



African Union troops driving Al Shabaab from Mogadishu, Somalia, in 2011.  
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# ENVISAGING MORE CONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVES TO THE COUNTER-TERROR PARADIGM

**'Terrorism' has come to dominate current affairs in the Western World, and dealing with it is a top domestic and foreign policy priority for Western nations. However, the urgent need to respond often favours rushed decisions – leading to actions that do not improve, or actively worsen, the chances of long-term peace. This briefing identifies some significant drawbacks in the ways counter-terrorism and related stabilisation and statebuilding efforts are being pursued, and argues that holistic strategies for building peace should be developed that place due emphasis on less violent, more constructive alternatives. While many of these options have pitfalls of their own, we believe that these constructive alternatives could provide a stronger basis for building peace.**

Constructive alternatives include:

- Not defining conflicts narrowly as problems of 'terror', 'extremism' or 'radicalisation', and instead adopting a more impartial, holistic and sustainable approach to resolving them
- Changing international and national policies and approaches that fuel grievances
- Redoubling efforts for diplomacy, lobbying and advocacy to make the case for peace and adherence to international law by conflict actors
- Looking for opportunities to negotiate peace – and to do so in a way that balances pragmatic considerations with a determined focus to achieve inclusive and just political settlements as swiftly as possible in any given context
- Considering the use of carefully targeted sanctions
- Pursuing legal and judicial responses
- Supporting transformative reform efforts to improve governance and achieve inclusive, fair, responsive and accountable state-society relations
- Choosing not to engage if harm cannot be avoided and no clear solution is evident.

## INSIDE

- Why alternatives are essential
- Six things to do less often
- Six directions for constructive alternatives



# ‘THOSE WHO CANNOT REMEMBER THE PAST..’ WHY ALTERNATIVES ARE ESSENTIAL

The public debate on how to respond to ‘terrorist’ threats tends to revolve around the most horrific outrages and sensational crises. Whether the option in question is to bomb a reviled spoiler, to arm those opposing an evil regime, or to sponsor a regional partner to take on the dangerous militants, public debate often focuses on apparently simple choices between action and inaction. In this climate, the pressure on leaders to appear strong and act decisively – especially in the face of violent provocation – is very powerful. However, when the media directs its fickle gaze to newer stories, the success or failure of policy responses to ‘terrorism’ threats overseas over the long term is rarely publicly discussed.

Perhaps for this reason, it is not widely known that:

In **Somalia**, thousands of weapons and hundreds of vehicles and high-frequency radios provided by the international community as security assistance during the 1990s ended up in the hands of local militias. In addition, from 2004 onwards over 14,000 Somali soldiers trained by Ethiopia reportedly defected or deserted with their weapons and uniforms, while UN-trained police were implicated in violent abuses against civilians.<sup>1</sup>

In **Yemen**, external counter-terror support served to reduce the Saleh regime’s need to be responsive to its own constituents and institute reforms.<sup>3</sup>

It is remarkable that such failures have led neither to detailed public debate on how peace can best be achieved in the wake of ‘terrorist’ violence, nor to any serious accountability for the leaders and officials that presided over them. But what is also striking is that the mistakes of the present echo those of past decades: for example, the practice of bombing large swathes of the countryside and the diversion of aid to corrupt purposes that fed public support for the Viet Cong in Vietnam;<sup>6</sup> or the government emergency measures, including the attempt to use ‘development’ and forced relocation as instruments of counterinsurgency, that strongly fuelled the Mau Mau insurgency under British rule in Kenya during the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> While such problems are, tragically, familiar to scholars and experts working

In **Iraq**, the assault on Falluja in the wake of the lynching of four American security contractors in April 2004 resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people, including many women and children. Such heavy handed military action served to fuel further insurgency.<sup>2</sup>

In **Afghanistan**, because of local codes of revenge in Pashtun areas, killing insurgents has often served to “multiply enemies rather than subtract them”.<sup>4</sup> Studies have also “found little evidence that aid projects are ‘winning hearts and minds’ in the country: “instead of contributing to stability, in many cases aid is contributing to conflict and instability”.<sup>5</sup>



British Army Operations against the Mau Mau in Kenya (1952–1956).  
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to document the track record of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding approaches around the world, attention to the lessons of the past is strikingly absent from the public debate on how to do better in future. This briefing calls for more analysis to examine why such shortcomings are repeated from one decade to the next with diminishing public scrutiny.

## Taking stock

In recent months, Saferworld has attempted to take the long view on efforts to deal with conflicts related to rebel or ‘terrorist’ groups and their sponsors in past decades, considering contexts as diverse as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Vietnam, and Yemen. Despite the investment of huge resources in such contexts by Western governments, the results have been mixed at best: the current long-term instability of the Middle East, North and East Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the spread of Al Qaeda into multiple new regions, and the mushrooming of other transnational militant groups suggest that something is seriously wrong with the Western response to such problems.

**Long-standing problems** appear to lie in three main areas.

- Firstly, by setting national security above human security objectives the West has – whether directly or through proxies – too frequently responded to the threat of ‘terrorism’ with the **use of violence**. Such violence has, all too often, been indiscriminate, and has had a tendency to exacerbate conflict dynamics rather than contribute to sustainable peace.

# UNDERSTANDING MAINSTREAM APPROACHES

## What is the mainstream approach to counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding?

The mainstream approach tends to define conflicts in a way that designates some actors as ‘spoilers’ (or ‘terrorists’, ‘violent extremists’, ‘radicalised groups’, ‘rogue regimes’, etc.) and to address such conflicts by opposing ‘spoilers’ in partnership with whatever allies can be found. This typically involves the use of military force to depose a ‘rogue’ regime or a reviled rebel group, and is generally combined with – or followed by – some kind of ‘stabilisation’ or ‘statebuilding’ effort.

The primary focus in such contexts is on rapidly achieving and maintaining a degree of order, security or stability, and this typically involves negotiating – and then building on – a pragmatic ‘deal’ among influential actors. This normally leads to international military, political, economic and development support that reinforces those actors included in the deal. It often also involves continuing use of force against ‘spoilers’, and a willingness to overlook the limitations of allies.

In some contexts stabilisation and/or statebuilding approaches have been applied without direct international military involvement. Nonetheless, such contexts illustrate many of the same characteristics and inherent challenges that are evident in contexts that have experienced military engagement.

## Arguments used to support the mainstream approach

There are a number of arguments used in support of the mainstream approach:

- In the face of an impending atrocity it often appears that taking some form of action is preferable to inaction, which may appear to entail a failure to protect the vulnerable.
- Some degree of order is likely to be a necessary condition for any kind of political or economic transformation over the longer term – which can be a destabilising endeavour.
- Peace may be impossible without making pragmatic ‘deals’ to secure the cooperation of actors whose approaches are less than ideal – such as warlords and militia leaders. Even if a peace agreement is achieved, it is unlikely to hold if major stakeholders are excluded.
- At the same time, while negotiated agreements may sound like a pleasant alternative to war, it is not possible to welcome every violent group into power, particularly as this might encourage others to resort to violence.
- The mainstream approach does not simply rely on ‘sticks’ but has the apparent advantage of using ‘carrots’ as well: in theory, aid is believed to be able to lessen grievances and encourage people to leave violent groups, and some form of state seems almost self-evidently preferable to creating a power vacuum which violent actors can fill.
- Some argue that successful prevention of war depends less on addressing the causes of conflict than on ensuring that it is less physically feasible for groups to rebel by ensuring a strong counter-insurgency capacity.

- Secondly, counter-terrorism efforts and related actions taken under the label of ‘stabilisation’ and ‘statebuilding’ have often **failed to address drivers of conflict in meaningful ways**. In fact, they often clumsily reinforce the most serious drivers of conflict – especially patterns of abusive and exclusive governance and corruption.
- Thirdly, the Western response has typically **neglected to focus on sustainable solutions** to conflict that involve and respond to the concerns, priorities and potentials of conflict-affected people in constructive ways.

In the rest of this briefing, we:

- First offer more detailed examples of the shortcomings of mainstream approaches in action and their impacts.
- Second, analyse the lessons that can be drawn from these examples and identify six things to do less often, and six directions for more constructive alternatives.

One caveat before discussing these alternatives: all approaches to peacebuilding have shortcomings, and the challenges of conflict frequently present choices between a range of sub-ideal alternatives. The policy directions that are set out in this briefing are neither a call to side with the ‘enemy’, nor to evade the imperatives to respond to conflict swiftly and effectively. Instead, they are a call for the lessons of the past and the available alternatives to be more carefully considered, with the overarching objective of working towards long-term peace kept assiduously in mind.

### 'SPOILERS' HAVE MORE STAYING POWER THAN OFTEN SUPPOSED

Even rebel groups that appear to lack coherent ideology have sometimes shown remarkable resilience in the face of superior military forces.<sup>8</sup> Although rebel groups have frequently been painted as 'extremist' and therefore implicitly marginal, they have often had their origins in a previous government that has been forcibly deposed (as with the Taliban rebels in Afghanistan, the al-Shabaab rebels in Somalia and rebels in Iraq from 2003). Importantly, a rebel movement's access to resources and information – and also its sense of grievance and of its own legitimacy – may be boosted in these circumstances.



### EMPHASIS ON ORDER CAN MASK THE NEED FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND INSTITUTIONALISE CORRUPTION

Prioritising order may lead to the reinforcement of an unjust peace, ultimately leading to more conflict in future. In Cambodia in the 1990s, the peace process institutionalised corruption in many ways, thus depriving the treasury of revenue and making it hard to consolidate a developmental state.<sup>9</sup> After Tajikistan's 1992–97 civil war, the peace process effectively 'bought off' a range of warring factions, not least with the benefits of a privatisation programme; but corruption was institutionalised and oligopolistic markets were entrenched, raising concerns about how sustainable this 'peace' would prove.



### MAKING DEALS WITH VIOLENT ACTORS AND EXCLUDING OTHERS CAN INCENTIVISE VIOLENCE

Deciding who to include and who to exclude during peace negotiations is never going to be easy. In Liberia in the early 1990s the desire of various military leaders to claim a place at the negotiating table through seizing territory led to a rapid proliferation of warring factions.<sup>10</sup> Civilian organisations often opposed recognition of armed faction leaders in peace negotiations, arguing that this rewarded violence and boosted such groups.<sup>11</sup> However, at other times, attempts to *exclude* warlords in Liberia actually undermined the peace process, as key players simply would not cooperate.<sup>12</sup> Prioritising short-term stability and the appeasement of the most significant military actors sends some very damaging signals that can feed into violence. Although the inclusion of violent actors in dialogue and negotiations is often necessary, more inclusive peace processes that give a stake to non-violent actors and embrace an element of justice are also often possible.



### VIOLENCE MULTIPLIES REBELLION – ESPECIALLY WHEN INDISCRIMINATE

The vicious response of Indonesian armed forces to the original, small-scale Acehese rebellion in 1976 increased support for the separatist movement when it re-emerged.<sup>13</sup> Heavy-handed responses to rebel violence also fuelled rebellion in Cambodia: according to Ben Kiernan, carpet-bombing by American B52s was "probably the most important single factor in Pol Pot's rise".<sup>14</sup> More recently, the use of drones in Yemen and Pakistan has fuelled local anger. Such examples show how actions intended to quash 'terrorism' have frequently stoked grievances that can feed into *additional* 'terrorism'. Indiscriminate violence also often reduces the incentive for civilians to *avoid* joining rebels, since they may be targeted by counter-insurgency operations whether or not they are rebels.<sup>15</sup>



### AID IN SUPPORT OF STABILISATION IS OFTEN INEFFECTIVE

During the Vietnam War, while the US focused on 'eliminating the enemy' and reducing the numbers of Viet Cong,<sup>16</sup> rebels gained recruits due to the corruption of the South Vietnamese government. The Vietnamese generals who dominated this government were able to dispose of American resources largely as they pleased, and the resulting corruption increased sympathy for the Viet Cong rebels and radically undermined US efforts to 'win hearts and minds'.<sup>17</sup> More recent experiences in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen have echoed the lesson that, especially alongside military efforts, aid that is intended to 'win hearts and minds' tends to be ineffective and often alienates people, who resent corruption and biased assistance.



## DRAWBACKS OF THE MAINSTREAM APPROACH

### AID OFTEN ENDS UP FUELLING INSECURITY OR STRENGTHENING INSURGENTS

The UN's Monitoring Group on Somalia reported to the UN Security Council in 2010 that "Some humanitarian resources, notably food aid, have been diverted to military uses. A handful of Somali contractors for aid agencies have formed a cartel and become important powerbrokers – some of whom channel their profits or the aid itself directly to armed opposition groups".<sup>18</sup> In Afghanistan, an investigative team assembled by General David Petraeus estimated in 2011 that some US\$360 million provided by US taxpayers had ended up with the Taliban and criminals, and powerbrokers with ties to both.<sup>19</sup> Thus aid can serve to increase, rather than diminish, insecurity, and to reinforce violent actors.<sup>20</sup>



### POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS CAN PROVE UNSUSTAINABLE WITHOUT INDEFINITE SUPPORT

Backing political settlements for the sake of stability has sometimes involved supporting corrupt or unrepresentative regimes. Such efforts may distort local political deal-making, and often prove unsustainable without ongoing external presence and/or assistance.<sup>21</sup> In Iraq, the 'Awakening' movement proved important in isolating 'al Qaeda in Iraq' as tribal leaders joined forces with international troops in joint opposition to 'terrorist' elements. However, the Awakening movement had strong self-interested elements, with some participants hoping to restore revenue streams that had been lost when al Qaeda challenged their smuggling networks,<sup>22</sup> while other participants looked forward to jobs in state security structures. When hope of jobs proved largely illusory and the US withdrew from direct involvement in the government, many felt 'betrayed' and some even re-engaged with 'terrorist' elements.<sup>23</sup> Such elements were instrumental in the rise of Islamic State.



### 'ALLIES' OFTEN GAIN FROM EXTERNAL SUPPORT AND LOSE INTEREST IN ENDING THE CONFLICT

In 2003 a UN Panel of Experts investigating the civil war that devastated the DRC from 1998 found that in eastern DRC, Ugandan commanders had been training and arming *both sides* in a conflict between Hema and Lendu militias "in an attempt to control the gold-rich area and the potentially coltan-rich areas of Nyaleki [in north-eastern DRC]".<sup>24</sup> The illegal exploitation of natural resources in the DRC was enriching Ugandan military commanders as well as 'elite' Ugandan civilians.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Rwanda was ostensibly taking action in DRC to defeat the *Interahamwe* Hutu militias that had fled there after helping to carry out the 1994 Rwandan genocide. But some reports said Rwandan soldiers were making little effort to confront the *Interahamwe* – avoiding battles, stalling on attempts to disarm them, and in some cases even reportedly *supplying them with arms*.<sup>26</sup> Crucially, the war in the DRC was generating huge resources for the Rwandan army.<sup>27</sup> Here, as is often the case, 'allies' in stabilisation proved much less interested in boosting stability and taking on 'spoilers' than they claimed.



### GOVERNMENTS OFTEN GAIN FROM THE IMPUNITY ACQUIRED FROM SUPPORTING STABILISATION

In responding to the crisis in Darfur from 2003, the US appears to have been influenced by its desire for continued 'security' cooperation from Sudan – for example, in detaining Islamist militants on their way to Iraq and getting information on militants in Somalia.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Ethiopia's willingness to confront the Islamic Courts Union and al-Shabaab in Somalia has helped the Ethiopian government to attract major aid resources from the West and has tended to minimise criticism from the West about human rights abuses within Ethiopia.<sup>29</sup>



### THE MAINSTREAM APPROACH OFTEN DISPLACES OR POSTPONES VIOLENCE, RATHER THAN RESOLVING IT

In 2009, US Vice-President Joe Biden described the "balloon effect": "We squeeze it, and it pops out somewhere else."<sup>30</sup> NATO's Afghan intervention led to drone strikes against the Taliban inside Pakistan, and these have caused many casualties among Pakistani civilians.<sup>31</sup> Many wars have also left a legacy of violence – in the form of fighters, arms, poverty and warlords.<sup>32</sup> At the end of the 1980s anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan, radicalised fighters were dispersed to many parts of the world. Destinations included Bosnia, Tajikistan, Yemen, Chechnya, the Philippines, Western Europe and the US.<sup>33</sup> Though predictable, such legacies have rarely been taken into account when weighing the costs and benefits of launching new wars.



# ENVISAGING MORE CONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVES

Protestors call for an end to violence in Tripoli, December 2011.  
© UN PHOTO/JASON FOOUNTEN

## SIX THINGS TO DO LESS OFTEN

### Thinking short term

There needs to be more effort to avoid investing in short-term reactions with no clear long-term solution in mind – especially when there are clear risks of contributing to long-term drivers of conflict through short-term action. Similarly, more thought needs to be put into whether approaches require long-term commitment to be sustainable, and whether such commitment is feasible.

### Reinforcing poor governance and corruption

Governance deficits are perhaps the single most significant factor in driving conflict. This means that support for repressive and corrupt actors and regimes needs to be avoided because of its potential to lessen accountability and worsen governance deficits. Governance deficits known to have a significant role in driving conflict include corruption, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and exclusive political systems. Importantly, where international actors support leaders, governments and security forces that are not committed to addressing these failures, they reduce the pressure on them to be inclusive, accountable, responsive and fair toward their own societies. This in turn tends to fuel conflict. The apparent strategic advantage to be gained from alliances with regimes not committed to inclusive, fair, responsive and accountable governance is often illusory – not least because such alliances typically stoke the grievances that fuel insecurity.

### Mistaking partners' motives

Past experience shows that assumptions about the motives and behaviours of apparent 'allies' in counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding endeavours need to be interrogated more deeply. The consequences of working with allies whose motives differ from one's own have included appalling abuses against civilian populations, the diversion of money, arms and other resources into fuelling conflict, and the reinforcement of corruption, bad governance and grievances. All of these are known drivers of conflict. One of the clearest lessons from past failures is that the motives of 'allies' are hard to understand clearly: they may differ between individuals and across institutions, and can shift over time. An expressed aim of defeating 'terrorism', for example, may differ dramatically from the *actual* aims of any given actor. Importantly, the actions of 'allies' are also affected by the resources on offer for counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding processes, which may even serve as an incentive for prolonging conflict. Conflict sensitivity requires much more careful monitoring of these issues and more determination to minimise harm by factoring this better into decision-making.

### Using aid in the service of counter-terrorism

Casual assumptions about aid contributing to counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding objectives are called into question by the significant evidence that the use of aid to reinforce military action and stabilisation efforts has in many contexts proved either ineffective or harmful. In particular there is a need to revisit the assumption that local action to address socio-economic drivers of radicalisation can provide an adequate solution when wider structural drivers of conflict are not simultaneously addressed – including the role of international actors and their proxies in contributing to grievances and injustice. While development processes are likely *part* of the solution to the conflicts that are being defined as problems of 'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'extremism', the holistic pursuit of positive peace should include a wider range of measures, including avoidance of policies and actions that create the grievances that fuel conflict.

A related issue is the tendency to overlook the way in which aid and other resources (such as military equipment) provided to 'allies' is diverted for harmful or corrupt purposes by conflict actors. Because corruption is known to be such a visible driver of conflict, and diversion of resources away from their intended purpose is such a common failing, corruption and diversion need to be more systematically prevented and monitored – even when they involve apparent 'allies' of the international community. Too often, declaring a particular government to be an 'ally' has given it a green light for corruption and abuse. In practice, there has often been much more concern about the way aid might be misused by 'terrorists' than the way it is being misused by governments.<sup>34</sup>

Attempts to co-opt aid agencies into support for any particular side in a conflict – as providers of intelligence, as offering relief and assistance only to one group or side – are also counterproductive: they compromise the principle of impartiality, render assistance ineffective, alienate the local population, and make aid agencies a target for attack.

### Using force

International actors should be much less ready to use force to resolve conflict. In particular, more caution is needed in designating any particular actor as a 'spoiler'. The staying power of 'spoilers' needs to be assessed much more realistically, and greater awareness is needed of the potential for conflict dynamics to spin out of control as a result of intervention. In particular, military force should not be used simply to demonstrate the resolve or power to retaliate in response to violent provocation – indeed, military responses of this kind often play into the intentions of 'terrorists'.<sup>35</sup>

### Disregarding abuses

Significant efforts are also needed to strengthen adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law by international actors and those they co-operate with: torture and indiscriminate use of violence are not only wrong in principle – they also deepen the grievances that can fuel violence and make sustainable peace much harder to achieve. Demonstrating full accountability for irresponsible use of force and abuses that have taken place is vital to minimise grievances.



Civilians displaced by LRA attacks in what was then Southern Sudan, September 2009.  
© UN PHOTO/TIM MCKULKA



Dialogue can be challenging but is often necessary. A UN Special Envoy for peace arrives for talks with rebels in the DRC, 2008. © UN PHOTO/MARIE FRECHON

## SIX DIRECTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVES

### A different conceptual framing and approach

The first and most important shift in the pursuit of constructive alternatives to the counter-terrorism paradigm should be to reaffirm long-term sustained peace for all actors involved as the overall objective – rather than ‘victory’ over a particular enemy or ‘national security’ defined in narrow terms. To construct a strategy oriented towards lasting and positive peace it is then crucial – especially in relation to conflicts involving the most reviled of ‘spoilers’ – to develop an impartial picture of all dimensions of the conflict. One key starting point for achieving this is perhaps offered by developing a conflict analysis.

Conflict analysis can provide an important opportunity to *avoid biased actor analysis and narrow analysis of the causes of a conflict*. In the counter-terrorism paradigm, designating certain actors as ‘spoilers’, ‘radicals’, ‘terrorists’ or ‘extremists’ risks framing the problem from the outset as lying with those actors alone – the solution being to change their wrong-thinking (or physically eliminate them) rather than seeking to identify what all relevant actors – including national, regional and international governments – can change to contribute towards lasting peace.

Similarly, approaching conflict as a problem of ‘extremism’ or ‘radicalisation’ has sometimes encouraged a focus on the socio-economic disadvantages experienced by the individuals who perpetrate acts of violence. Looking at local poverty or unemployment may be helpful, but it must not preclude a focus on other causes of conflict – including the actions of governments enjoying various degrees of immunity to international criticism. Grievances created by powerful political actors at national, regional or international levels may well prove especially important in driving conflicts defined as ‘terrorism’, ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’. Framing the problem impartially as one of ‘conflict’ may enable much more comprehensive identification of causes that require fresh approaches – not only by extremists and local actors but also by national, regional and international leaders, governments, security forces and so on.

Conflict analysis may also provide an opportunity to connect apparently local or national dynamics to transnational factors: it may be crucial to recognise that ‘extremism’ is not only driven by the transnational spread of problematic *ideologies* based on *misperceptions* but also by the moral objection of conflict actors in one country to policies and actions taken in other countries, which may indeed be unjust or unlawful and which they may feel powerless to change through constructive means. Peacebuilding strategies in such contexts could valuably include the creation of effective channels for grievances to be constructively raised and addressed.

Given the need to avoid the common challenges of short-term thinking, failure to learn from past mistakes, and incoherence between development, diplomatic, economic and military-security approaches, conflict analysis also provides opportunities to consider how different responses to conflict will play out through the development of forward-looking scenarios, examine lessons from past engagement, and facilitate diverse actors to recognise their roles and responsibilities within a shared long-term peacebuilding strategy.

### Changing international and national policies that have fuelled grievances

If conflicts defined as stemming from ‘extremism’, ‘radicalisation’ or ‘terrorism’ are driven in part by moral objections to policies and actions which are unjust or unlawful, part of the strategy for achieving sustainable peace should be to reconsider those policies and actions. Just as apartheid needed to be brought to an end, and many former colonies were awarded their independence following struggles by rebel organisations now viewed as liberation movements, in the same way there is a need to examine the justice of policies that are the focus of rebellion and protest around the world.

Such unjust policies may be military (indiscriminate use of violence, military aid to actors who are perpetrating abuses), economic (sanctions perceived to be unjust, failure to regulate markets in goods and resources from conflict-affected countries, imposition of unequal trade rules, or prioritisation of natural resource access over other priorities), diplomatic (support for allies who are violating human rights and/or international law), or developmental (further support for such allies). A greater effort to demonstrate consistent support for international law and human rights is surely one of the most promising options for reducing the grievances of the victims of unjust international policies and practices, and those who claim to represent them.

### Seeking to negotiate peace – and building towards inclusive and just political settlements

There are many challenges inherent in deciding whether and how to negotiate peace. Overall, however, negotiating solutions is currently a less favoured option than it was during the 1990s. Clearly it is neither desirable nor practical to welcome every militant or rebel group into a power-sharing deal. Both inviting and excluding rebel movements to the dialogue table has incentivised armed violence in the past. At the same time, long-term peace can of course be undermined when only a relatively narrow and elite group is accepted into negotiations and into the political settlement that results.

While the dilemmas involved are complex, the counter-terrorism paradigm has in certain contexts ruled out the possibility of negotiation with (or even assistance to) large sections of whole societies (as in Somalia and Afghanistan). In this context, it seems important to reflect that long-term peace will eventually be sustainable only if those who survive the conflict are prepared to accept the eventual settlement that is made. Moreover, as Greenhill and Solomon argue, even an apparently ‘implacable spoiler’ may sometimes change – in new circumstances – into a less violent entity.<sup>36</sup> In this context, alongside the inclusion in peace processes of those who have not resorted to violence, and ongoing efforts to ensure broader inclusion in political settlements of the public, including women, youth and any marginalised groups, more effort is needed to pursue communication with and understand all actors involved in any given conflict – even those ‘terrorists’, ‘violent extremists’, ‘radicalised groups’, and ‘spoilers’ that are most reviled.

### Using legal-judicial responses and targeted sanctions

An important option for approaching conflict is to use the law (national or international) to punish and deter violence and to protect those who may otherwise feel marginalised and resort to violence as a last resort. Legal approaches to insecurity are complex, and only a few points can be made here. Prosecutions offer the prospect of reducing impunity, deterring violence (both within a particular country and more broadly), and of course incarcerating those responsible for violence (and thus taking them ‘out of the game’). In many cases, a *policing* response to disorder (apprehending and trying criminal suspects) will be more appropriate than a military response. Sometimes, it is a heavy-handed military response that turns a small rebellion into a large one or gives life to a weakening ‘terrorist’ movement.

When due process is applied and the rights of defendants to fair trials are visibly upheld, legal approaches offer the considerable advantage of guaranteeing rights of defendants and their equal treatment before the law – thereby helping to dispel perceptions of discrimination against particular groups.

The option to deploy sanctions comes with certain drawbacks. Sanctions can be used by those targeted to shore up their economic advantages and their political support base. They can also do great harm to the general population and create grievances among those they were intended to help. Yet, when they are carefully targeted, sanctions can offer an important option for pressurising conflict actors, including armed groups, to change their approach.

## Supporting transformative governance efforts

Of course, governance reforms are explicitly part of the stabilisation and statebuilding policy agenda. However, this policy agenda is typically coloured by the imperatives provided by counter-terrorism to boost a counterinsurgency or a new political order with external aid or military support. Likewise, the international discourse on peacebuilding and statebuilding enshrines ownership of processes by nation states in a way that tends towards the exclusion of other actors and far-reaching reforms in practice. The 'mainstream' approach to all three (counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding) thus leans visibly towards aligning behind and reinforcing the capacities of the state as it is (including states recently installed by military action) rather than prioritising wider social empowerment models that seek to *transform* the state from within and foster lasting and positive peace.

Peace, indeed, cannot be built in the absence of institutional capacities, but these capacities also need to be oriented towards beneficial purposes. This makes the objective of achieving wider reform and the transformation of state-society relations (widely acknowledged in policy discourse but rarely pursued effectively in practice) absolutely central to efforts to respond to conflicts labelled as 'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'extremism'. After all, such conflicts often emerge from the grievances and injustice that are created by poor governance, and prove difficult to manage in the wake of institutional breakdown and civic unrest.

Past research by Saferworld<sup>37</sup> suggests that to support lasting peace, transformative governance reform should include significant efforts to:

- Ensure inclusive political dialogue and decision making
- Provide people-focused security and justice
- Reduce corruption and bribery in conflict-sensitive ways
- Offer fair access to social services, resources and opportunities to all social groups
- Resolve grievances and disputes constructively.

An example of the shift that is needed can be found in the security sector. While much development work is oriented to social empowerment and community driven models, when it comes to responding to conflict and insecurity, bottom-up approaches are not pursued on the scale that is required to achieve a transformative effect. Thus Security Sector Reform and efforts to negotiate peace settlements tend to be relatively top-down and exclusionary. Therefore, to a certain extent, they tend to lack the legitimacy to be both successful and sustainable. Application of 'community security' approaches at a greater scale has the potential to deliver a different kind of result.<sup>38</sup>

## Bringing a peacebuilding perspective to the fore in public debate

One of the challenges inherent in trying to move beyond mainstream approaches is the way in which problems of 'rogue regimes', 'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' and relevant responses are presented in public debate. Leaders, journalists and news outlets are in some ways responsible for establishing prevailing notions of enmity, while at the same time public interest and public opinion has a role in shaping and underpinning policy directions that leaders come under pressure to adopt. Thus the success of peace efforts partly depends on much more systematic questioning of the fault-lines of conflict, the prevailing definitions of the enemy, and the impacts of potential policy responses. Demonising particular enemies too often serves as 'cover' for those claiming to confront them; but those making these claims may not only be failing to confront these enemies but even actively reinforcing them in various ways.

In many contexts, the declaration of a 'war on terror' remains a convenient banner to call for public unity in support of a common enemy, bolstering the power base of political leaders. When the status of an 'enemy' has been well established in public discourse, this seems to lead to journalistic failures to question the tactics to be used, the allies to be supported, and the coherence of longer-term strategies.

A further problem is that, especially within conflict-affected contexts, those who oppose an officially approved persecution or question the approved fault-lines in a conflict, risk *themselves* being labelled as 'enemies', 'terrorists' and so on – and sometimes face intimidation, violence or prosecution as a result. This affects the willingness to speak out not only of journalists, the public and local activists but also international aid agencies and multilateral bodies. Particular definitions of the enemy have often been 'policed' in this way, and those who are in a position to question these definitions have a particular responsibility to do so.

While politicians, diplomats and human rights organisations tend to remain vigilant and critical regarding human rights in conflict situations, much more systematic efforts are needed to question the definitions of enmity that create – and recreate – mass violence, as well as to challenge the methods that are justified through this discourse at different levels.

## CHOOSING NOT TO ENGAGE – A VALID OPTION

This paper has offered a summary of constructive alternatives to the counter-terrorism paradigm and to some of the approaches taken to stabilisation and statebuilding under the influence of this paradigm. Alongside these, it is important to mention one further option, noting: that 'terrorist' atrocities frequently produce a sense of revulsion even among those the terrorists claim to represent; that if conflict resolution demands

*reform* (as suggested above), the best way to encourage this may in some circumstances be *not to provide support* to the current leadership and institutions in conflict-affected contexts; and that international actors *may not be able* to influence the dynamics of each and every conflict effectively. Given these points, in some contexts choosing not to engage should be considered a valid option.



Children displaced in Afghanistan in February 2002.  
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## UNDERSTANDING AND QUESTIONING MOTIVES

It is important to understand that, regardless of the arguments for and against it, the **mainstream approach** is underpinned by powerful motives that include the following:

- the political convenience of defining a common enemy and the logic of securitization that this legitimizes
- the assumption that geopolitical/international security goals in the West are of greater importance than human security goals elsewhere
- the wish to appear tough in the face of actual or threatened violence
- the pressures generated by and within defence industries and the military – to maintain a role for the military, and jobs and profits within the 'military-industrial complex', and also the tendency to measure military 'success' in questionable ways.

Crucially, the adoption of constructive alternatives will depend not only on the evidence and arguments presented, but on the ability of societies to **understand and question these motives**.

**“In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. [...] it is important to remember that there may be important vested interests in the use of force. This is a further reason to be sceptical about the claim that relatively belligerent approaches are useful and appropriate for ‘peacemakers’.”**

**US President Dwight D Eisenhower, 'Farewell address', 1961**



Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

We are a not-for-profit organisation that works in over 20 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and Europe.

# CONCLUSION

Options for dealing with those designated as rogue regimes, terrorists, extremists, radicals or spoilers can often appear limited – but this is not necessarily the case. While all alternatives carry potential problems, the drawbacks of current approaches to counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding described in this briefing have so far been under-recognised, and poorly factored into decision-making. By pursuing stability in counter-productive ways, and neglecting the perspectives of the people worst affected by conflict, external actors have often exacerbated the problems their interventions were intended to overcome. Through military

action, support to actors who are themselves worsening the situation, and through assistance that has had predictably harmful, if unintended, consequences, the overall goal of sustained peace has become more rather than less distant in many contexts. However, it is not too late to apply the lessons of past experience and respond to the next generation of conflicts with the goal of lasting peace for those affected much more clearly in mind.

These issues will be discussed in more detail in Saferworld's forthcoming research studies on constructive alternatives to counter-terrorism in a range of different country contexts.

This briefing summarises the findings of Saferworld's discussion paper on *Dilemmas of Counter-terror, Stabilisation and Statebuilding*.

## About the authors

**David Keen** is a political economist and Professor of Conflict Studies at the London School of Economics, where he has worked since the 1990s. He is the author of several books on conflict and related problems, including *Useful Enemies*, *Complex Emergencies*, *Endless War?* and *The Benefits of Famine*.

**Larry Attree** is Head of Policy at Saferworld, where he has worked since 2003.

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