs various proxies and there is an alternative which does not fix us backing one actor. Developing a political economy and agency (power) analysis in order to try and facilitate negotiations between the competing parties is an essential step; it is vital to identify who will be the winners and losers of these political contests and which actors may create instability and generate new risks as part of these processes.
35. Even significant players can’t act alone. In the above example the UK developed a coalition with US, EU, IGAD, UN and initiated a controversial strategy to engage. In stabilisation there are key moments when the risk of doing nothing outweighs the risk of doing something. The collapse of a fragile but ‘good enough’ agreement in this instance would have led to a reversal of progress and undermined the new political accommodation in Jubbaland.

Political settlement case study - Somalia

36. The UK Somalia Stabilisation Team was established in 2012 in support of the political transition occurring in Somalia at the time, and in response to the need to consolidate the territorial gains being made by AMISOM in recapturing areas of the country from extremist group Al Shabaab. The team was designed to offer a uniquely flexible capability for HMG, able to deliver short-term and rapid impact interventions while long-term programmes were being established.
37. **Stabilisation in Kismayo:** fighting for the control of Kismayo, in south-central Somalia, has been a persistent source of conflict in the region since 1991. Control over the city is contested due to competition over the seaport and airport, the complexity of clan rivalries in the city and the position of Kismayo as an access route to arable land. In October 2012 the city was reclaimed from Al Shabaab by the Kenyan Defence Forces, operating under AMISOM, and the allied Ras Kamboni militia headed by Ahmed Madobe. The resulting changes in authority exacerbated further conflict between local militias and armed groups, increasing crime and insecurity in the city.
38. A peace deal, brokered by Ethiopia with UK support in September of 2013, offered new hope for improved stability in the region. In response UK funded projects at a political level through the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and on the ground the stabilisation team facilitated a number of engagements with armed groups

as a means to sustain momentum for the fragile agreement. The challenge to securing an enduring settlement lay in continued political progress, underpinned by the ability for the international community to deliver critical support to the emerging administration and security forces.

39. In consultation with international partners, the stabilisation team commissioned a six-month programme in Kismayo in line with an objective for 'rapid crisis prevention and response'. The project's theory of change states that the "rapid implementation of small-scale projects which respond to the prioritised needs of local citizens will help establish the political, security and operational conditions required for longer-term stability and recovery." In such a charged context, the initial interventions were necessarily lower-risk: the installation of solar street lights, the establishment of a youth sports programme and the deployment of police explosives teams to train local forces and reduce threats to local physical security. These interventions formed part of a broader range of support to the city, coordinated by the UK team with US, EU and other international counterparts including the Stability Fund. In doing so, the critical ingredients for longer term engagement are being established; identifying local partnerships and improving contextual understanding of the complex political dynamics.
40. Underpinning the theory of change is the fundamental assessment that creating stability relies upon reinforcing security arrangements and helping establish an enduring political settlement in Kismayo. The initial interventions aim to act as entry points through which stability can be built. The UK's stabilisation response represents an important demonstration of the need for UK stabilisation to be politically-led, shaped by international, national and local political realities and opportunities. The stabilisation team have engaged the political dynamics and with key political actors at national and local levels through their own networks as well as through outreach via other UK government departments. In this context, political engagement is an inclusive and ongoing process, supported and facilitated by the team's operational delivery of and position at the forefront of HMG efforts.

Lessons from stabilisation case studies

41. Having taken a country and regional format to the case studies we have presented the lessons from the case studies primarily on a country by country basis rather than providing a more synthetic summation because of the importance of specific contextual differences. Trying to make individual lessons applicable across a range of countries and activities is at best fraught with difficulties and in the worst instances ill-advised and actively misleading. From the three thematic sectors and country case studies examined during the course of the conference it was, however, possible to identify two major areas which do appear to be universally relevant albeit with different nuances and variations depending on the specific country context.

Recurrent cross-cutting themes

International co-ordination and coherence

42. In nearly every case study ranging from security and justice in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria to quick impact projects in Mali and responses to cross-border issues in the Sahel a key lesson has been that insufficient attention has been paid to international co-ordination and programmatic coherence in stabilisation operations. In Afghanistan unilateral empowerment of key local actors and militias frequently undermined the formal state security apparatus and contributed to an unhelpful culture of impunity for specific individuals; while in Somalia coherence and coordination within the international community has been largely absent and at times bilateral engagements have been actively counterproductive. Mali again demonstrated the need for donor coordination and a more coherent approach by the international community. Planning and executing UN Quick Impact Projects in isolation has led, in some instances, to duplication and confusion, undermining the objectives of the UN and the international community more widely. This process has been compounded by donors being overly

focussed on the politics and narratives emanating from the capital, Bamako, to the extent that marginalised or distant areas have been overlooked. It is inadvisable to separate out programmes and responses into lines of distinct activity; there is an absolute requirement for a coherent and comprehensive plan from the outset to avoid the tendency of donors and security actors to work in silos.

43. On a more positive note co-ordination and coherence between the United States, Denmark and the United Kingdom has been exemplary, both in developing a collective intent up front and in the implementation of local security and justice programmes in Northern Syria, which suggests that these earlier shortcomings have been identified and addressed. This has been driven by joint ownership and work in the field which ensures that both the strategic approach and tactical activities have been coordinated. And by doing this in the field it makes it easy to navigate in an extremely complex political situation as well as ensuring that what is happening remains contextually relevant. This collective, multinational, and collegiate approach appears to have been informed by many of the individuals involved having working together in Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and, therefore, being comfortable with this shared culture. A collective approach by the United States, Denmark and the United Kingdom has also allowed for greater flexibility around funding and to capitalise on the strengths of the different donors while ensuring that risks are shared. It also ensures that the programme has had sufficient scale while containing best practice from the smaller implementing partners like the Danes.

Host nation capacity and the delegitimising effect of unilateral stabilisation activities

44. Across nearly all the case studies it was apparent that in the absence of host nation governance capacity unilateral activities by the international community to provide government services (service delivery, security, and governance), even as a temporary substitute, contributed to delegitimising the host nation government (and local governments) and in some cases were actually destabilising. In Somalia through the creation of defence and police working groups the international community has also assumed the role of the Somali Ministry of Defence to the extent of paying salaries to the security forces through stipends. Arguably while this may be necessary in the short term – in order to assist the Somali government take form – in the longer term it is unsustainable and is a reflection of the lack of extant governance capacity in the Ministry of Defence, National Security, and the Interior. In South Sudan the actions of the development community, which assumed lead agency for all activities including stabilisation, and the visible presence of the United Nations – UN(POL) – unintentionally contributed to instability as it not only contributed to the lack of legitimacy for the South Sudan government but also had very little effect in reducing endemic levels of insecurity.
45. In Afghanistan government absorptive capacity has been limited, which has undermined the legitimacy of the government as off-balance sheet projects have created directed relationships between the international community, notably the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and the Afghan populace essentially marginalising the role of the Afghan government whilst a lack of transparency and accountability has also fuelled opportunities for corruption. In Helmand for example, a RAND study suggests that in the financial year 2009–2010 off-budget expenditure by the international community is likely to have exceeded US\$200 million whereas the Afghan government is likely to have spent as little as US\$29 million and most of this on core salaries. Again, the evidence from Mali suggests that external service delivery, the form that most consent winning activities take, is a weak legitimising tool and that providing external delivery through separate modalities undermines state development. Projects should be designed that allow state building to occur and allow trust in the government to develop.

Security and justice case studies

46. The security and justice sectors are central to stabilisation activities, involving the greatest degree of integration between military and civilian capabilities and the most tangible manifestation of government interaction with its own population. Improving these sectors through enabling essential and minimum security and justice for the populace offers a clear means of enhancing the legitimacy of the political authority. The case studies examined a range of security and justice activities in Afghanistan (specifically those conducted in the district of Nahr-e Saraj), South Sudan, Syria, and in Somalia.
47. Within this thematic area it was apparent that premature attempts to impose disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes were destabilising and allowed local powerbrokers to manipulate the process in order to gain personal advantage in highly localised disputes and conflicts. In Afghanistan empowering local militias to provide security and then rebadging them as Afghan Local Police was detrimental to wider stabilisation activities in the security and justice sectors and, again, acted to undermine the formal government. While in Somalia the entire state and machinery of government was dominated by security actors, something that centralised DDR was unable to address nor was sufficient consideration given to how to take 30,000 armed combatants off the state payroll without alternative forms of employment and equivalent income being subsequently available to them [as was the case in Afghanistan with DDR & Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program].

Afghanistan

- The Danish model (military security envelope around police) of police mentoring overcame duty of care limitations around ISAF co-location with Afghan National Security Forces and allowed more focus on the full range of policing activities rather than being wholly security-centric and paramilitary in nature. It also provided a platform in which a dedicated capacity building effort to flourish. Co-locating was very beneficial.
- Justice was central to the Danish efforts. Most progress was made in respect of justice when efforts were made to build on what already worked by creating linkages and co-operation between local informal community-based justice and the formal justice system, including setting up human rights training in remote districts and working to include women – traditional Afghan law is not incompatible with women rights.
- The creation of the District Community Councils (DCC) led to genuine expectations of better conduct and held local elites to account as well as providing women with a means to be involved in dispute resolution under the auspices of the DCC Justice Committee.
- The Afghan security and justice sector had limited absorptive capacity for mentoring, for example Afghan senior police officers frequently had multiple international (military) mentors leading to confusion and mixed messages.
- Efforts were made to bridge the gaps between the national, provincial, and local levels of the justice system which proved difficult due to the power broker dynamics. Future efforts should however ensure that there is focus on doing exactly this if engaged in a context similar to Afghanistan. Without the buy-in from the national level, creating sustainable results on the provincial and local levels will become very difficult.

Somalia

- There is a lack of agreement within the international community and the government over what constitutes Security Sector Reform and what the priorities should be. Given the situation of armed conflict and fighting Al-Shabaab there has been a bias towards military support and standard train and equip programmes

without considering how to develop Somali governance capacity.

- Somali diaspora communities represent a relatively under-utilised resource in respect of developing government capacity but where they have been employed they have proved disproportionately effective.

South Sudan

- A key issue was that the international community and the government initiated statebuilding and programmatic responses without recognising the absence of a sustainable political settlement. This was compounded by the process being led within the development community and the government, who in many instances deprioritised addressing the drivers of conflict.
- Another issue was the need to recognise the degree of insecurity throughout South Sudan beyond the illusory Juba bubble. This enduring violence led to coping strategies by the populace and an entirely understandable reluctance to either plan or commit to longer term activities. Addressing this insecurity was fundamental along with convincing the population that their own government would tackle this. Realism in respect of the timeframes involved was also largely absent; the idea that two to three year programmes could effectively address the consequences of more than 50 years of conflict and a completely militarised society was wholly improbable.

Syria

- Access has been very problematic and the international community has to work through intermediaries, which means there are little or no means of directly verifying the situation, context, activity and impact of the security and justice programme.
- Furthermore, the Integrated Community Security Programme will neither help donor governments win the war nor achieve our political strategy. Nor is it necessarily addressing what the populace wants most, which appears to be support in respect of meeting their basic food and shelter requirements especially in respect of looking after homeless children.

Key lessons

1. Where possible security and justice programmes should building on existing informal local community based systems to ensure that they are sustainable and culturally compatible.
2. Premature or incorrectly sequenced attempts to implement DDR and SSR can prove highly destabilising. Nor are train and equip programmes in isolation sufficient substitutes for developing comprehensive host nation security sector and governance capacity.
3. As the Syrian case study demonstrates the first priority of any population caught up in conflict is their personal security.
4. Whilst duty of care for international personnel is a priority it must be considered against issues of access and the benefits of co-location with host nation personnel. It is recommend that greater consideration is given to operating with a security perimeter provided by either international or regional security forces.

Stabilisation and peace dividends case studies

48. Peace dividends and associated activities such as quick impact projects (QIPs), consent winning activities and the provision of small scale civilian infrastructure have always been associated with stabilisation and in many instances have been the most visible manifestation. They have, however, been highly contentious and have often

been characterised as a struggle between politics and security on the one hand and development on the other.

49. Supporters have seen them as flexible, rapid instruments of diplomacy, key to gaining local influence and instruments of soft power vital to military commanders to shape the battlefield through money as a weapon system and provide force protection for their own troops. Critics have described them as being disjointed, chaotically managed programmes with offer much less than the sum of their parts, frequently providing dangerous interventions that undermine the host nation government and its popular legitimacy as well as reinforcing the local war economy.
50. Their delivery in the initial stage of most exogenous interventions normally coincides with the period when we know least about the context and conflict dynamics. The concept of money as a weapon system has not been underpinned by a rigorous evidential base and what little evidence that has been provided in its support is largely anecdotal. The case studies under review examined peace dividends and quick impact projects in Afghanistan, Mali and Somali as a means of trying to address this lack of evidence and to examine what works and what does not in terms of improving stability, promoting state legitimacy and supporting political settlements.
51. In the context of peace dividends it was apparent from the case studies in Mali and Somali that the term Quick Impact Projects was something of a misnomer as the design and implementation of the programmes was a lengthy process nullifying the possibility of an immediate peace dividend either to generate confidence in the host government or to gain consent for the presence of the international community and any associated military forces. For a range of reasons, many of which are bureaucratic and a reflection of the institutions involved (the United Nations and World Bank in this instance), UN and World Bank QIPs are anything but quick and often take over six months to agree and implement by which time the moment has passed. Experience from Kismayo in Somalia has shown that where there is sufficient understanding of an environment and the local community are consulted and involved QIPs can make a positive and meaningful contribution to local stability. In one instance a QIP was commissioned to build a bridge in a process which involved collecting information from many different local participants and including the whole community in the process. Representation was made to include locals in the scoping and implementation of the project as much as possible, something which led to a successful outcome albeit at the cost of making it quite a lengthy process. This was in contrast to the Stabilisation Adviser's previous experience in Musa Qala (Northern Helmand) where the United States Marine Corps had built a bridge without any investigation, consultation or coordination with local actors and went ahead despite opposition from that community. As a result the bridge had to be dismantled within two months.

Afghanistan

- Detailed examination of QIPs in Afghanistan, notably by the Feinstein Center,⁴ has demonstrated that they have tended to be delivered as technical programmes without sufficient consideration of local politics or the specific drivers of conflict.
- QIPs and especially those associated with the US Commander's Emergency Response Programme (CERP) were also problematic in the degree to which they securitised aid and distorted its application to areas of greatest violence rather than areas of greatest poverty or need, which ironically in Afghanistan were often the least violent and the most permissive. As a result such distortions created perverse incentives with violence or the threat of violence attracting rewards in terms of security contracts and development expenditure.

⁴ Fishstein, P. and Wilder, A., 2012. 'Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan' Feinstein International Center, Tufts University. Available at: <http://sites.tufts.edu/feinstein/2012/winning-hearts-and-minds>

- The lack of oversight around CERPs also resulted in their application for projects for which they were never originally intended, notably around power plants and road infrastructure. Ultimately it was concluded that ‘the lack of proper incentives and accountability measures have rendered CERP and similar funds an extractive industry for construction companies, non- governmental organizations, and multiple Afghan government ministries, fuelling rather than fighting corruption, community insecurity and insurgent coercion’.⁵
- The concept that QIPs, CERPs and consent winning activities could be used as a ‘weapon system’ to support counterinsurgency (COIN) and provide force protection has not been borne out by the evidence from Afghanistan, which suggests that such programmes did not differentiate between the initial aftermath of the ‘clear’ phase and the latter phases and ‘cash for work’ schemes – many of which had a distortive effect on the local economy – tended to evolve into larger scale infrastructure projects. Furthermore consent winning activities as part of a COIN campaign are only effective if they are resourced properly and they required intense force ratios.

Mali

- Peace dividends and consent winning activities need to be as inclusive as possible and involve as much as the local population as possible during the dialogue, design and delivery of projects while minimising the degree to which the host nation government is excluded from this process and their legitimacy is undermined. This also requires a keen, detailed awareness of the history of previous political and peace processes and any earlier associated projects.
- There is an absence of coherent national strategy towards the north even within the government construct, which is when taken with the different strategies of the international community atop of that, the difficulties are exacerbated. This has been exacerbated by the tendency of the development actors and the security actors to retreat into their separate silos rather than operate in an integrated fashion. One participant commented they had been “shocked by how much business-as-usual thinking there is” amongst the government but also on the donor side, where there is a very entrenched sense that we should just continue with our projects. In World Bank for example, given that projects were suspended, the attitude was to get those projects back on track, not ask whether these were the right projects.

Somalia

- Somalia has shown that it is best to keep QIPs very small scale so that they are sufficient to show progress and feasible in terms of doing the necessary investigation and due diligence in a short space of time. This is important especially where military operations have just taken place and need immediate follow on police and civilian follow up in order to sustain the achievements. In many instances it is the lack of analysis of the local context, conflict drivers and environment which has led to their failure. Keeping projects to a (small) manageable scale can help militate against this. This also requires that sufficient human resources are allocated – preferably on location.
- Consideration needs to be given as to which companies are employed in implementing QIPs. The Somalia case study suggests that more use should be made of local companies which can do the job tolerably well rather than using contractors who comply with demanding international standards. This creates a requirement for identifying such companies before engaging with a civilian contractor and ensuring that what they will deliver is locally sustainable.

⁵ Counterinsurgency Advisory & Assistance Team (2011), ‘Less Boom for the Buck: Projects for COIN Effects and Transition’, *CAAT Special Report April 2011*, p.2

Key Lessons:

5. QIPs have the potential to create perverse incentives for violence due to the securitisation of the approach and its application in areas of greatest violence rather than greatest need.
6. QIPs are neither quick nor do they create a tangible peace dividend and require a relatively lengthy process of local consultation if they are to be done well and to avoid unintended consequences.
7. Keeping them small (and preventing 'mission creep' into larger scale infrastructure projects) can make them more flexible and responsive, especially when local contractors are used employing local methods and materials.

Cross-border and regional stabilisation challenges

52. Causes and catalytic triggers of violent political conflict are rarely confined to a single state and a wealth of evidence has long shown that regional, national and non-state actors use borders and liminal regions in order to gain advantage through conflicts.⁶ An issue, therefore, has been whether international and regional approaches to tackling such manifestations of instability are appropriate and capable of addressing the challenges posed by such regional threats. The case studies considered the approaches of the international community in the Sahel, the Levant and Kenya in order to assess the degree to which these strategies are capable of addressing the drivers of instability in those regions.

The Sahel and North West Africa: cross-border crime and destabilisation

- Experience from the Sahel and elsewhere has demonstrated that cross-border crime & instability should be viewed as a symptom or consequence of conflict rather than a causal factor. Cross-border challenges are endemic in the fragile countries in the region and are best analysed as a manifestation of state fragility, although certain activities such as cross-border smuggling and weapons trading clearly exacerbate extant weaknesses.
- Recovery from violent conflict depends initially on the reestablishment of security, of which one aspect is establishing territorial integrity and secure borders. While it is necessary to allow the free movement of the populace and legitimate goods, smuggling of illicit goods, weapons and narcotics and the passage of individuals presenting security threats need to be curtailed. In addition to resourcing physical security measures adequately – the provision of trained border patrol forces, check points and, where necessary, physical barriers to channel movement – these needs to be specifically complemented by actions to address corruption, security sector stabilisation and reform (including the police, immigration services, customs and excise as well as the country's armed forces) supported by legislation and regulatory frameworks.
- Cross-border crime in the Sahel has been the consequence of the explosion in intra-state conflict since the 1990s, partly because of the permissive environment that conflict creates for such activities and also as a rationale coping mechanism to the disruption and dangers imposed by enduring periods of violent conflict. Such criminality is facilitated by local knowledge and networks, often familial, and elite actors with illicit business interests in sustained instability and the absence of formal state authority. Criminal networks are flexible and capable of responding to changes in the operating environment as well as being highly amorphous, with diffuse leadership and consequently difficult to detect.

⁶ Pugh, M., Cooper, N. and Goodhand, J. 2004. *War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner

- Experience from Mali, Libya and elsewhere in the Sahel has shown that cross-border crime is both a manifestation of and facilitated by weak national institutions, notably in the security and justice sectors. As a result regional actors and multilateral institutions, such as ECOWAS, the AU, IGAD, the EU, and the UN have had to pursue regional approaches to compensate for this national level weakness and to co-ordinate the activities of all parties involved in attempting to create cross-border security and regional stability.
- Cross-border stabilisation is challenging given the sheer geographic scale and multiple theatres of operations – it is analogous with maritime operations – and it is important to map and understand where criminal networks operate and interact. The close linkages between the Sahel and the Maghreb complicate the magnitude of this geographic challenge and create inter-regional dynamics exacerbated by the lack of adequate understanding and presence in these regions. This magnifies the degree to which donor coordination, regional and national planning are key not least because cross-border issues simultaneously have to be addressed at national and regional levels.

Regional spill-over: addressing regional instability in the Levant

- It was recognised that neither the political will, nor the resources nor the necessary range of tools are available to the international community to work in all the countries affected by regional instability in the Levant concurrently. While there is domestic political demand in the international community for a humanitarian response in Syria, and now Iraq, – “something MUST be done” – this is not backed by a similar capability for a more comprehensive intervention designed to address the causes of the conflict.
- It is apparent that the international community is challenged by having to reassess how regional dynamics are changing sufficiently often and changing plans and approaches accordingly. In the initial stages of the conflict there was an insufficient development of the necessary level of understanding of either the context or the conflict dynamics in order to determine the strategy or who we should back, something which has had serious subsequent ramifications. More recently the international community has not recalibrated its strategy of removing Assad in the light of the rise of the Islamic State (IS, also referred to as the Islamic State in the Levant – ISIL) and rising regional contagion.
- The Levant case study is an example of where proxy wars are being played out by regional actors (the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) and non-regional players (notably Russia and the United States), a dynamic which is materially contributing to exacerbating and perpetuating the process. While the US, the UK and the Danes – who have led the international effort to conduct stabilisation operations – have varying degrees of influence over these proxy wars ultimately they are not able to prevent them. The lesson from previous proxy wars is that they are difficult to end not least because they are as much about the wider political motives of large powers than the specific conflict and they tend to be long and bloody.
- The international community has overlooked the impact it is causing in the region because of actions in Syria. While this is currently most obvious in Iraq, where it has precipitated the collapse of Iraqi security forces in the north of the country and the fall of Maliki’s regime, it is also evident in neighbouring countries like Jordan and Turkey. Arguably the international community has not prepared them enough for the unintended consequences of its actions. Given Jordan and Turkey’s importance as key Western allies in the region insufficient attention has been paid to ensuring their continuing stability and increasing their resilient if the conflict continues to escalate regionally.
- Train and equip programmes like those conducted in Iraq, primarily by the United States, are no substitute for supporting and enabling enduring political settlements. The failure to ensure the participation and representation of Iraq’s Sunni elites and

population in Maliki's government has provided immense support for IS. Without this support from the Iraqi Sunni population the Iraqi security apparatus has proved remarkably fragile in the face of IS aggression.

Preventing and countering radicalisation and violence in Kenya

53. Since 2012 the Danish Peace and Stabilisation Fund has supported an agency-to-agency cooperation between the Danish (civilian) Security and Intelligence Service and the National Counter Terrorism Centre in Kenya to develop host-country capacities and activities to counter radicalisation, violent extremism and terror-recruitment. Based on 10 years of operational countering violent extremism (CVE) experience from Denmark, the program has implemented activities across the CVE-spectrum, divided into three areas: (1) outreach to civil society in radicalisation-prone areas to build resilience and alliances against violent extremism, including dialog between civil society actors and central security authorities; (2) capacity building of key security authorities like Prison and Probation services to detect and prevent radicalisation locally; and (3) a disengagement program that offers operatives a way out of violent extremism.
54. What was essentially a 2-year pilot project aimed at training and capacity building, has resulted in more than 50 cases being handled by the involved Kenyan actors. These are cases ranging from youth at an early stage of radicalisation or at risk of joining terrorist networks to returning foreign fighters, facilitators and recruiters. Since the program seeks to build on the existing formal and informal structures in Kenya and is based on a multi-institutional approach, the main challenges have primarily been on (i) integration of CVE with the daily procedures and activities already in place and (ii) systematic cooperation between different institutions on CVE, strategically and operationally, that have no tradition of cooperating.
55. Contrary to expectations, outreach by security authorities to civil society has been very well received by the communities that welcome the approach and are equally worried about the threat that confronts them. Another kind of challenge altogether is the cross-border nature of the problem itself: violent extremist groups, like al-Shabaab, have established a cross-border presence with the ability to carry out attacks, facilitate the movement of weapons and fighters across the porous border, and effectively exploit local grievances to radicalise and recruit Kenyan citizens. The challenges are certainly many, but evidence from the piloted CVE activities in Kenya show that soft, preventive security measures can be an effective supplement to traditional security and policing approaches to terrorism if accompanied by organisational change from local CVE authorities and actors. From a Danish perspective, at least, such an upstream approach can promote trust between security actors and communities and promote human rights. Hence, CVE constitutes a niche at the core of the security-development nexus worth being further examined by stabilisation actors.
 - Prevention in the context of countering radicalisation in Kenya has required a holistic approach, bridging the gap between traditional social rehabilitation and security operations approaches. The prevention approach has wider links to and impacts on other stabilisation risks than solely counter radicalisation, e.g. a prevention approach to radicalisation addresses drivers in a holistic manner that can have preventive impacts on conflict, trans-border criminal activity, and so on. Prevention requires a longer-term perspective, from identification of the causes of radicalisation, to addressing those causes and supporting 'After Care' for de-radicalised or at risk individuals identified.
 - Key challenges to the approach included the deeper institutionalisation of practices, durability of trust, sustainability of de-radicalisation efforts, identification of correct and capable partners, and avoiding counterproductive effects. It was noted that use of incorrect language, or bad interpretation or use of language (e.g. 'terrorist/terrorism') has had detrimental effects, so changing the vocabulary and encouraging actors across government to adopt this approach to countering violent extremism and counter terrorism is optimal and necessary for making durable

change.

- Another issue has been that of identifying measures of impact. While the Kenya project does have a logical framework with measures, it was noted that the lack of an evidence base for this type of approach was an obstacle for engendering engagement of departments- the example of DFID was made, that funding decisions are increasingly tied to evidence basis for the proposed interventions. It was noted, however, that despite lack of evidence base for prevention approach in the international context, there is a substantial empirical basis for counter radicalisation and prevention in the UK domestic context.
- The case study highlighted that long term, sustainable structural solutions – addressing fundamental causes related to historical injustices and inequality – would be difficult to achieve in Kenya, but that progress was more possible at an informal/individual level (families and communities). It was noted that local systems play an important role (customary systems), and that the international community need to rely more on these local systems to find solutions. Related to this was the concern that while a long term approach to address structural issues is necessary the development community in Kenya are deeply reluctant to become involved in counter radicalisation, possibly because it is perceived to be driven by parochial national interests rather than a desire to reduce poverty.

Key lessons:

8. Engaging regional partners and building regional capacity is central to sustainability.
9. Cross-border instability requires the prioritisation of re-establishing security and developing both the necessary security resources and governance capacity architecture.
10. The drivers of conflict, especially in complex regional contexts, must be reassessed regularly and the strategies and operational approaches of the international community should be adjusted to reflect changes in the conflict dynamic.
11. Train and equip programmes are unlikely to create enduring security capacity and resilience in the absence of an enduring political settlement.

Cross-cutting lessons:

56. A number of lessons were identified in each of the case studies, of which perhaps three quarters were on challenges and failures something which suggests these are fundamentally difficult environments and that ill-considered interventions into poorly understood conflicts has no effect or does more harm than good. There is a pressing imperative to address these failures, get better at establishing what works and what is best practice as well as standing up to domestic political pressures to engage regardless of the situation and lack of a theory of change. The case studies did suggest, however, that the stabilisation approach is appropriate and intellectually sound but requires significantly improved expertise and understanding to be of more consistent and enduring use. Clearly a focus on the political dimension is paramount but emerging from the case studies are seven related challenges which need to be addressed by the international community and stabilisation practitioners:

- I. **Coherence of outlook and commitment:** There has been an absence of coherence between national and local strategies (Helmand vs Kabul for example), differing national approaches and between strands of engagement – economic, military – resulting in wholly conflicting objectives, for example counter-narcotics running contrary to development and improving livelihoods. This has been compounded by differences in commitment in respect of time – it is unrealistic to suggest that we can stabilise states which have been in conflict for decades in two

to three years – and resources.

- II. **Self-imposed constraints:** the international community has compounded the issues around coherence, commitment and necessary levels of resourcing (see above) through short term military rotations – for example six month brigade tours in Afghanistan – and a tendency towards relatively short deployments by civilians, both civil servants and contractors. Human resource issues have only made matters worse, such as the infamous six weeks on and two weeks off, destroying continuity and corporate memory. Above all a restrictive and risk-averse approach to duty of care for civilian deployees in particular – although the military's imperative of force protection has not been without problems – has made sustained engagement and understanding of the needs and priorities of the local population a matter of near impossibility. Poor filing discipline, multiple mutually incompatible IT systems, lack of handovers and excessive frequency of rotations has also led to a failure to exploit pre-existing knowledge and expertise.
- III. **Whole of government approach:** Stabilisation is a tool to be used to complement other types of engagement – development assistance, peacekeeping etc. It requires close cooperation between a government's civilian and military contributors (expand).
- IV. **Coordination:** Internationally-led defence & police working groups are *de facto* playing the role of the host nation Ministry of Defence as has been the case in Somalia. Either consciously or unconsciously we have been guilty of trying to impose Western normative values and standards ignoring local realities and the local culture. This has been compounded by a lack of coherence (see point I.) leading to a multiplicity of plans, visions, strategies and concepts largely ignoring what the locals actually want or even need. One approach is to strengthen regional organisations (AU, ECOWAS, IGAD) to take the lead in stabilisation activities and in developing host nation capacity
- V. **Accountability:** Political processes that increased public expectations and enabled elites to be held to account such as District Community Councils in Afghanistan have worked well. The issue of who owns the process of setting the agenda and priorities remains; ideally it should be locally driven. Risk sharing is part of this process, combining approaches & funding to leverage one another's strengths, and to underwrite each other's risks as has been the case in Syria. Part of this process requires devolving decision making to the field level and out of the capitals of the international community.
- VI. **The assistance paradigm:** The international community has frequently leapt into a state building process without really accepting that a political settlement had not yet been reached. As a result the international community – notably development actors – have tried to lead countries out of conflict as in Afghanistan, Iraq and notably South Sudan. Stabilisation activities require necessary levels of resourcing, not least in the provision of trained personnel – when they have been in place the international community has been able to make progress as in Somalia and latterly in Afghanistan. Additionally military forces must accept their supporting role and the principle of political primacy. For example in many instances the flaws inherent within many QIPs lay in failing to realise their political nature, as was the case with Afghanistan.
- VII. **Leadership:** It is pretty hard to build a state in a fully militarised environment where a large part of the civil service have been bush fighters for the past 20 years, as has been the case of South Sudan. The international community should recognise the sheer length of time and commitment required in these interventions and give greater consideration to using diaspora communities to source leaders and educated administrators. Diasporas also come with ties and affect power relations, however, and are not a magic bullet, but should still be incorporated within our theories of change. We should be astonished at our astonishment at the lack of

leadership which is a natural consequence of sustained conflict. Strong leaders are rarely available and it is the dynamics of weak leadership which make inclusive political settlements essential. Including a sufficiently representative slice of the population while choosing when to exclude some political actors / elites / spoilers is a difficult but necessary part of the process as evinced in Somalia.

VIII. **Understanding:** We should not fool ourselves that we know what we're doing. In particular there has been a continual failure to learn about and recognise regional conflict dynamics. There is a need to change institutional structures within western governments from country-focussed to regional structures in order to address this deficit. There is also a need to accept greater levels of complexity; cross-border issues involve a complex value chain. Typically we have taken an unrealistically narrow view and tried to take out one link or node only for the space to be filled quickly by another actor or organisation. There needs to be greater focus on history in order to learn from what has succeeded and failed in the past. Finally we need to building on what works such as co-operation between the formal & community based justice systems in Afghanistan and elsewhere – and for that, it is essential that we crunch the problems within own frameworks, developing more flexible budgeting, sufficient and properly trained staff, delegated partnerships with each other etc.

Conclusion

57. We have to recognise that stabilisation is an inherently destabilising process. The concept of doing no harm in a stabilisation environment is unhelpful. We are potentially going to do some harm. The question is how much more harm we are likely to prevent. However, we must situate stabilisation as a process which moves political contexts from being limited access orders to more open and enduringly stable which is willing to engage with the international community.⁷
58. The challenge implicit behind the debates throughout the conference was that whilst stabilisation activities have been, and will continue to be challenging, there is little scope or appetite to abandon them. It is not an option because of the structure of the international system and the proactive role that a number of states play in supporting peace and stability globally. Equally, in an increasingly unstable world, where the broader pressures from globalisation, development itself, climate change and geo-political shifts there is likely to be more, not less, demand for stabilisation. It is also not an option because stabilisation activities are driven by our, the interveners, own political priorities and at times security priorities. Given that context, the challenge is that we, collectively, need to get better at identifying and understanding out what works and applying that learning to ourselves and one another – and informing our political systems. We will also need to become more courageous in choosing what to do, what not to do, and how we engage.
59. The conference has reaffirmed and through the case studies empirically demonstrated what we already knew: namely, that stabilisation is fundamentally a political process centred on the need to establish and support enduring political settlements and build local capacity for handling violent conflict and outbreaks of instability – institutional resilience. The reality of the political nature of stabilisation raises a number of issues, notably that politics is a messy and protracted process often involving compromise and periodic outbreaks of violence during rearrangements of existing political accommodations. For the international community the challenge lies in accepting the implications of this political nature, not least the need to accept a degree of humility and loss of agency – ultimately it is down to the country or region in conflict to reach a political settlement rather than having it imposed externally. Furthermore, we need to be realistic in what stabilisation missions we choose to participate in both in respect of

⁷ North, D. et al, 2007. *Limited Access Orders in the Developing World: A New Approach in the Problems of Development*, Policy Research working paper, WPS 4359. Washington: World Bank.

the resources and time commitment we are willing to make and in respect of what we can achieve, the degree of risk we can tolerate and the issue of who will own the eventual outcome.

There are no magic bullets in this process, as the case studies demonstrate it is difficult and prone to recurrent failure and reversion to violence. The contexts we operate in are radically different and understanding them is paramount and the crises require bespoke responses and solutions. While it is desirable to improve our own systems, cross-government integration and co-ordination and coherence in the international community we should avoid the trap of falling into the mechanical metaphor of state failure, which tends to treat failed states much 'like broken machines, [which] can be repaired by good mechanics'.⁸ This metaphor is naturally seductive as it suggests that with the right tools and technocratic approaches solutions can be found to state failure. This ignores the primacy of local political, the political economy and vested interests of local elites and how in some instances a failed state serves the interest of many within and without the country. Ultimately the mechanical metaphor of state building – and by extension stabilisation – overlooks the central role of informal networks of power and authority supported by wartime economies and political networks along with the coping strategies of the wider populace. It is essential, therefore, to develop the necessary level of understanding of the historic, cultural and political context on a case by case basis.⁹ Alone better tools or structures will not lead to better outcomes and in some instances we need to accept that stabilisation is sometimes about the least bad option rather than a positive outcome contrary to the liberal tendency to believe there is a good solution for every situation.¹⁰

60. The conference also highlighted the degree to which stabilisation is resource intensive, in time, money and people. If Western governments wish to engage in these operations then it is necessary to resource them sufficiently over time rather than apply insufficient resources and lose interest when the crises become protracted which is almost a certainty. In many respects we have a moral obligation to make the stabilisation a positive process in moving from 'stable' limited access orders to inclusive open access¹¹ orders representing a broad range of views and constituencies without destabilising them and causing an unnecessary and unacceptable degree of human suffering.

One purpose of the conference was to provide material to inform the next Stabilisation Senior Leaders' Forum in The Hague. The message that will be passed on will be that it is necessary to learn from past failures and to be honest about risk and what is achievable in a given timescale. The importance of coordination has been demonstrated again – the international community has no choice on co-operation – and stabilisation practitioners need to find the right way to move forward, anchored in locally owned and driven solutions. Above all is the imperative to consider the political dimension and the need for inclusiveness in creating enduring political settlements. While intervening nations must be cognisant of and address security risks in order to protect their deployees they must also be prepared to take risks. But there is political willingness, and it is important, therefore, to look at other structural constraints that prevent action – for example how we are organised and how we can work better together. There is also a requirement to explore innovative

⁸ Ellis, S., 2005. 'How to rebuild Africa', *Foreign Affairs*, 84/5, 135-148.

⁹ Berdal, M. and Zaum, D. eds., 2013. *Political Economy of Statebuilding: Power after Peace*. London: Routledge. Ch.1

¹⁰ Kolakowski, L., 1990, *The Self-Poisoning of the Open Society, Modernity on Endless Trial*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. p.163 '[the tendency] to believe that there is a good solution for every situation and not that circumstances will arise in which the available solutions are not only bad, but very bad'. Under the current circumstances it would be hard to think of a better description of the situation in Syria.

¹¹ North (2007), Op. Cit.

partnerships, work with non-traditional donors such as the UAE for example. In Syria/Iraq – stabilisation can only help to relieve the challenges but working with regional partners may help. Countering violent extremism and terrorism is one of the biggest challenges facing the West – both during and post conflict, especially in respect of returning radicalised Western national – and we should recognise that regional players like Iran and Saudi Arabia also have common interests in this. Ultimately choosing when not to do things based on learning from things that have failed remains a key challenge. We need to continuously look at likely successes and explain how our efforts fit a long term picture of stability.

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