



SAFERWORLD

PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES

Dilemmas of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding

A discussion paper



David Keen with Larry Attree

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Acronyms

AQAP	Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	MONUC	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)	MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration	NSC	National Security Council (NSC)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)	OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo	OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative	PKK	<i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê</i> – Kurdistan Workers' Party
EU	European Union	PTA	The Prevention of Terrorism Act (UK Law)
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	RUF	Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda	SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)	TFG	Transitional Federal Government
GVN	Government of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese government)	UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
ICG	International Crisis Group	ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia
ICU	Islamic Courts Union (Somalia)	UNITA	The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force (NATO – Afghanistan)	UNSOM	United Nations Mission in Somalia
IS	Islamic State (Iraq and Syria)	UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force (Ugandan armed forces)
ISS	Institute for Security Studies	US	United States of America
LDF	Lofa Defence Force (Liberia)	USAF	United States Air Force
LeT	Lashka-e-Taiba (armed group in South Asia)	WFP	World Food Programme
LPC	Liberia Peace Council		
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda)		
LTTE	The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka)		
MoJ	Ministry of Justice (UK)		

Foreword

THIS PAPER IS INTENDED TO STIMULATE DISCUSSION of how international actors respond to conflict. Security threats defined as stemming from ‘terrorism’, ‘radicalisation’, ‘extremism’ or ‘rogue regimes’ have significant public profile, and stimulate responses from many different branches of government responsible for economic, security, development and diplomatic affairs. The paper begins from the assumption that counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding approaches – while distinct from each other, and different in different contexts – are also linked in important ways, and have followed a discernible pattern in recent decades.

While it is obvious that counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding have had significant impacts on conflict dynamics – both on the ground and around the world – for a number of reasons there has not always been a full and frank public debate about what the lessons of past engagement with security threats have actually been, and how future engagement could be improved in the interests of building lasting and positive peace.

Many of the lessons described in this paper are in fact known to policymakers and the public, and critics may be quick – and indeed correct – in pointing to policy evolutions that have ostensibly taken account of such lessons. Thus, in the UK, official approaches to stabilisation in 2014 are deeply concerned to nurture the legitimacy of states in troubled contexts; and, in the US, the President articulated in 2014 a strategy for engaging with terrorism that speaks of lessening direct military engagement, redoubling restraint in the use of force, reaffirming a ban on the use of torture, and so on.

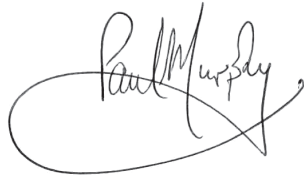
Although such ostensibly positive policy developments suggest that there is an appetite for learning lessons and attempting innovative solutions, this paper draws attention to the profound continuity between current approaches and those of the past, and calls for the lessons of the past to prompt a more innovative search for peaceful solutions in the face of contemporary threats.

As new crises evolve – as in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Nigeria – they understandably alarm decision makers and precipitate public outcry to respond decisively. At such moments, the need to adopt more nuanced and carefully thought-out alternative responses can be overtaken by the apparent imperative to act. And in spite of policies that acknowledge the need to use force more sparingly and focus on the grievances that underpin violent conflict – including by transforming state–society relations – at the same time collateral damage at the hands of external interventions remains a reality for the people of conflict-affected countries like Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan. Even when there is caution about the direct use of force to solve the problems of conflict, international actors have yet to find practical alternatives to, for example, backing allies

who may be worsening conflict dynamics and are uninterested in serious reform. Nor have many other policies and practices that are greeted with anger around the globe – and have the undesirable effect of storing up violence for the future – been revisited.

In the face of ‘terror’, ‘extremism’, ‘radicalisation’ and other threats, this paper provides an original and insightful contribution on perhaps the most important issue in contemporary international relations. While acknowledging the dilemmas faced by policymakers, it critically examines the lessons from counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding efforts in countries around the world. It thus makes a convincing case for questioning many of the routine assumptions underlying Western policy approaches to ‘terror’ and instability. At the same time, based on Saferworld’s experience and the wider evidence reviewed, the paper provides a much-needed reminder that a number of constructive, peacebuilding options do exist for dealing with the challenges of contemporary conflict, and that these may prove not only more humane, but also more effective in resolving security problems in the long term.

It suggests that the lessons of the past remain relevant today and necessitate a re-evaluation of current approaches. It calls for an understanding of the profound continuity that underlies apparently ‘new’ policy thinking – such as the use of development assistance to further national security objectives, or the funding of proxy governments to combat terrorists as an alternative to direct military action. Beyond short-term approaches to achieving security by defeating external threats, the paper strongly recommends the development of strategies that make lasting peace for all actors involved the ultimate objective of engagement in conflict-affected contexts.



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Executive summary

THIS DISCUSSION PAPER REVIEWS the impacts of stabilisation, statebuilding and counter-terrorism approaches on peace in conflict-affected contexts. It was developed based on a time-bound review of relevant literature, is not exhaustive in scope, and is intended to stimulate debate among the policy actors and practitioners engaged in these approaches about their strengths and weaknesses. Drawing on this analysis, it suggests some constructive alternatives that policymakers and practitioners should factor into their decision making and planning.

While recognising that counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding are distinct terms, the boundaries between them are often blurred, and can shift over time. This paper takes a particular interest in how they affect one another and combine as part of what we describe as the ‘mainstream’ approach.

The mainstream approach begins with the tendency 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. This often involves continuing use of force against spoilers, coupled with a willingness to overlook the limitations of allies.

In some contexts where stabilisation and/or statebuilding approaches have been applied, international actors may not have been involved militarily. Nonetheless, such contexts illustrate many of the same characteristics and inherent challenges that are evident in contexts that have experienced military engagement. We include such contexts in our analysis of the mainstream approach.

This paper considers the impact of the mainstream approach on efforts to achieve peace in both the short and long term in a wide range of contexts where relevant actions have been taken in recent decades.

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

1. 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.
2. 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.

3. 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, moreover, it is unlikely to hold if major stakeholders are excluded.
4. Then, when it comes to those actors who are designated as ‘spoilers’ and excluded from such deals, 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.
5. The mainstream approach does not simply rely on ‘sticks’ but has the apparent advantage of using ‘carrots’ as well: in theory, the use of aid to ‘win hearts and minds’ offers a way to lure people away from violent groups. Where states are visibly crumbling, some kind of statebuilding seems almost self-evidently necessary to offer services that can reduce grievances, and to avoid creating a power vacuum which violent actors can fill.
6. 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 counter-insurgency capacity that is stronger than the capacity to rebel.

While such arguments often make it difficult to make the case for constructive alternatives to the mainstream approach, the frequent use of – often indiscriminate – violence, and reinforcement of abusive, exclusive and corrupt governance, has in many contexts exacerbated drivers of conflict dynamics, rather than addressing them and contributing to sustainable peace. This paper therefore summarises the following significant weaknesses in the mainstream approach:

1. The ease with which ‘spoilers’ – whether rogue regimes or rebels – can be dispatched has very frequently been underestimated.
2. Stabilisation’s emphasis on order and stability can easily marginalise the need for social change, while at the same time institutionalising corruption. The ‘peace’ that is thereby ushered in may not be a just one; moreover, unaddressed grievances may mean the peace is not sustainable.
3. While excluding warlords or rebel leaders can make peace agreements unsustainable, rewarding them by giving them a prominent role in the new ‘stability’ – particularly where civilian groups have been largely excluded from a peace process – may constitute a powerful incentive for people to resort to violence so that *they too* can be rewarded.
4. The violence – and most especially indiscriminate violence – inflicted as part of a counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism operation may have the effect of creating additional enemies, particularly if the violence is not carefully ‘targeted’ at those actually engaged in violence. Sanctions impacting civilians may also create additional enemies and violence. Importantly, indiscriminate violence can also enable violent groups to act as, and portray themselves as, protectors of the public.
5. Aid that is intended to ‘win hearts and minds’ as part of stabilisation or statebuilding efforts is often ineffective, especially when combined politically and geographically with kinetic operations. It may actually *lose* hearts and minds – and it may even *contribute* to insecurity in various ways. Importantly, aid can encourage corruption within a regime that is conducting counter-terror operations, perhaps further alienating the population. If aid is seen as biased, this can increase anger among those who do not benefit.
6. Assistance intended to strengthen states against ‘insurgents’ may either feed problems of violence emanating from state structures themselves or end up being channelled to insurgents, with obvious dangers.
7. The relatively exclusive political settlements created under or reinforced by the mainstream approach often ultimately depend on continuing external inputs and therefore may prove *unsustainable* – especially given the difficulty in ‘selling’ inputs of aid and/or troops to Western electorates. Apparent ‘successes’ may fall apart in the long – or medium – term.

8. Governments (whether inside a conflict-affected country or outside it) may have little or no incentive to defeat a rebel movement whose continued existence may underpin a politically and economically useful 'state of emergency' and/or a large flow of international resources.
9. Governments participating in some international counter-insurgency or 'peacemaking' effort may be able to derive from this participation a significant degree of impunity for abuses they carry out against their own people or even against people in countries other than the one where they are intervening. Again, this may contribute to undermining their willingness to eliminate the spoiler they claim to be combating.
10. Counter-terror and stabilisation efforts may *displace* violence, into new geographical areas and into new time periods, rather than resolving it.

The problems with the mainstream approach described in this paper have so far been seriously under-recognised, and thus have been very poorly factored into decision making. To explain the dominance of the mainstream approach, and successfully encourage alternatives to it, also requires an understanding of the motives underpinning it. Beyond the immediate rationale, such motives may include the political convenience of defining a common enemy and the logic of securitisation that this legitimises; the prioritisation of geopolitical/international security goals above human security goals; the tendency to wish to appear tough in the face of actual or threatened violence; and the pressures generated by and within defence industries and the military.

If it is important to look for constructive alternatives to the mainstream approach to counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding, doing so should first involve striving to do less harm bearing in mind the lessons of the past. This would necessitate making stringent efforts to avoid the following:

- Thinking and reacting in the short rather than the long term
- Reinforcing poor governance and corruption
- Mistaking partners' motives
- Attempting to use aid in the service of counter-terrorism
- Recourse to violence, especially in indiscriminate and unaccountable ways.

If the challenges associated with the mainstream approach are typically overlooked, this is admittedly due in part to the fact that there are few unproblematic policy alternatives. However, a number of constructive alternatives do exist.

The first of these would be to reinstate lasting and positive peace (rather than victory over specific criminals or enemies, or the pursuit of narrowly defined national security interests) as the overall objective underpinning all strands of engagement with conflict contexts.

Proceeding from this objective, a more open-minded, impartial approach to conceptualising and analysing conflict – its actors, causes and dynamics – can help us to move beyond the reductive lens offered by approaching the problem as one of 'terror', 'extremism' or 'radicalisation'. This can help to avoid the idea that such conflicts can be solved simply by defeating 'spoilers' or reorienting their wrong-thinking – which is usually not the case. To help achieve this, conflict analysis should be a collective exercise that sits at the heart of public policymaking towards conflict situations, and should enable diverse actors to identify their roles in contributing to lasting peace. Reframing and analysing conflict in this way can help us to envisage holistic strategies for building peace that give due emphasis to less violent, more constructive alternatives. Such constructive alternatives may include:

- 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 on achieving inclusive and just political settlements as swiftly as possible in any given context
- Using sanctions to target particular actors
- 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 substantial harm cannot be avoided and no clear solution is evident.

It is time to apply the lessons of past experience much more rigorously to the dilemmas of the next generation of conflicts. This requires pursuing constructive alternatives with renewed vigour – with the goal of fostering a lasting peace, and the interests of people in conflict-affected contexts, much more clearly in mind.

1

Introduction

THIS PAPER DISCUSSES how the international community has tried to counter terror, achieve stability, build states and foster peace around the world. It examines whether these objectives and approaches are being pursued effectively and coherently and whether there are contradictions between them. It is based on a review of relevant literature, is not exhaustive in scope, and is intended to stimulate debate among the policy actors and practitioners engaged in these approaches.

Defining key terms

This paper revolves around a discussion of a ‘mainstream’, largely Western approach to addressing security threats that consists of context-specific combinations of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding approaches. It thus adopts a broad frame: analysing a range of ostensibly different engagements in a variety of contexts to examine what common lessons are evident from them.

At the outset, it is therefore important to explain what we mean by counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding, and why we consider it useful to discuss a ‘mainstream’ approach to these three interlinked endeavours.

Counter-terrorism consists of military efforts to defeat particular actors who have been defined as ‘terrorists’ or ‘spoilers’, and/or their sponsors, as well as efforts to support regional or national allies to do the same. Counter-terrorism may also include efforts to apply law enforcement approaches to disrupt, prevent or punish these actors. It can further involve efforts to stop people joining the ranks of ‘terrorists’ – which may be in part developmental and include tackling selected root causes of the problem. This latter – and arguably more developmental, preventative – approach is sometimes styled ‘countering violent extremism’.

Stabilisation is a wide-ranging field that is made harder to define by the fact that it can involve the deployment of a wide range of approaches and tools according to different contextual needs. This proliferation of aims within stabilisation gives the term a slippery quality. It is currently described by the UK government as:

[O]ne of the approaches used in situations of violent conflict which is designed to protect and promote legitimate political authority, using a combination of integrated civilian and military actions to reduce violence, re-establish security and prepare for longer-term recovery by building an enabling environment for structural stability... stabilisation is a politically driven activity intended to have political effects... There are a lot of activities that can be applied in stabilisation, but the three core components of stabilisation include:

*protect political actors, the political system and the population; promote, consolidate and strengthen political processes; prepare for longer-term recovery.*¹

Stabilisation has tended to include direct military action and/or support to military actors to remove ‘illegitimate’ political actors from control. It has also embraced international/regional peacekeeping efforts and other efforts to protect civilians; assistance to security institutions and other institutions; efforts to meet humanitarian need; and development efforts. It is increasingly recognised that such elements of stabilisation are not ends in themselves but should be deployed carefully to enable and support the emergence of sustainable ‘political settlements’.

Statebuilding is likewise a wide-ranging concept that would be defined differently by the different actors involved. It is seen by many of its proponents (for example, the signatories of the ‘New deal for engagement in fragile states’²) as very closely linked to peacebuilding, in particular in its apparent focus on supporting improved state–society relations. It can be understood as the attempt to support states to achieve peacebuilding and statebuilding goals, and thus typically involves a mix of support intended to foster political dialogue, promote the provision of security, justice, services and economic capacities, and to develop the core capacities of states.

Under the New Deal, statebuilding is an approach in which international actors are committed to supporting ‘country-led and country-owned transitions out of fragility’, aligning behind the country’s plans, building the capacity of country systems and delivering resources through them (also in line with international aid effectiveness principles set out in Paris, Accra and Busan). In this sense, statebuilding may have the tendency to reinforce the state rather than to seek to transform it in more fundamental ways.

The ‘mainstream’ approach

While recognising that counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding are distinct terms, the boundaries between them are often blurred, and can shift over time. This paper takes a particular interest in how they affect one another and combine as part of what we describe here as the ‘mainstream’ approach.

The mainstream approach begins with the tendency to define conflicts in a way that designates some actors as ‘spoiler(s)’ (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 use of military force to depose or weaken a ‘rogue’ regime or 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. This often requires continuing use of force against spoilers, coupled with a willingness to overlook the limitations of allies.

The balance between statebuilding, stabilisation and counter-terrorism of course varies from context to context. Importantly, the focus on weakening or eliminating the ‘spoiler’ may actually take attention away from the wider project of pushing for political changes (within the relevant state or neighbouring states) that might help to undermine the ‘spoiler’.

In some contexts where stabilisation and/or statebuilding approaches have been applied, international actors may not have been involved militarily. Nonetheless, such

¹ Stabilisation Unit, 2014c.

² International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, 2011.

contexts illustrate many of the same characteristics and inherent challenges that are evident in contexts that have experienced military engagement. We include such contexts in our analysis of the mainstream approach.

Observations on the mainstream approach

Particularly in the context of a 'global war on terror', a key element in international strategies for dealing with unstable or dangerous states has, as noted, been identifying the main peace 'spoiler(s)' and then taking military action to weaken or eliminate them. This rather militaristic framework may involve targeting rebel groups or 'spoiler' militias. It may also involve targeting *governments*: several regimes that have been perceived as key spoilers in terms of peace and security (and particularly *international* peace and security) have been subjected to military attack – either with the direct participation of Western governments (as in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya), or through proxy interventions (as in the US-supported Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006), or through support for rebel groups (as with the support of Gulf states, the US, and other Western actors for Syrian rebels).³

Importantly, when rogue regimes (or 'governmental spoilers') have been overthrown, forces loyal to those regimes have tended to become key spoilers in the conflict that follows (as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Libya). Thus, the use of force to depose a regime tends to imply – though this is rarely if ever stated when a war is being planned or advocated – the *ongoing* use of force against 'spoilers', notably those with some attachment to the previous regime.

Given the abusive nature of many governments and many rebel and terrorist groups, a forceful approach can often appear (whether to politicians or sections of the wider public) as both necessary and desirable. The felt need for a 'global war on terror' after 9/11 has encouraged a relatively belligerent approach to security problems. This approach appears to have a good deal of intuitive and emotional appeal, centring most notably on the apparent need to 'confront evil'.

At the governmental level, prominent 'spoilers' have included the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, the Taliban during its brief period of rule in Afghanistan, Colonel Gaddafi's regime in Libya and the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) regime in Somalia. Among the most prominent and reviled rebel (or 'terrorist') 'spoilers' in recent years have been the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Rwandan 'genocidaires' sheltering in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), al-Shabaab in Somalia, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and of course al Qaeda. Boko Haram in Nigeria, and Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq have recently acquired a similar status.

Even just mentioning these entities (whether rogue governments or rogue rebels) can sometimes elicit feelings of revulsion that seem to feed naturally into an agenda of violent intervention and even elimination. In fact, where rogue states or 'terrorists' have been publicly identified and vilified, it can be extremely difficult even to articulate the view that an agenda of violent intervention has major drawbacks. This view may be seen as 'unpatriotic' or 'soft on terrorism' or even as implying some degree of *sympathy* with 'terrorism'. Certainly, within a country afflicted by civil or regional war, any attempt to speak against an agenda of violently suppressing rebels may be taken as expressing a degree of sympathy with, or advocating appeasement of, such a reviled group or groups. This underlines the need for clear thinking – and blunt talking – on the mainstream approach to dealing with such security dilemmas.

³ See e.g. Landler M, 'U.S. Considers Resuming Nonlethal Aid to Syrian Opposition', 9 Jan 2014; The Wall Street Journal, 'U.S. Bolsters Ties to Fighters in Syria', 13 June 2012; Al Monitor, 'US Authorizes Financial Support For the Free Syrian Army', 18 August 2012; Hopkins, Nick, 'West training Syrian rebels in Jordan', The Guardian, 8 March 2013; DeYoung, Karen. 'U.S. pledges to double nonlethal aid to Syrian rebels as opposition backers reach consensus', Washington Post, 20 April 2013.

Although the rhetoric of war (including civil war) tends to focus on the weakening or elimination of particular armed groups, in practice civilians have routinely been victimised on a large scale in wartime. Very often wars have created ‘windows of impunity’ for violence against certain civilians, at least for a period of time. In practice, certain civilians (often defined ethnically) have been deemed by their own governments to be illegitimate (and not deserving of rights or protection) because of their (actual or presumed) association with a reviled enemy.⁴ Where an overriding priority is attached (whether by a national government, international actors, or both) to a particular rebel or ‘terrorist’ security threat, these conditions of impunity may be facilitated. If the enemy is demonised internationally as well as nationally, the abuse may be greatly reinforced. Such windows of impunity may approximate to Giorgio Agamben’s ‘camp’, a state of exception in which crimes against what we might call ‘illegitimate civilians’ are, in practice, not considered (either nationally or internationally) to be crimes.⁵ A key ‘downside’ of more belligerent approaches to security is the suffering of those caught up in these overlapping war systems – those people who live (and die) *in the shadow of ‘just wars’* (the title of a seminal *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) publication on the topic). This underlines some of the dangers of focusing on the elimination of ‘spoilers’.

It would be incorrect, however, to characterise the mainstream approach as simply belligerent. In some cases, the mainstream approach may simply consist of stabilisation and statebuilding efforts that are linked to political, military or security objectives but that do not involve a military intervention. One hallmark of the mainstream approach is that it is likely to involve not only the targeting of spoilers but also some kind of pragmatic ‘deal’ among influential actors to ensure stability. This may involve an element of negotiation. The deals that are struck as part of the mainstream approach may be peace agreements or donor-recipient compacts, or may be more informal or covert arrangements. They are sometimes conflated with the idea of encouraging particular ‘political settlements’ (a wider concept that describes the underlying power dynamics in any given society – local or national – that determine how resources, privileges and so on are distributed). A key observation is that the mainstream approach has a tendency to embrace a rather limited idea of who is to be involved in any negotiations or deals that it brokers. In practice, involvement is often limited to powerful elites, warlords, tribal leaders or prominent rebel leaders, and often excludes groups (notably those deemed to be ‘terrorist’) that may nevertheless have a significant popular following. Those who buy into such deals tend to become allies to be reinforced by significant military, economic, diplomatic and development support, whether this is offered under the banner of counter-terrorism, stabilisation, statebuilding or more routine development assistance.

Given the need to maintain these deals and reinforce these allies, stabilisation and statebuilding may in practice only make a very limited attempt to induce radical reform or rethinking of the form that the state should take (although the violent overthrow of a regime is an obvious exception). In particular, while the project of ‘stabilisation’ often involves some element of democratisation (and perhaps a generous use of terms like ‘participation’), it has also been criticised for setting aside a broader project of social transformation, empowerment or emancipation (though there may be a hope that elections will make some of this social change possible).⁶ Roger Mac Ginty notes a revealing shift in the language of international peacemaking: “the concept of peace has been side-lined in recent years and has been supplanted by ‘stabilisation’, ‘security’ and other concepts that are based on ideas of control.”⁷ When there have been negotiated settlements, they have often involved a significant degree of *exclusion* (as in Sudan and the DRC, for example).

⁴ Weissman, 2004; Keen, 2008

⁵ Agamben, 1999; Agamben, 2005; Keen, 2013a,

⁶ See, for example, Mac Ginty, 2012.

⁷ Mac Ginty, 2012, 20.

Counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding increasingly overlap with humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding, and the proponents of stabilisation and statebuilding often assume that these different fields should and will contribute to common (primarily security) objectives. Within the mainstream approach, attempts to confront rebel or terrorist spoilers are likely to involve an attempt to use aid as a tool to ‘win hearts and minds’. Violent action against rebels and rogue regimes has usually been accompanied by the provision of aid to support the structures of the favoured state and to win hearts and minds (in line with long-established counter-insurgency practice). This approach has been prominent, for example, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq and Somalia. It often involves finding those people who are ready to cooperate with a state that is modelled (at least in theory) on Western systems of government, and then dealing forcefully with the others (‘the bad guys’). Today, alongside the penchant for military solutions to the problem of ‘rogue’ regimes and rebels, there also tends to be a penchant for military involvement in enterprises (‘development’, ‘statebuilding’, etc.) that have often, in the past, been regarded as the preserve of civilian actors (whether local or foreign).

The ‘UK Government’s Approach to Stabilisation (2014)’ and its Stabilisation Unit illustrate the tendency for the military to become more deeply involved in the enterprise of peacebuilding. Significantly, the unit is attached to the Ministry of Defence as well as to the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development. It defines itself in terms of its ability to operate in “high threat environments”, and it notes:

The UK’s stabilisation approach explicitly enables the deployment of external military force to manage existing violence and deter further outbreaks. This may or may not include UK forces in direct combat activities.⁸

The longer-term goal to which stabilisation is said to contribute is ‘Structural Stability’, defined by the UK government as:

[P]olitical systems which are representative and legitimate, capable of managing conflict and change peacefully, and societies in which human rights and rule of law are respected, basic needs are met, security established and opportunities for social and economic development are open to all.⁹

Thus stabilisation is defined as serving the interests of the people in conflict-affected countries. While this emphasis on legitimacy and the interests of people in conflict-ridden countries is welcome, and coherence between different departments on conflict-related issues has potential benefits, it is important to keep an open mind on whether the security that is being promoted in practice is primarily the security of those in-country or rather some broader conception of Western security. This question is typically fudged with the assertion – convincingly critiqued in the work of Zoe Marriage on the DRC, for example – that ‘our security’ and ‘their security’ are one and the same thing.

The role of geopolitical considerations in ‘stabilisation’ agendas is strongly implied in a chart in the UK Stabilisation Unit’s business plan 2014–2015. The chart describes the unit’s 2014–2015 geographical priorities as (in no particular order): Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Libya, Egypt and Lebanon.¹⁰ While these countries are at least somewhat diverse and while it is true that they harbour some of the most significant insecurity in the world today, it is noticeable that they all (arguably excepting South Sudan) have a significant link to the threat from ‘Islamic extremists’ – a threat that Western security policy has placed above any other, at least since 9/11. There are many other areas with significant insecurity (perhaps most notably the DRC) that do not

⁸ Stabilisation Unit, 2014a.

⁹ Stabilisation Unit, 2014a.

¹⁰ The ‘medium’ priority list does include DRC, Burma and Ukraine, with the remainder being countries where some version of ‘Islamic extremism’ has again been a major concern, namely Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria and North & West Africa. Stabilisation Unit, 2014d.

feature on this 'priority' list.¹¹ Similarly, illustrating how stabilisation efforts in support of the mainstream approach have influenced the aid agenda, in 2011 Afghanistan received more than 60 per cent more aid than any other country on the OECD's list of 'fragile states'.¹² From 2000–2007, Iraq received more than double the amount received by the next largest recipient country – again Afghanistan – with the two accounting for over one-third of total OECD ODA to 'fragile states'.¹³

It is worth noting at this point that 'stabilisation' is not incompatible with some of the constructive approaches discussed later in this paper. These include negotiated agreements, the deployment of peacekeepers, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes, targeted sanctions, attempts at legal prosecution, and other 'policy tools' for those pursuing less belligerent forms of peacemaking. However, 'stabilisation' does tend to imply a significant role for external military actors, and it tends to imply the use of violence (or at least the potential for violence) against internal spoilers. Notably, stabilisation tends to embrace a reality of more-or-less constant warfare but also one in which Western casualties are low by historical standards.

The proponents of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding may not view their individual actions as interlinked, but nonetheless their conceptual frameworks and imperatives do appear to overlap. Thus not only are the boundaries between counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding blurred in that they contain some common elements – in addition, the deployment of one approach can rapidly morph into another. For example, the consolidation of a peace agreement via 'stabilisation' may slip into outright counter-insurgency, as it did in Afghanistan via foreign forces that were already present in the service of consolidating and 'stabilising' the post-Taliban government there.¹⁴

Likewise, counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding affect one another in important ways. For example, at policy level stabilisation aims to foster 'legitimate political authority'. However, in reality stabilisation efforts have not always involved alliance with legitimate actors or encouraged the evolution of more legitimate, more just and less corrupt settlements. While this may be in part because of the inherent difficulty of finding 'legitimate' stakeholders to support and the difficulty of promoting such settlements effectively, stabilisation is also affected by counter-terror objectives and strategies. The counter-terror paradigm, and the laws and lists of proscribed actors that have emerged from it, have in some cases predetermined which actors and sectors of society *can* be part of a long-term settlement or solution and which cannot. Where this is the case, stabilisation may find itself constrained to work within a definition of the problem as one of 'terrorism' in which certain actors (those perceived to pose a danger to Western security in particular) have to be fought, and those who are opposed to them thereby assume the role of legitimate allies.

A similar point can be made about statebuilding. Here, the assumption that peacebuilding is synonymous with statebuilding serves to smooth the relations between states when they discuss sensitive issues in multilateral settings. It also conforms to the received development wisdom that being 'effective' (in conflict and non-conflict settings) means aligning aid with host governments' policies and working through their systems. It is also clear that, when there are 'terrorists' in a given context – and strong partners are needed to eliminate them – the opportunity to reinforce such partners under the banner of statebuilding is notably convenient from the perspective of counter-terrorism.

¹¹ It is worth noting also that even negotiated settlements in recent years have sometimes been shaped by international strategic priorities. For example, the 2005 peace agreement in Sudan, while certainly addressing many sources of insecurity inside Sudan, can also be seen as part of a long-term attempt to rein in the excesses of a Khartoum government in which Islamic extremists were influential.

¹² OECD, no date, 'Ensuring fragile states are not left behind: 2011 Report on Financial Resource Flows', 11.

¹³ OECD, no date, 'Resource Flows to Fragile and Conflict-Affected States: Annual Report 2008', 9.

¹⁴ Mac Ginty, 2012, 28.

For all these reasons, the possible connection between the counter-terror paradigm and the enthusiastic application of stabilisation and statebuilding approaches is well worth exploring.

Overview of the paper

Based on this overview of the mainstream approach, this paper is organised into three further sections: in **section 2**, the rationale that underpins the mainstream approach is discussed, before ten major drawbacks with the approach are introduced, together with practical examples drawn from literature review; in **section 3**, based on the observation that the ‘mainstream approach’ continues to be favoured despite its drawbacks, we look at some of the interests that may be underpinning it. **Section 4** then considers alternative approaches. While some combination of stabilisation and counter-insurgency has come to appear a routine (and perhaps even a ‘natural’) response to disorder, it is important to remind ourselves that a wide range of alternatives exists (even though many have been neglected and some have become rather unfashionable).

2

The benefits and drawbacks of the mainstream approach

Rationale underpinning the mainstream approach

THE COMBINATION OF statebuilding, stabilisation and counter-insurgency approaches that has been described in this paper as the mainstream approach can be – and has been – defended on a number of grounds. First, in the face of actual or impending atrocities – such as the impending massacre of Libyan rebels in 2012 or of Yazidis in Iraq in 2014 – it often appears that taking some form of action is always preferable to inaction, which may appear to entail a failure to protect the vulnerable.

Second, it stands to reason that some degree of order is likely to be a necessary condition for any kind of political or economic transformation. Projects of social transformation cannot usually be achieved in a short period (and attempts to do so can be profoundly destabilising),¹⁵ while a degree of security – perhaps combined with democratisation – holds out the hope of facilitating some broader social transformation.

Third, peace may be impossible without the cooperation of (for example) warlords and militia leaders; even if a peace agreement is achieved, moreover, it is unlikely to hold if major stakeholders are excluded. Liberia illustrates this point, for here – in the early 1990s – there were significant attempts to marginalise warlords from the political process and to support a civilian government; but these fell apart in the face of warlords' unwillingness to disarm or abandon their profitable activities; it was only by bringing warlords into power in 1996 (distasteful as that was) that demobilisation and elections became possible.¹⁶ Insofar as the mainstream approach involves reinforcing the power of unsavoury actors, such actions can still play a part in peace processes.

Fourth, since it is not possible to welcome every violent group into power, something has to be done in relation to those who are excluded. Where an attempt is made to bring every violent actor into power, this can easily encourage others into acts of violent rebellion.

A fifth defence of stabilisation (and the task of weakening or eliminating spoilers) is that it does not simply rely on 'sticks' but has the apparent advantage of using 'carrots' as well. In theory at least, the use of aid to 'win hearts and minds' offers a way to lure people away from violent groups, while strengthening the provision of services and

¹⁵ See, for example, Eriksson, 1996; Mansfield and Snyder, 1995.

¹⁶ Adebajo 2002: 599–630

building loyalty to an emergent state. Where states are visibly crumbling, some kind of statebuilding seems almost self-evidently desirable. Statebuilding will also be important for conflict prevention: for one thing, without the provision of state services, grievances will proliferate and armed actors are likely to step into the gaps left by state failure.

Sixth, it has been argued that one way of preventing war is to prevent rebellion (or at least to squash it as soon as it appears). Paul Collier, for example, suggests that preventing civil war demands a counter-insurgency force that is stronger than the rebels. Arguing that civil wars happen when they are physically *feasible* – and moving away from his earlier focus on *motivation* (‘greed’ or ‘grievance’) – Collier states:

If the feasibility hypothesis is right it has a powerful implication: violent conflict cannot be prevented by addressing the problems that are likely to motivate it; it can only be prevented by making it more difficult. Whether rebellion is easy or difficult basically comes down to whether rebels have access to guns and money, and whether the state is effective in opposing them.¹⁷

These various arguments notwithstanding, there are grave dangers in overlooking the *drawbacks* in the mainstream approach. Ten of these are explored in more detail in the rest of this section.

Ten drawbacks of the mainstream approach

Drawback 1: ‘Spoilers’ have more staying power than supposed

The first problem with the mainstream approach is that the ease with which peace ‘spoilers’ – whether regimes or rebels designated as enemies – can be dispatched has very frequently been underestimated. For a variety of reasons (including support from abroad), many rebel groups have proven remarkably resilient. And when it comes to ‘rogue’ regimes, while Western politicians have tended to project the idea that a swift military victory over such a regime is both feasible and likely, in practice the act of ousting such regimes has frequently marked the *beginning* of a long war rather than the end of it.

Rebel resilience is likely to reflect some combination of external support, internal support, access to resources, and physical terrain (for example, mountains or jungles that provide physical cover for rebels). The resilience of the Taliban in Afghanistan reflected a complex mixture of factors, including the mountainous terrain, a degree of popular dissatisfaction with the Afghan government, the rebels’ access to resources (including opium), and the rebels’ ability to get support from inside Pakistan and to retreat into Pakistan when necessary.

‘Spoilers’ beyond the borders of a conflict-affected country have often been neglected and they may be crucial in sustaining militia ‘spoilers’ or rebel ‘spoilers’, whether or not these originate in a deposed regime. These foreign ‘spoilers’ have also included Rwanda and Uganda in relation to the conflict in the DRC. Foreign ‘spoilers’ have frequently themselves been in receipt of significant international aid (as in the case of Rwanda and Uganda).

Even rebel groups that appear to lack coherent ideology and that have large numbers of children within their ranks have sometimes shown remarkable resilience and organisational coherence in the face of superior military forces.¹⁸

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 the rebels with ties to Saddam Hussein’s regime who opposed the internationally installed government in Iraq from 2003). Importantly, a rebel

¹⁷ Collier 2009, 139.

¹⁸ Marks, 2013.

movement's access to resources and information – and also its sense of grievance and of its own legitimacy – may be boosted in these circumstances.

In Iraq, after Saddam was ousted in 2003, compulsory redundancy was issued to some 400,000 trained and armed men.¹⁹ The working assumption among the occupying powers seems to have been that Iraqi soldiers would effectively disappear as political and military actors once the Iraqi military was defeated. But this was never realistic, and many regime soldiers joined the insurgents. Where a government has been overthrown by international military intervention (as in Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq), rebels are likely to be able to tap into resentment of foreign interference. For example, in Afghanistan the Taliban was able to portray itself as the latest in a long line of Afghan movements resisting foreign invaders.²⁰

**Drawback 2:
Emphasis on order
can mask the need
for social change and
can institutionalise
corruption**

A second problem with the mainstream approach is that its emphasis on order and stability can easily marginalise or disguise the need for radical social change, while at the same time institutionalising corruption and the control of resources by a relatively small elite. Arguably, the predominant approaches to stabilisation and statebuilding are antithetical to the long-term changes on which long-term stability depends. The 'peace' that is thereby ushered in may not be a just one; moreover, unaddressed grievances may mean the peace is not sustainable.

Even the term 'spoiler' carries the risk that it will place the stigma on the 'spoiler' rather than the peace that is being 'spoiled'. If we were to use a different word for 'spoiler' (for example, 'revolutionary') or a different term for 'peace' (for example, 'order', 'organised exploitation' or even 'totalitarian rule'), then we are likely to get a different impression of the righteousness of the rebel violence in any given context – and conversely, the righteousness of any counter-terror, stabilisation or statebuilding action taken to end it.

Similarly, labelling certain groups or individuals as 'extremist', 'terrorist' or 'radical' implies a prior judgment about the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of certain viewpoints within a conflict context. Likewise, the use of terminology such as 'countering' (as in 'counter-terrorism' and the more recent 'countering violent extremism') infers taking sides within conflicts from the outset, rather than adopting an approach that seeks to identify constructive solutions to conflict issues. If some points of view are seen as illegitimate (and as needing to be 'countered'), the motives and grievances underpinning a conflict are less likely to be considered impartially. They are also less likely to be resolved through the pursuit of a relatively transformative peace agenda that involves serious consideration of how the key grievances of all actors can be resolved in an enduring way.

A number of analysts have suggested that peace may actually represent a kind of 'dirty bargain' between those who previously had an interest in war and have now decided, for whatever reason, that they have an interest in peace.²¹ The deals that are struck are likely to be a compromise, the result of (unequal) competition between elites as well as between an elite and the wider population.²² While rapid moves to inclusivity can themselves prove destabilising, exclusive systems appear to yield less peaceful outcomes in the longer term.²³ This underlines the dangers in labelling any given situation as 'peace' or in revering the concept of 'stability'.

There have also been many instances where 'peace' has been accompanied by widespread violence, as Carolyn Nordstrom notes in relation to sexual violence and Zoe

¹⁹ Dodge, 2004.

²⁰ On the presence of foreign troops as a reason for joining the Taliban, see for example, Gordon, 2011, 49.

²¹ Keen, 2001; Le Billon, 2003; Atkinson, 2011; de Waal, 2009; see also North, Wallis and Weingast, 2006; Di John and Putzel, 2006.

²² See for example Di John J and Putzel J, 2009.

²³ Institute for Economics and Peace, 2011, 6, 18, 25; Paffenholz, 2008, 15. OECD, 2011, 35, 31–32; Caumartin, Molina and Thorp, 2008.

Marriage notes in relation to violence in eastern DRC after the 2003 ‘peace’ agreement.²⁴ Programmes of economic liberalisation that typically accompany a peace process can feed powerfully into inequality and grievances, helping to nurture future acts of violence.²⁵ This underlines the need to look at which groups are being brought into a peace process – and which silently or violently marginalised – even as ‘peace’ is praised and ‘peace spoilers’ are reviled.

The dangers of whitewashing unrepresentative political settlements with the label of ‘peace’ appear to have increased with the ‘war on terror’ (and its accompanying temptations to embrace repressive governments that have – or say they have – an ‘anti-terrorist’ agenda). The post-Taliban political settlement in Afghanistan, in which a number of abusive warlords were prominent, was one example. But these dangers also pre-date the ‘war on terror’. In Cambodia in the 1990s, the peace process institutionalised corruption in many ways and this had the effect of depriving the treasury of revenue and making it hard to consolidate a developmental state.²⁶ 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.

In the DRC, the 2003 peace agreement was seen by many as a kind of ‘warlord’s peace’ that entrenched the exploitation of economic resources by various military commanders (often with foreign backing).²⁷ Zoe Marriage notes that the 2003 peace agreement in the DRC not only had the effect of legitimising and perpetuating violent exploitation by warlords; it also ushered in a set of donor-sponsored economic policies that further eroded security (policies that were designed in part to counter the threat of Chinese influence): firstly there was a rapid ‘fire-sale’ liberalisation involving concessions unfavourable to the Congolese but favourable to elite politicians and Western companies; secondly, there was a push for non-labour-intensive ‘industrial mining’ that ended up contributing further to mass unemployment (and hence insecurity).

This case shows how a relatively exclusive version of stabilisation can end up feeding instability. It also raises the important question: *security for whom?* Surprisingly, while the international community has increasingly ruled out power-sharing with large rebel movements that have some degree of popular support (as in Afghanistan), the case of the DRC suggests a willingness, in some circumstances, to embrace power-sharing with warlords who *do not have* significant popular support, a strategy that has a number of drawbacks that have been insufficiently recognised.

Of course, in the DRC as in many other countries, the hope has been expressed that a greater degree of inclusion (and accountability) may become possible over time, even where short-term pragmatism has put warlords or faction leaders into positions of power at the expense of civil society. Eastern Sudan represents another example of where such hopes have been expressed (but remain largely unrealised).²⁸ Quite often warlords have proven adept at adapting to a degree of democratisation, not least by threatening disorder if they do not get elected. In Liberia, Charles Taylor became President in part because of his ability to threaten a resumption of war if he was unsuccessful in the presidential elections. In Afghanistan’s Kandahar province, there was widespread suspicion that, in the context of a ‘democratising’ state, local warlords were directing coalition forces raids at their political rivals.²⁹

Such examples serve to illustrate how the promotion of social change may sometimes be postponed or impeded under the mainstream approach, with the effect of

²⁴ Nordstrom, 1999; Marriage 2013; see also Autesserre, 2007.

²⁵ For example: Paris 2004; Pastor and Boyce, 2000; Marriage, 2013. On the way economic liberalisation fuelled the civil war in Sierra Leone, see Keen 2005b.

²⁶ Le Billon, 2000; see also Malone and Nitschke 2005.

²⁷ See, for example, Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2009; Autesserre 2007.

²⁸ Pantuliano, 2006.

²⁹ Forsberg, 2010.

institutionalising corrupt and autocratic actors into positions of strength. While peace is rarely possible without some kind of ‘deal’ between the powerful, the drawbacks of this process also need to be clearly recognised and strenuous efforts made for peace to be as inclusive as possible.

**Drawback 3:
Making deals with
violent actors and
excluding others
provides an incentive
for violence**

A third problem with the mainstream approach is that rewarding warlords or rebel leaders by giving them a prominent role in the new ‘stability’ may constitute a powerful incentive for people to resort to violence so that *they too* can be rewarded in this way.

There may be a fine line between rewarding people for giving up violence and rewarding them for taking it up in the first place. Insofar as stabilisation equates to striking a deal with the most powerful elites and militia leaders, the signals sent out may be very dangerous. In fact, the message that ‘violence pays’ may be sent internationally as well as nationally. These dangers are all the greater if the peace process largely excludes either civilian groups, civil society or those politicians who are not linked to armed groups.

In the former Yugoslavia, the 1995 Dayton Agreement has sometimes been seen as rewarding local elites who had already benefited from violent accumulation in wartime.³⁰ Discussing the impact this had on Kosovan Albanians, who were using radical means to resist Serbian rule and wished to avoid a repetition of the Bosnian scenario, Alexandros Yannis argued that the Kosovan Albanians “could not fail to observe that the underlying logic of the peace accords was largely the ratification on paper of the ethnoterritorial gains made on the ground by the use of force.” He concluded that some Kosovan Albanians were encouraged by the Dayton Agreement to give up on peaceful methods.³¹

The case of Liberia is again instructive. Civilian organisations there often opposed recognition of armed faction leaders in peace negotiations, arguing that this rewarded violence and boosted their prestige and their ability to attract a following.³² The early 1990s in Liberia saw a rapid proliferation of factions, driven in part by the desire of various military leaders to claim a place at the negotiating table through seizing territory.³³ Adekeye Adebajo explains the process:

... ULIMO [United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia], the LPC [Liberia Peace Council], and the LDF [Lofa Defence Force] hoped to obtain a share of political power in a future government through the conquest of territory, which would then provide them with some leverage during negotiations. ULIMO’s presence at the Cotonou talks in 1993, after its exclusion from Yamoussoukro in 1991, was a clear sign to other factions that gaining territory was the most viable way of winning a place at the negotiating table.³⁴

Of course, striking the right balance in such negotiations is never going to be easy. We have noted already that attempts to *exclude* warlords in Liberia actually undermined the peace process as key players simply would not cooperate.³⁵ It remains the case, however, that prioritising short-term stability and the appeasement of the most significant military actors sends some very damaging signals that can feed into violence – in the short term as well as the long term. While the dangers in rewarding warlords may suggest a need for an approach that punishes violence instead of rewarding it, these dangers may equally suggest a need for a very inclusive peace process (that could also embrace an element of justice).

³⁰ Andreas, 2004.

³¹ Yannis, 2003: 171.

³² See, for example, Armon and Carl, 1996. Similar concerns have been expressed by civilian organisations in Somalia. See also Menkhaus and Prendergast, 1995.

³³ Adebajo, 2002.

³⁴ Adebajo, 2002, 612.

³⁵ Adebajo, 2002.

**Drawback 4:
Violence multiplies
rebellion – especially
when indiscriminate**

A fourth problem with the mainstream, relatively belligerent, approach is that the expressed aim of weakening or eliminating the enemy has routinely run aground on military actions that predictably create more enemies: the violence inflicted as part of a counter-insurgency or counter-terror operation may have the effect of creating new rebels or new ‘terrorists’, particularly if the violence is not carefully ‘targeted’ at those that are themselves perpetrating violence³⁶ (and any associated sanctions impacting civilians may also have this effect). Relatively indiscriminate actions – whether outright violence or sanctions – are especially likely to stoke anger and create poverty, feeding into further violence. Thus actions with the expressed aim of reducing ‘terrorism’ have frequently stoked grievances that can feed into *additional* ‘terrorism’. In a civil war, it also reduces the incentive for civilians to *avoid* joining the rebels, since they may be targeted by the counter-insurgency whether or not they are rebels.³⁷ Insofar as individuals or states are picked on because they are weak and not very well armed,³⁸ the incentive to arm oneself (and thereby perhaps avoid attack) is going to be significant.³⁹

Although toppling rogue regimes has been presented as a contribution to reducing ‘terrorism’, the connection between some of these regimes and ‘terrorism’ has been tenuous or non-existent. Famously, Saddam Hussein in Iraq had no known link to al Qaeda, and therefore it was not clear how the invasion of Iraq (a key part of the US-led international response to 9/11) was going to contribute to counter-terrorism. At the same time, the attack does seem to have inflamed anger among many Muslims. At the extreme, Mohammed Siddique Khan, the leader of the July 2007 London bomb attacks, said in a pre-recorded video that the bombers were retaliating against Britain’s role in the invasion of Iraq. A number of police officials and academic studies have plausibly linked military interventions with increased anger among many Muslims and with a heightened threat of ‘terror’ attacks.⁴⁰

A pertinent (and often overlooked) consideration when weighing options in the face of ‘terrorism’ and insurgency is that rebels or ‘terrorists’ may themselves court a violent reaction, hoping that this will win them recruits. Bruce Riedel (a CIA officer from 1977 to 2006) noted, “Prompting America to invade Afghanistan was exactly what Osama bin Laden was hoping for on September 11th. His son has told us in retrospect, ‘my father’s dream was to get America to invade Afghanistan.’”⁴¹ The counterproductive nature of the violent backlash against ‘terrorism’ is underlined when we remember that ‘terror’ attacks have tended to produce popular revulsion – for example, within countries in the Middle East – even among those who might share some of the grievances of the ‘terrorists’. Fawaz Gerges shows how, in the face of the natural and widespread popular revulsion against acts of terror by extreme Islamist groups (most of them against fellow Muslims), al Qaeda turned to ‘the far enemy’ (the United States) in an apparent attempt to provoke more repression and reverse the dwindling popular support for the ‘terrorists.’⁴² Such popular revulsion was also manifest, incidentally, when many Iraqis turned away from ‘al Qaeda in Iraq’ during the US-supported ‘Awakening’ movement from 2007.⁴³

When it comes to counter-insurgency, it is important to note that repression against civilians is not *always* counterproductive from the point of view of authorities seeking to suppress rebellion. A dictator may find that indiscriminate violence preserves his rule, and if a rebel movement is for some reason too weak to pose a realistic alternative to the government, then there may be little incentive to join a rebellion even during

³⁶ Civilians may die as a result of ‘collateral damage’ from military strikes, or they may be intentionally targeted (see, for example, Slim, 2007).

³⁷ Kalyvas, 2004.

³⁸ Cf. Girard, 1977; Roy, 2004.

³⁹ E.g. Keen, 2006.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Bergen and Cruickshank; also Dodd.

⁴¹ BBC2, Afghanistan: War Without End.

⁴² Gerges, 2005.

⁴³ See, for example, Said, 2011.

a very vicious and indiscriminate counter-insurgency.⁴⁴ Frances Stewart and her colleagues observe that, “highly repressive regimes can prevent conflict”,⁴⁵ and they note that the harsh repression of Indonesian President Suharto was quite successful in preventing communal conflict in much of the country after he came to power in 1966.⁴⁶ But the army behind Suharto’s rise to power was also the army that played a leading role in the killing of perhaps 300–500,000 people in ‘anti-communist’ massacres in late 1965 and early 1966, a period of covert US support to the Indonesian army.⁴⁷

It is also important to note, however, that even small rebellions have often been turned into big ones by large-scale government repression. In Indonesia, for example, a harsh official response to separatist conflicts tended to provoke further rebellion, sometimes after a delay. This was the case when a vicious Indonesian armed forces’ response to the original, small-scale Acehese rebellion in 1976 increased support for the separatist movement when it re-emerged.⁴⁸

Part of the problem with the idea that intense violence can deter people from joining the rebels is that people do not simply make a rational calculation about the likely costs and benefits of resorting to violence or rebellion. The experience of being attacked creates anger that can directly inflame rebellion. Humiliation has also been shown to be an important cause of subsequent violence.⁴⁹ The mass bombing of North Vietnam by US forces was designed to deter Hanoi’s support for the Viet Cong, but in the event it seems to have hardened the resolve of Hanoi, cementing its support for the Viet Cong.⁵⁰ There is also evidence that the infliction of massive US firepower, which drove large numbers of refugees into squalid camps, had the effect of cementing civilians’ disaffection in relation to the South Vietnamese government while driving many to support the rebel National Liberation Front.⁵¹

In Vietnam, the American forces aimed to kill communist rebels faster than replacements could be sent by Hanoi in the north.⁵² But the strategy of bombing and shelling the countryside proved largely self-defeating. It was actually creating additional Viet Cong, particularly since the farmers who were being attacked by the US actually had an alternative army (backed by an alternative government) that was offering them revenge.⁵³ The National Liberation Front rebels were addressing some real grievances among the Vietnamese peasantry and large amounts of US propaganda leaflets were unable to undo these ties.⁵⁴

Heavy-handed responses to rebel violence also fuelled rebellion in neighbouring Cambodia, where around 100,000 bombs were dropped. The carpet-bombing of Cambodia by American B52s was described, in Ben Kiernan’s study *The Pol Pot Regime*, as “probably the most important single factor in Pol Pot’s rise”.⁵⁵ The Khmer Rouge highlighted the bombing in their propaganda and won recruits as a result of the bombing.

More recently, the use of drones (for example, in Yemen and Pakistan, as discussed further below) has fuelled local anger.

In addition to the effects of anger, indiscriminate violence also alters *incentives* in ways that can feed rebellions, as noted. At the extreme, as Kalyvas notes, if everyone is being

44 Kalyvas, 2004.

45 Stewart, Brown, and Langer, 2008, 295.

46 *Ibid.*

47 Easter, 2005.

48 Stewart, Brown and Langer, 2008; 295.

49 See, notably, Gilligan, 1999, 2003.

50 Schultz, 1978, 119.

51 *Ibid.*, 114, 121

52 See e.g. Faludi, 1999, 331–2; see also Bourke, 1999, 217; Keen, 2012; Appy, 1993; Sorley, 2011.

53 Sheehan, 1990; Bilton and Sim, 1993.

54 Hunt, 2010, 36.

55 Kiernan, 1996, 16; see also Shawcross, 1980.

targeted by counter-insurgency forces irrespective of whether they are a rebel or not, what then is the incentive for *not* joining a rebellion?⁵⁶

Examples where harsh counter-insurgency measures have fuelled rebellion are legion. A careful study by Bruce Berman of the so-called ‘Mau Mau Emergency’ in British-ruled Kenya in the early 1950s concluded that the rebellion was strongly fuelled by government emergency measures, including the attempt to use ‘development’ and forced relocation as instruments of counter-insurgency.⁵⁷

In the context of the Cold War, heavy-handed tactics in Latin America seem similarly to have contributed to rebellions. In El Salvador, the wave of state-sponsored terror in 1979–81, ostensibly to defeat the rebels, actually increased the rebels’ power as they drew on a pool of activists motivated by state abuses.⁵⁸ In Guatemala’s civil war, Shelton Davis notes that indigenous groups joined the guerrillas more in search of defence against the army and death squads than from ideological motives, while David Stoll observed:

*The army’s violence backfired. Instead of suppressing the guerrillas, it multiplied a small band of outsiders into a liberation army, mostly Indians drawn from local communities.*⁵⁹

Guatemalan rebel leaders reported that government soldiers were often more interested in attacking civilians than armed rebels.⁶⁰

From 1983–1991, the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in what was then southern Sudan derived important logistical and military support from the Communist Ethiopian government, and was perceived as threatening the stability of the Western-backed government in Khartoum. Yet violence against southern and Nuba civilians in areas not aligned to the rebels played a role in their growing involvement in the war – swelling support for the then-rebel SPLA even in previously neutral areas.⁶¹ The tendency for aggression by Khartoum to fuel rebellion was echoed some 18 years later. In 2004, the International Crisis Group said of the crisis in Sudan’s western region of Darfur: “The government’s heavy-handed counter-insurgency campaign has facilitated a major recruiting drive for the rebels, as suggested by the scarcity of young men in the refugee and IDP [internally displaced people] camps.”⁶²

The Russian government’s aggressive intervention in Chechnya in December 1994 appears to have swelled Chechen rebel numbers.⁶³ In Uganda in the late 1990s, the government alienated civilians by forcing them into camps, arguing that it would be easier to provide security, humanitarian assistance and social services to civilians in the camps, rather than in their scattered villages. However, the camps duly became centres for rebel and militia recruitment, and were the site of massacres and abductions due to failure to provide adequate protection.⁶⁴

In Yemen, it has been argued that US air strikes against alleged terrorist leaders have often been counterproductive in the propaganda war. Sarah Phillips observed, “AQAP’s political appeal is... heightened by the US air-strikes that help the group to paint the Yemeni regime as an American puppet.”⁶⁵ Drone strikes hold out the prospect of eliminating terrorists but may simultaneously produce support for terrorism.⁶⁶

In a related process, Harry Verhoeven observed of Somalia: “the decision by the White House to place Al-Shabaab [the armed Islamist group] on the list of terrorist

⁵⁶ Kalyvas, 2004.

⁵⁷ Berman, 1976.

⁵⁸ Peceny and Stanley.

⁵⁹ Stoll, 1992 (first published 1988), 103.

⁶⁰ Keen, 2003.

⁶¹ Keen, 1994; see also Baas, 2012.

⁶² International Crisis Group, 2004.

⁶³ Lieven, 1999, 2005.

⁶⁴ Dolan, 2009.

⁶⁵ Phillips, 2011, 107.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Phillips, 2011.

organisations [in March 2008] has further radicalised Somalia's Islamist youth."⁶⁷ The killing of al-Shabaab leader Aden Hashi Ayro in May 2008 prompted al-Shabaab to declare aid organisations legitimate targets.⁶⁸ Such strikes have also, according to retired US Colonel Thomas Dempsey, added to mistrust of the US in Africa beyond Somalia.⁶⁹

In the Philippines, 9/11 led to an intensification of Manila's counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism efforts in Muslim areas of Mindanao and parts of the Sulu Archipelago.⁷⁰ A terrorist bombing campaign ensued, which was then used to justify the original intensification of counter-insurgency.⁷¹

In Falluja, Iraq, more than 600 people, many of them women and children, died after the US called in air strikes in the wake of the lynching of four American security contractors in April 2004. The assault ended up fuelling the insurgency more generally. A further assault on Falluja was carried out seven months later, and this was also unsuccessful in defeating the insurgency.⁷²

Counterproductive counter-insurgency has been in evidence in Afghanistan too. Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff, 2006–2009, commented on the war in Afghanistan: "A lot of the people we were killing were effectively the farmers that had AK47s put in their hands by the Taliban leadership... We were conscious that really with everyone we killed, we were probably actually fuelling the insurgency."⁷³ Somewhat similarly, Major General Michael Flynn, the United States' deputy chief of staff for intelligence in Afghanistan, noted in 2010 that, in part because of local codes of revenge in Pashtun areas:

*... merely killing insurgents usually serves to multiply enemies rather than subtract them... The Soviets experienced this reality in the 1980s, when despite killing hundreds of thousands of Afghans, they faced a larger insurgency near the end of the war than they did at the beginning.*⁷⁴

Of course, foreign support for the mujahideen was also crucial in sustaining that particular insurgency.

We have noted already that groups using violence for political ends may actually try to *provoke* repression. In their study of Afghanistan, Johnson and Mason observed in 2007: "At the strategic level, the Taliban is fighting a classic 'war of the flea', largely along the same lines used by the mujahideen twenty years ago against the Soviets, including fighting in villages to deliberately provoke air strikes and collateral damage."⁷⁵ Taliban rebels have been aware of the cultural importance attached to revenge in some local codes of honour, and this awareness has helped them to build support by provoking violence that local people will feel obligated to avenge.⁷⁶

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels, though originally motivated by a desire to stand up to government repression, may have also evolved a significant interest in *provoking* repression. Commenting in December 2009 on the overall course of the war in Sri Lanka, one informative report by University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), a human rights organisation in the north, noted:

... the LTTE's [Tamil Tiger] repression of its own population succeeded best when the violence of the State was at its worst. The LTTE understood this and it formed a part of its calculations in breaking off every peace process and restarting war. Under heightened

⁶⁷ Verhoeven, 2009, 417; see also Bradbury 2010; Menkhaus, 2010.

⁶⁸ Menkhaus, 2010, S332.

⁶⁹ Dempsey, 2008, 2.

⁷⁰ Hedman, 2009, 4.

⁷¹ Hedman, 2009.

⁷² Hills 2006; Dodge, 2004, 2007, 2009.

⁷³ BBC2, Afghanistan: War Without End.

⁷⁴ Flynn, Pottinger and Batchelor, 2010, 8.

⁷⁵ Johnson and Mason, 2007, 87.

⁷⁶ Johnson and Mason, 2007, 87; Flynn, Pottinger and Batchelor, 2010,8).

levels of violence, the people were on the move or were too busy trying to keep their families safe and fed. Whenever the violence diminished, people talked more to each other and began to wonder why they accepted this level of repression that often involves surrendering their children to the LTTE for cannon fodder. If governments had understood this, they would have had some ready political options for dealing with the LTTE. But they were so undisciplined that whenever war began, they lost all control and rushed headlong into indiscriminate violence [...].⁷⁷

Where an aggressive military response has had some effect in weakening rebels, the long-term effects are often troubling. Turkey and Sri Lanka illustrate the point. In Turkey, the forcible evacuation of Kurdish villages reportedly displaced somewhere between one and four million Kurds, with displacement peaking in the early 1990s.⁷⁸ In some ways, this weakened the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* – PKK); even so, the displacement of people into shanty towns eventually had the effect of turning the PKK into a largely urban organisation, and the PKK remained the dominant influence in Kurdish politics.⁷⁹

In Sri Lanka, the government's military victories in the east in 2008⁸⁰ and the north in 2009 may well have stored up trouble for the future. Underlying grievances remain strong and have been fuelled by violence against Muslims as well as violence against Tamils. A Human Rights Watch report noted in May 2013: "Respect for basic rights and liberties has declined in Sri Lanka in the four years since the government defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)." The report also noted that "The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) continues to be used to detain individuals for long periods without charge or trial."⁸¹ Meanwhile, parts of the Tamil diaspora remain aggrieved and continue to have the capacity to support further rebellion, if one should materialise.

Very often civilians have not only been subject to violence but also deprived of relief because of their association with a rebel or militia group. This in itself can feed support for the group.⁸² Somalia shows some of the dangers here. In December 2009, the World Food Programme (WFP) suspended aid to south-central Somalia.⁸³ The agency cited insecurity but it had also been under strong pressure from the US government, a major donor, not to provide relief that could find its way into the hands of 'terrorists'.⁸⁴ Starting in the middle of 2009, US funding for relief to famine-affected areas in al-Shabaab-held territory was considerably reduced because of laws designed to prevent relief from falling into the hands of 'terrorists'. Ken Menkhaus went so far as to say that relief to areas of rebel strength was effectively criminalised.⁸⁵ At the same time, the perception that aid was being subordinated to geopolitics reinforced the rebels' hostility to aid operations.⁸⁶ While it is clear that civilians were deprived of relief as a result of these processes, the relationship between relief and war is undoubtedly complex, and it is important to add that there were ways in which aid was *indeed* feeding into violent processes (as discussed in more detail in relation to drawback 5 below). All this underlines the dangers in assuming that civilians can be protected in the midst of counter-terror operations, and casts further doubt on the idea that aid can 'win hearts and minds' in the context of a complex counter-insurgency.

In Afghanistan, there was pressure on aid agencies to support the Coalition and national government's military agenda, and the lack of assistance to Taliban areas made it extremely difficult to convince the rebel Taliban that aid workers were neutral

⁷⁷ University Teachers for Human Rights, 2009, 58.

⁷⁸ The figure of three million is used by Human Rights Watch (1994), Zaman A (1999) and Minority Rights Group International (2008). Ahmed A (2012), states that the figure is in the region of one to four million.

⁷⁹ Bacik, Coskun, 2011.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Keen, 2009b.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, 2013.

⁸² International Crisis Group, 2013.

⁸³ Menkhaus, 2010; Bradbury, 2010.

⁸⁴ Menkhaus, 2010; Bradbury, 2010.

⁸⁵ Menkhaus, 2010.

⁸⁶ Mackintosh and Duplat, 2013, 73–86.

and responding objectively to humanitarian need.⁸⁷ Insofar as NGOs presented their efforts as part of a broader political or peacemaking project, this effect was exacerbated.⁸⁸ While the use of aid to ‘win hearts and minds’ may sound relatively benign, there are many cases where this has been attempted in civil wars and has resulted in the creation and/or worsening of famine.⁸⁹ Where people see themselves as being deprived of aid because of their association with a disfavoured rebel group or militia, moreover, this is likely to anger them and encourage them to rebel.

Even intra-household violence can be powerfully fuelled by an abusive counter-insurgency. For example, in northern Uganda from the mid-1990s, males displaced by counter-insurgency into camps were unable to meet their traditional masculine role as ‘provider’. The effects of the counter-insurgency may have been compounded by the tendency for humanitarian agencies to distribute assistance via women and children, and in a context of large-scale disempowerment many men turned to more aggressive definitions of masculinity (including not only joining the rebels or the counter-insurgency but also perpetrating domestic violence).⁹⁰

Drawback 5: Aid in support of stabilisation is often ineffective

A fifth problem with the mainstream approach centres on the provision of aid and the ‘statebuilding’ aspect: specifically, especially in contexts in which aid donors are simultaneously engaged in military/intelligence activity, aid that is intended to ‘win hearts and minds’ tends to be ineffective; it has in a number of cases alienated people, helping to *lose* hearts and minds; and it may even *contribute* to insecurity in various ways. Importantly, aid can encourage corruption within a regime that is conducting counter-insurgency, perhaps alienating the population further from the regime in question. Aid operations designed to ‘win hearts and minds’ may also be seen as biased in favour of the government, prompting increased anger among rebels and among civilians who are deprived of assistance. In circumstances where foreign aid is supporting an abusive government, the contention that ‘stabilisation’ is designed to support the security of people within a conflict-affected country (rather than, say, *Western* security) will be particularly difficult to sustain.

Particularly when influential actors are pointing to one group (perhaps a rogue rebel group) as the source of everything bad, it is important to remember that sources of violence are typically quite diverse. A good deal of the violence against civilians within a particular society may originate from state structures, which may include foreign states supporting insurgency or counter-insurgency. Where these state structures (whether within or beyond the conflict-affected country’s borders) are shored up by international support, this can reinforce violence in important ways.

There are many examples of the injection of aid as part of stabilisation or counter-insurgency to ‘win hearts and minds’. In both the Vietnam War and during the war in Afghanistan in the 2000s, aid was seen as something that could ‘rescue’ a floundering or stalling counter-insurgency.

Of course, aid can in theory be used to exert leverage over an abusive government. But such leverage has repeatedly been neutralised (just as it was in Vietnam) when donors proclaim that they (and the government of the conflict-affected country) are engaged in a struggle against an ‘evil’ enemy.⁹¹ Although stabilisation adds new elements to the mix, the modern term ‘stabilisation’ has tended to suggest that we are dealing with a new and innovative enterprise, thereby marginalising experience from earlier counter-insurgency operations (notably Vietnam) which ought to have been salutary.⁹²

⁸⁷ Donini, 2010.

⁸⁸ Donini, 2010; Rieff 2010.

⁸⁹ Keen, 1994; Human Rights Watch (1991).

⁹⁰ Dolan, 2009; see also Dolan, 2010.

⁹¹ See, in particular, Byman 2006.

⁹² Barakat, Deely and Zyck 2010.

Violent suppression of rebels is likely to be very difficult where the state is itself corrupt and exploitative, and pumping large amounts of foreign funding into such a state is unlikely to help. In fact, the more foreign support is given for a corrupt, abusive or unpopular regime's counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism operations, the more the corruption, abuse and unpopularity of the recipient government are likely to be reinforced.

During the Vietnam War, while the US focused on 'eliminating the enemy' and reducing the numbers of Viet Cong (principally by killing them more quickly than new recruits were acquired),⁹³ the processes *producing* the enemy were largely ignored (and a major contributor to rebel recruitment was 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'.⁹⁴ In fact, Vietnam's flourishing war economy was actually fuelled in large part by US aid.⁹⁵ In the event, the attempt to use aid to rescue a failing counter-insurgency was unsuccessful and the provision of relief rice could not begin to compensate communities afflicted by an aggressive bombing campaign. US Colonel William Corson noted, "The absurdity of the situation lies in the fact that while we champion the cause of democracy as the justification of our presence in Vietnam, we overtly support a government whose actions completely deny this *raison d'être*."⁹⁶ Meanwhile, corruption at the top of the South Vietnamese army was lessening the troops' willingness to confront the enemy and making them more prone to abusing civilians.⁹⁷

After the overthrow of the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2001, the 'political settlement' was very profoundly shaped by international actors, and those interests linked to the Taliban were substantially excluded. Perhaps a huge and speedy international effort at statebuilding – and a tolerance of the more 'moderate' interests with links to the Taliban – might have stabilised this arrangement. Many diplomats on the ground favoured negotiation with elements of the Taliban.⁹⁸ But the option of negotiating with Taliban elements was effectively ruled out. It was certainly extremely difficult to negotiate – or to be seen to be negotiating – with a group that had been publicly labelled as 'terrorist'⁹⁹ and that had indeed been responsible for many massacres and much forcible displacement as well as widespread oppression of women during its rule; nor would it have been politically feasible to bring quickly back into power a group (the Taliban) that had just been ejected from power by international military action. But other groups and individuals with a record of abusing human rights were brought into government, while war was waged against the Taliban. In the event, a major international military effort did not succeed in defeating the Taliban rebels, even when it was combined with a major aid effort.¹⁰⁰

As in Vietnam, a failing counter-insurgency led to increased faith in aid as a way of 'rescuing' counter-insurgency. As it became more and more clear that the war against the Taliban was faltering, a huge increase in aid spending was put in place. In the summer of 2009, the US government indicated that it planned nearly to double (to \$1.2 billion) the main fund for projects that military commanders use to 'win hearts and minds' in Afghanistan.¹⁰¹ But this aid seems to have been ineffective in reducing

⁹³ A 1966 internal memorandum, approved by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, announced a plan to "Attrit (sic) by year's end, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces at a rate as high as their capability to put men into the field." (Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, 400). See also Faludi, 1999, 331–2; also Bourke, 1999, 217; Keen 2012; Appy 1993; Sorley 2011.

⁹⁴ Hunt, 2010, 36; Corson, 1968.

⁹⁵ Corson, 1968.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ See, for example, Barakat, Deely and Zyck, 2010.

⁹⁹ The US has generally opposed negotiation with senior Taliban leaders, but increasingly favoured some 'reintegration' of lower-level fighters.

¹⁰⁰ Kilcullen, 2009; Egnell, 2011; Ledwidge, 2011; Gordon, 2011; Wilder 2009.

¹⁰¹ Wilder, 2009, 1.

the power of the Taliban. Indeed, research by Andrew Wilder suggested that spending too much too quickly was actively counterproductive. After he and his team carried out more than 400 interviews in Afghanistan, Wilder noted:

*While many projects have clearly had important humanitarian and development benefits, we have found little evidence that aid projects are ‘winning hearts and minds’, reducing conflict and violence, or having other significant counterinsurgency benefits. In fact, our research shows just the opposite. Instead of winning hearts and minds, Afghan perceptions of aid and aid actors are overwhelmingly negative. And instead of contributing to stability, in many cases aid is contributing to conflict and instability.*¹⁰²

Along with the resources and logistics linked to NATO’s military campaign, to a significant extent the aid effort appears to have fuelled corruption and Afghanistan’s war economy more generally. The Taliban was able to paint itself as a less corrupt alternative to a regime in which unpopular and acquisitive warlords were extremely influential. Problems with reinforcing corruption within a regime are likely to be exacerbated when the aid is seen as another manifestation of interference by foreign powers with their own geopolitical priorities, and this has certainly been the case in Afghanistan.

Wilder went on to note that uneven distribution of aid had fuelled local jealousies and pushed some excluded groups into the arms of the Taliban.¹⁰³ In their 2010 assessment of aid to Afghanistan, Jonathan Goodhand and Mark Sedra referred to “narcissistic beliefs in the transformative potential of aid”.¹⁰⁴ The belief that remedying poverty will reduce insurgency is simplistic, they suggested, pointing out that many of the poorest areas of Afghanistan (like central Afghanistan) have been relatively unaffected by insurgency.¹⁰⁵

The case of Afghanistan also brings home a basic practical problem with the idea of using aid to ‘win hearts and minds’: carrying out a successful development programme, often difficult enough in peacetime, is likely to be extremely difficult in wartime. Drawing on their experience in Afghanistan, Goodhand and Sedra observe, “To a great extent, the nature of the political settlement and the security environment are what determine the possibilities for development rather than vice versa – to pretend otherwise is to put the development cart before the political horse.”¹⁰⁶ Part of the problem with ‘stabilisation’ in Afghanistan (as also in Iraq) was the international reluctance to recognise the *existence* of a war, with the country having been labelled prematurely as ‘post-conflict’.

A further problem is that, insofar as aid is targeted to areas with a particular problem of violence, it may send a signal that ‘violence pays.’ The summary of a major conference at the UK’s Wilton Park in March 2010 observed:

*There is a definite perception that donor money is following the violence and drugs to the South and South-West, creating a form of ‘peace penalty’ for those living in other parts of the country. It was felt that this was exacerbated by the resource-strained PRTs [Provincial Reconstruction Teams] in those areas.*¹⁰⁷

Another negative effect of channelling aid towards a regime conducting counter-insurgency is that it may give the regime little incentive to cultivate popular support or even to extend its tax base. Aid was also seen by many Afghans as reinforcing a long-established pattern in which elites relied on outside support rather than cultivating popular support.¹⁰⁸ In Yemen, supporting such a ‘counter-insurgency’ with large-scale foreign aid has also created incentive problems: in particular, Sarah Phillips

¹⁰² Wilder, 2009; see also Thompson, 2010.

¹⁰³ Wilder, 2009, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Goodhand and Sedra, 2010, 579.

¹⁰⁵ Goodhand and Sedra, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Goodhand and Sedra, 2010, 595.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, 2010, 13.

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, 2010.

argues that the support seems to have reduced the local elite's need to be responsive to their own constituents and has instead contributed to competition between various elite factions.¹⁰⁹ Counter-insurgency operations there have also been impeded by the (externally supported) corruption of the Yemeni government.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, the corruption of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) following the demise of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) regime in Somalia in 2006 was also a boon for al-Shabaab and was subject to relatively little criticism from international donors supporting that TFG government in the context of the threat posed by links between al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda which was much highlighted at the time.¹¹¹

**Drawback 6:
Aid often ends up
fuelling insecurity
or strengthening
insurgents**

Linked to the drawback that aid that accompanies military action or is delivered in support of stabilisation can be ineffective is the observation that aid can serve to increase, rather than diminish, insecurity: aid can both encourage violent behaviour on the part of a regime that is conducting a counter-insurgency, and contribute to the resources of other violent groups, with obvious dangers.¹¹²

There is a long history of aid inciting violence. In the 1980s the Ethiopian government was able to use aid to lure people to locations from which they were forcibly resettled, often to work on government farms.¹¹³ More recently in Afghanistan, the Taliban rebels have attacked reconstruction projects, including those working on these projects.¹¹⁴ They have also targeted schools, teachers, health centres and humanitarian workers.¹¹⁵ Associating oneself with government/donor development projects in Afghanistan could be extremely dangerous – another dynamic that was manifest in the Vietnam War. In Helmand, Afghanistan, British forces tried to turn parts of the province into 'beacons of development' that would entice other parts into a political settlement with the government authorities. A similar plan seems to have been somewhat successful during counter-insurgency operations in the 1948–1960 Malaya Emergency. But the colonial administration in Malaya was far more substantial than the thin foreign administrative presence in Afghanistan.¹¹⁶ In areas of Afghanistan where the Taliban had been incompletely 'cleared', there was considerable reluctance to engage with reconstruction, with fear playing a key role.¹¹⁷

Aid underpinned insecurity in diverse ways in Afghanistan, and a key mechanism was bolstering the power of unsavoury elements. Many of the Afghan state's shortcomings reflected the power and significant autonomy of warlords who were brought into the state administration in 2001 – essentially as a reward for their role in ousting the Taliban.¹¹⁸ Yet many of the returning warlords had earlier been ousted by the Taliban precisely because of their predatory activities.¹¹⁹ Warlords also impeded reconstruction – not least by withholding revenues from the central treasury.¹²⁰ Many made money from the drugs trade and had a considerable degree of immunity from being fired or prosecuted.¹²¹ Meanwhile, corruption in the police was such that people would pay as much as US\$100,000 to become a police chief in a poppy-growing district.¹²² Significantly, reform of the justice and courts system – which might have helped stem such venality – was relatively neglected in international interventions.¹²³

¹⁰⁹ Compare de Waal, 1999.

¹¹⁰ Phillips, 2011.

¹¹¹ International Crisis Group, 2011b, 2; Menkhaus, 2010, 2011; Leduc, and Neuman, 2011.

¹¹² Of course, foreign funding for rebel groups (whether intended or not) may play a part in social change, but there are also dangers in fuelling violence and entrenching enduring 'war systems' (as in Afghanistan).

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch, 1991.

¹¹⁴ Goodhand and Sedra, 2010; Gordon, 2011.

¹¹⁵ Goodhand and Sedra, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Egnell, 2011.

¹¹⁷ Gordon, 2011.

¹¹⁸ Goodhand and Sedra, 2010; Goodhand, 2008; Giustozzi.

¹¹⁹ Gordon, 2011.

¹²⁰ Chayes, 2003.

¹²¹ See, for example, Rashid, 2007.

¹²² Rubin, 2007.

¹²³ Goodhand and Sedra, 2010.

The way rebellion has been fed by corruption was brought out in a thorough 2010 study of Kandahar district by Carl Forsberg:

The local population sees the government as an exclusive oligarchy devoted to its own enrichment and closely tied to the international coalition. Anti-governmental sentiments are exploited and aggravated by the Taliban. Many of the local powerbrokers who are excluded from [Ahmed] Wali Karzai's network [the brother of the President] see the Taliban insurgency as the only viable means of political opposition.¹²⁴

The major local warlords, including Wali Karzai, competed for the loyalty of militia commanders using lucrative contracts (mostly security contracts) from ISAF [the International Security Assistance Force] as a bargaining counter.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, 'state-building' often took the form of integrating militias into the police, with some of the militiamen subsequently engaging in crime and with local warlords anxious to keep the police force weak – not least to sustain ISAF's reliance on private militias for security.¹²⁶ In Afghanistan as in many countries, a significant 'shadow state' has lurked on the fringes of state institutions (including those intended to provide security), simultaneously undermining them and drawing strength and resources from them.¹²⁷

A well-funded counter-insurgency effort may also provide assistance to rebels, wittingly or not, in the form of funding. This has again been clear in Afghanistan. Andrew Wilder and his Tufts University research team heard many reports of the Taliban "being paid by donor-funded contractors to provide security (or not to create insecurity), especially for their road-building projects."¹²⁸ UN Special Representative Peter Galbraith noted:

The U.S. spends hundreds of millions on Afghan security companies who use the proceeds to pay off the Taliban not to attack, or, in some cases, to stage attacks so as to enable the local warlord (a.k.a. security contractor) to hire more men at higher prices.¹²⁹

A 2010 US House of Representatives report went so far as to state that many of the Taliban attacks on security firms "are really negotiations over the fee".¹³⁰ Some warlords can secure a lot of immunity from attacks for their trucks.¹³¹ In 2011, an investigative team assembled by General David Petraeus estimated that some US\$360 million provided by US taxpayers had ended up with the Taliban, criminals and powerbrokers with ties to both.¹³²

Stabilisation, in this context, is very far from being straightforward and can easily feed the problems it claims to be addressing. Meanwhile, as in Vietnam, the leverage that the international community does possess has rarely been put to use. Corruption, for example, has been tolerated – not least because of a lack of unity among the various elements of the coalition forces.¹³³

Somalia, a prime context in which collective amnesia appears to have led international actors to repeat the mistakes of the past, provides several more cautionary tales. Here, aid has been diverted on a staggering scale for many years – enriching and empowering the violent actors who have precipitated the successive crises that aid has been intended to relieve. For example, the UN's Monitoring Group on Somalia reported to the UN Security Council in 2010:

The war economy is... an impediment to humanitarian assistance efforts. Some humanitarian resources, notably food aid, have been diverted to military uses. A handful

¹²⁴ Forsberg, 2010, 7; even among those sub-tribes that have provided the dominant political and commercial networks, large elements remain excluded (Forsberg).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Reno, 1995; see also Keen, 1994, 2005.

¹²⁸ Wilder, 2009, 1.

¹²⁹ Galbraith, 2010.

¹³⁰ Tierney, 2010, 34–5.

¹³¹ For example, Watan Risk Management (Tierney).

¹³² Riechmann and Lardner, 2011.

¹³³ Forsberg, 2010.

of Somali contractors for aid agencies have formed a cartel and become important power-brokers – some of whom channel their profits or the aid itself directly to armed opposition groups.¹³⁴

In another report on Somalia, Bryden summarises how “Past efforts to rebuild Somalia’s security forces have been at best disappointing, at worst disastrous”:

Between 1993 and 1995, the United Nations Mission in Somalia undertook a massive effort to rebuild the Somali police force and judicial system. In addition to training and salaries, the United Nations provided thousands of weapons and hundreds of pick-up trucks and high-frequency radios. But when the mission was withdrawn in 1995, the entire establishment collapsed, with most of the equipment ending up in the hands of local militias. The next serious effort to rebuild Somali security forces followed the establishment of the transitional federal government (TFG) in 2004. Once again the United Nations took the lead in reviving the Somali police force, but the program was soon mired in controversy as police units trained and paid by the United Nations acquired a paramilitary character, engaging in counterinsurgency operations and – like the armed forces – perpetrating abuses against civilians. [...] Ethiopia, the TFG’s closest ally, quietly took the lead in trying to train and integrate the TFG’s army. But with the government unable to pay soldiers’ salaries – chiefly because of rampant and pervasive corruption [...] – such efforts were doomed to fail. Between 2004 and 2008, more than 14,000 soldiers trained by Ethiopia reportedly defected or deserted with their weapons and uniforms.¹³⁵

**Drawback 7:
Political settlements
can prove
unsustainable without
indefinite support**

A seventh problem with the mainstream approach, particularly where it involves backing a relatively exclusive political settlement (with large sections of the population denied effective representation), is that such settlements often prove unsustainable without ongoing external support. Thus, supporting corrupt or unrepresentative regimes may distort local political deal making – what Alex de Waal has called the ‘political marketplace’ – in ways that demand some kind of permanent international presence and/or large-scale assistance.¹³⁶ Any ‘stability’ created through such means may ultimately depend on continuing external inputs and may prove *unsustainable* for this reason. The recent history of Libya, for example, is salutary in this respect.

Even alliances that have strong positive elements may ultimately depend on a continued foreign military presence. In the case of 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,¹³⁷ while other participants looked forward to jobs in the 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.¹³⁸ Of course, al Qaeda in Iraq has been central to the rapid rise of IS.

A variant on the unsustainability of political settlements is the economic unsustainability in the absence of indefinite external support of many state structures created under the mainstream approach. The ‘political settlement’ in Afghanistan is also likely to prove extremely fragile on the withdrawal of foreign troops. Taking stock of a range of international police reform efforts, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) warns the architects of security assistance to Afghanistan that:

¹³⁴ Monitoring Group on Somalia, 2010, 7.

¹³⁵ Bryden, 2013, 9–10, citing Bryden et al, 2008, 12.

¹³⁶ Rebels and warlords may use violence, elections and economic pressures to extract the best price for their ‘loyalty’ from national governments, and a key bargaining tool is the possibility of striking some kind of bargain with neighbouring governments (de Waal, 2009).

¹³⁷ Long, 2008; Benraad, 2011.

¹³⁸ Benraad, 2011.

‘Examples abound of economically unsustainable reform. Missions have rarely considered the compatibility of new structures and mechanisms with available long-term national resources and likely financial constraints. Valid concerns remain that the high quality of training and equipment provided by the British in Sierra Leone for example, cannot be sustained once responsibility is returned to national actors.’¹³⁹

Indeed, in post-Taliban Afghanistan itself, police payrolls were established by donors at a level the government could not hope to afford for many years to come.¹⁴⁰

Such examples bring to mind the further point that while peacebuilding may require sustained efforts over a number of years before sustainable results can be said to have been achieved, large and continuing inputs of aid and/or troops cannot always be ‘sold’ to Western electorates for the long term.

**Drawback 8:
Governments often
gain from external
support and lose
interest in ending the
conflict**

During the Vietnam War, US Colonel William Corson noted, “the one thing the GVN [South Vietnamese government] seeks to avoid [is] the end of the war and the withdrawal of US forces”.¹⁴¹ He added, “The GVN’s power is based on the US presence, and since that in turn is based on the level of violence it is to their advantage to orchestrate the war at the appropriate level.”¹⁴²

We have seen that counter-insurgency forces may engage in actions that predictably create more enemies, which in itself should lead us to question their true priorities. Powerful actors also have priorities (such as making money or staying alive) that simply take time, energy and resources away from the task of ‘winning’. An eighth problem with the mainstream approach is thus that those actors who claim to be engaged in a military confrontation with an actor that has been designated a ‘spoiler’ may be much less interested in weakening their opponent than they claim.

This can apply to foreign governments as well as in-country governments, who may have little or no incentive to defeat a rebel movement whose continued existence may underpin a politically and economically useful ‘state of emergency’ – and indeed a large flow of international resources. These international resources may include not just aid but all the supplies and logistics required to sustain a foreign or international military force. External backing may also play an important role in legitimising a government that, in the absence of a ‘state of emergency’ or an existential *threat*, would be revealed as simply corrupt and self-serving.

The desire of Guatemala’s counter-insurgency forces to confront their own insurgents was very much open to question. Importantly, Guatemala’s long civil war (1960 to 1996) was not simply a fight between government troops and rebels; it also provided cover and legitimacy for violence against a broad range of political activists and human rights workers.¹⁴³ In addition, it helped – for a period – to secure international aid from the US in particular. In terms of military strength, the rebels were simply no match for the government army, but at the same time, as the Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification noted:

... the State deliberately magnified the military threat of the insurgency, a practice justified by the concept of the internal enemy. The inclusion of all opponents under one banner, democratic or otherwise, pacifist or guerrilla, legal or illegal, communist or non-communist, served to justify numerous and serious crimes ... the vast majority of the victims of the acts committed by the State were not combatants in guerrilla groups, but civilians.’¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ RUSI, 2009, 37–38.

¹⁴⁰ Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, 2007, ‘JCMB Task Force on Afghan National Police Target Strength’.

¹⁴¹ Corson, 1968, 207.

¹⁴² Corson, 1968, 208–9.

¹⁴³ Historical Clarification Commission, 1999: para 25.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, para 25.

In what was then southern Sudan (now South Sudan), attacks in the 1980s and 1990s by the Government of Sudan and its proxies on civilians were often militarily counter productive, and yet they persisted. They tended to spread rebellion to new geographical areas, and one reason for their persistence may have been the way they legitimised the exploitation of new groups of civilians under the cover of war, exploitation that included stealing cattle and gaining access to southern grazing land. There was also profiteering from grain sales and cattle purchase and, crucially, the prospect of getting access to oil, which was located in the areas subjected to greatest famine.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the rebels' links with communist Ethiopia from 1983 to 1991 helped cement Western support for Khartoum and to underpin international quietude on the abuse of civilians seen as linked to the rebels.¹⁴⁶

The case of Yemen is also instructive. While the Yemeni government has often expressed a powerful determination to destroy AQAP, the incentive to eliminate AQAP altogether is by no means clear. Ali Abdullah Saleh, Yemen's former longstanding President, was able to secure significant economic assistance from the West on the grounds that he needed to ward off the threat of AQAP.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the continued existence of AQAP gave him and his corrupt regime a pretext for intimidating both the media and a range of political opponents.¹⁴⁸ After the Yemeni government announced the killing of Abdullah al-Mehdar, he was officially described as one of the country's most wanted militants and as the suspected leader of an al Qaeda cell. But Guardian journalist Brian Whitaker commented, "The word in Yemen is that Mehdar was just a troublesome tribal figure who didn't join al-Qaida until he was dead."¹⁴⁹

Until US-Pakistan bilateral relations deteriorated in 2011 due to tensions over drone strikes and the killing of Osama Bin Laden on Pakistani soil, Pakistan, and the military in particular, had been for many years a recipient of very substantial aid from the US.¹⁵⁰ Notwithstanding tensions during 2011–2012, US aid appropriations for and military reimbursements to Pakistan exceeded \$1.5 billion in 2013.¹⁵¹ Not only has Pakistan's support been seen by the US as crucial for the war and subsequent stabilisation in Afghanistan, and for wider counter-terror efforts, but shoring up the Pakistan government against a possible take-over by Islamic militants has also been a key US priority. Pakistan is also seen as an important source of leverage over the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan's efforts to defeat the Taliban have been ambiguous at best, and the discovery of Osama Bin Laden on Pakistani soil has led some commentators to question whether Pakistan is as interested in defeating enemies of the US as it is in deterring India and limiting Indian influence in Afghanistan and Kashmir.¹⁵²

The case of Pakistan also shows how a militaristic approach to security can jeopardise attempts to reach a negotiated settlement. In November 2013, a US drone killed Hakimullah Mehsud, the chief of the Pakistani Taliban. The killing was widely seen as likely to jeopardise peace initiatives in Pakistan, and it came after a September 2013 meeting where the main Pakistani political parties had actually backed government attempts to negotiate with the Pakistani Taliban. The killing may have been motivated less by a sense of what was likely to bring greater peace to Pakistan than by the fact that Mehsud was behind a 2009 suicide bomb attack in Khost province, Afghanistan – an attack that killed seven CIA officers.¹⁵³

The case of civil war in Uganda underlines the dangers in assuming that the primary aim of counter-insurgency forces is to defeat the rebels. The Ugandan government

¹⁴⁵ Keen, 1994.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Whitaker, 2010, Phillips S, 2011b.

¹⁴⁸ Whitaker, 2010.

¹⁴⁹ Whitaker, 2010; see also Phillips, 2011.

¹⁵⁰ Bird and Marshall. 2011; Congressional Research Service, 2014.

¹⁵¹ Congressional Research Service, 2014. 'Direct Overt U.S. Aid Appropriations for and Military Reimbursements to Pakistan, FY2002–FY2015' 26 March 2014.

¹⁵² See e.g. Woodward, 2010, pp 3–4; Joscelyn, 2011; Bird and Marshall, 2011.

¹⁵³ Boone, 2013.

proved consistently unable to suppress a rebel movement, the LRA, that had perhaps 1,000–4,000 core fighters, little in the way of a coherent political ideology and ancillary forces that consisted to a large extent of children.¹⁵⁴

By 2003, there were some 800,000 displaced people in northern Uganda. Following their forced relocation into camps by state forces (including through the use of shelling), poor conditions in the camps further alienated the Acholi population of northern Uganda, and the camps encouraged military recruitment into both the government army and other armed groups, so the counter-insurgency was actually feeding the war through this mechanism. Strengthening the LRA in this way was quite an ‘achievement’ since the Acholi were usually quite hostile to the LRA – not least because it was abducting their children. Nevertheless, even a ‘failing’ counter-insurgency appears to have had important political and economic functions. According to some scholars, the forcible displacement and the threat of being branded ‘soft’ on the ‘terrorists’ had the useful political function of weakening opposition actors,¹⁵⁵ while others have documented how counter-insurgency operations provided an opportunity for some of those involved to profit in various ways.¹⁵⁶ These studies therefore concluded that such motives significantly diminished the interest of some of those involved in resolving the conflict.

Tangri and Mwenda further observe that the pressure on individuals to profit from the campaign were heightened by the high rate of HIV infection among army officers.¹⁵⁷ IMF austerity measures had encouraged the state to withdraw from free healthcare and education, and officers with HIV were under severe pressure to provide both for their own treatment and for their families in the event of incapacity or death.¹⁵⁸ This does not excuse those who were involved in wrongdoing, but it does illustrate how partners in defeating rebels can become distracted by other factors – as well as the inherent danger of trying to defeat rebellions in partnership with armies that are themselves in need of reform and development.

In a similar vein, Mareike Schomerus has described how perverse incentives such as the profits to be made from illicit logging distracted the Ugandan army from its purported goal of combating the LRA in what was then southern Sudan in the period 2006–2009. This had the effect of prolonging the conflict and multiplying the suffering of civilians.¹⁵⁹

The case of the DRC, where roughly 4 million people are estimated to have died as a result of the conflict in the decade from 1998,¹⁶⁰ offers further evidence that the pursuit of spoilers across international borders may not be quite what it seems. Uganda was again involved, originally as a supporter of the Congolese rebel (and soon to be President), Laurent Kabila. In 2003, a UN Panel of Experts found that in eastern DRC Ugandan commanders had been training and arming *both sides* in a conflict between Hema and Lendu militias.¹⁶¹ The UN Panel commented, “There are strong indications that some UPDF [Ugandan armed forces] elements may spark violence so as to remain in the region in an attempt to control the gold-rich area and the potentially coltan-rich areas of Nyaleki [in north-eastern DRC].”¹⁶² The illegal exploitation of natural resources in the DRC was enriching Ugandan military commanders as well as ‘elite’ Ugandan civilians.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁴ See discussion in Dolan, 2009.

¹⁵⁵ Dolan, 2009; Mwenda, 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Mwenda, 2010, 48; Dowden, 2010; Dolan, 2009.

¹⁵⁷ One estimate put the figure at 40 per cent.

¹⁵⁸ Mwenda, 2010; see also Tangri and Mwenda, 2003 on Ugandan forces in the DRC.

¹⁵⁹ Schomerus, 2012, “‘They forget what they came for’: Uganda’s army in Sudan, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 6, 1, 124–153.

¹⁶⁰ Most deaths due to diseases aggravated by conflict. Estimates have been contested. See: IRC, 2008; Human Security Report, 2010; Spagat M et al, 2009.

¹⁶¹ Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2001.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, para. 180.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

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*, usually avoiding battles and stalling on attempts to disarm the Hutu militias. Some Rwandan soldiers were even reported to be supplying arms to these 'genocidaires'.¹⁶⁴ Crucially, the war in the DRC was generating huge resources for the Rwandan army.¹⁶⁵

**Drawback 9:
Governments
gain from the
impunity acquired
from supporting
stabilisation**

A ninth problem with the mainstream approach is that governments participating in an international counter-terror, stabilisation or statebuilding effort may be able to derive from this participation a significant degree of impunity for abuses they carry out against their own people or even against people in countries other than the one where they are intervening. Again, this may lessen their willingness to eliminate the spoiler they claim to be combating.

In the 1990s when the US was already turning its attention to 'Islamic extremism', Sudan's government was seen as part of this emerging threat. Washington channelled assistance to the rebel SPLA through Uganda¹⁶⁶ and Khartoum retaliated by supporting the Ugandan rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).¹⁶⁷ Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni secured considerable diplomatic and economic benefits from the US (including support for the Ugandan army), in part, by presenting himself as confronting Sudanese government 'terror' as well as confronting LRA rebel 'terror' in Uganda and in Sudan.

Even where participation simply takes the form of approval, the danger of impunity may arise. When the Ugandan and Rwandan governments played a destabilising and destructive role in the DRC from 1996 to 1997, they benefited from a kind of 'favoured' status with the West. This reflected their perceived developmental 'success stories' (and ability to recover from mass violence) but signing up to Western security agendas did not hurt either. Uganda and Rwanda went on to sign up to the 'coalition of the willing' that endorsed the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The Ugandan government also seems to have acquired some immunity to international criticism from its active role in international peacekeeping efforts in Somalia, where Uganda provided peacekeeping troops – who played a significant role in combat operations – to support the US-backed Transitional Federal Government.¹⁶⁸

Even indirect participation in a counter-insurgency effort can apparently win some degree of impunity for a participating government. 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.¹⁶⁹ John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen commented:

Cooperation accelerated after the 9/11 attacks on the United States, and Sudanese intelligence officials deftly exploited this relationship to deflect US pressure on other fronts. When President Bush asked his cabinet for robust options to sanction the Sudanese government because of Darfur, the US intelligence community squashed any actions that might upset the US-Sudanese relationship.¹⁷⁰

Meanwhile, the Khartoum government, anxious to be seen as 'anti-terrorist' in the wake

¹⁶⁴ Astill, 2002; see also Panel of Experts, final report.

¹⁶⁵ Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2001.

¹⁶⁶ Dagne, 2011, 9; Hamilton, 2011.

¹⁶⁷ Schomerus, 2007, 24–25.

¹⁶⁸ See discussion in Mwenda, 2010.

¹⁶⁹ Silverstein, 2005; Prunier, 2005; Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen, 2009.

¹⁷⁰ Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen, 2003, 213.

of 9/11, gave explicit permission for Uganda's already-existing 'anti-LRA' operations in 2002.¹⁷¹

Ethiopia's willingness to confront the ICU and al-Shabaab in Somalia has meanwhile 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.¹⁷² Such processes represent a variation in a longstanding practice – dating back to the Roman era – of giving gifts or stipends to border peoples or nations, in part to secure their cooperation against more formidable foes.¹⁷³

**Drawback 10:
The mainstream
approach often
displaces or postpones
violence, rather than
resolving it**

A tenth problem with the mainstream approach is that counter-terror or stabilisation efforts may *displace* violence, whether into new geographical areas or into new time-periods. Rebels tend to flee, often across international borders, perhaps bringing violence with them. Elements within refugee populations can be a source of violence. In the longer term, the mainstream approach may leave a profound legacy of violence for the coming years – whether in the form of fighters, arms, endemic poverty, or powerful warlords.

The spatial dimension of this problem was illustrated by NATO's intervention in Afghanistan from 2001, which had the effect of boosting Taliban elements within Pakistan. Part of the reason for this was the influx into Pakistan of Taliban elements fleeing Afghanistan: as US Vice-President Joe Biden commented in September 2009, "There's a balloon effect. We squeeze it, and it pops out somewhere else."¹⁷⁴ NATO's Afghan intervention also led to drone strikes against the Taliban inside Pakistan, and these have caused many casualties among Pakistani civilians.¹⁷⁵

Many wars have also left a legacy of violence. Although this legacy is in many ways predictable, it seems rarely to have been taken into account when weighing the costs and benefits of launching such a war. Legacies that can feed into future violence include fighters, arms, poverty and warlords.¹⁷⁶

War veterans have often moved on to new conflicts. We know, for example, that 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.¹⁷⁷ Gilles Kepel observed,

*The dispersal all over the world, after 1992, of the [jihadists] formerly concentrated in Kabul and Peshawar [in Pakistan, near the Afghan border], more than anything else, explains the sudden, lightning expansion of radical Islamism in Muslim countries and the West.*¹⁷⁸

The pitfalls presented in this chapter are crucial. Of course, we need to recognise that the dilemmas faced by the architects of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding efforts in recent decades are not easily resolved: these situations are extremely complex, and typically all responses carry a high risk of serious negative ramifications of some kind. Nonetheless, rather than being overlooked (as has so often been the case), the drawbacks of the mainstream approach need to be called directly to mind when seeking to identify the best course of action in response to emerging crises. Some of the motives which appear to have made it convenient to overlook the drawbacks presented in this section are presented in the following section, which deals with motives underpinning the mainstream approach.

¹⁷¹ Schomerus, forthcoming.

¹⁷² See, for example, Human Rights Watch, 2010b.

¹⁷³ Gordon, 1949.

¹⁷⁴ Woodward, 2010, 166; The increase in military action against the Taliban has displaced insurgents into other parts of Afghanistan, notably the north (Chaudhuri and Farrell, 2011).

¹⁷⁵ Simon and Stevenson, 2009; Lieven, 2009; Ghufuran, 2009.

¹⁷⁶ On the criminal legacies of war, see for example Andreas, and Keen, 2003. Such legacies extend to the 'Cold War' too (e.g. Chledowski; Castells, 1998).

¹⁷⁷ Kepel, 2002; Hedman, 2009.

¹⁷⁸ Kepel, 2002, 298; Stern, 2004.

3

Motives underpinning the mainstream approach

“We have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations. This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence [...] is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. [...] 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’, 1961¹⁷⁹

THE INTERESTS AT PLAY within conflict-affected contexts have been discussed already, and we have seen that war itself tends to have important political and economic functions (that may even militate against the winning of a war). We have also looked at some of the vested interests of regional actors. These include economic benefits (for example those arising from Ugandan and Rwandan military intervention in the DRC) and also the aid and immunity to criticism that may be generated when regional governments participate in (or simply endorse) a security project that has been prioritised by Western governments (and the US in particular).

In the following discussion, we concentrate on interests among Western governments. Strategies of ‘stabilisation’ and ‘peacemaking’ may often reflect strategic and political concerns more profoundly than a concern with the people in conflict-affected countries, and foreign powers’ attitude to particular regimes and particular rebels is likely to be profoundly shaped by geopolitical and commercial calculations.

Securitising in the face of a common enemy

Within the context of a ‘Cold War’ that posited Communism as the enemy or a ‘war on terror’ that posits terrorism as the enemy, Western governments have made decisions about who constitutes a rogue government, who constitutes a rogue rebel group, and who (conversely) is to be supported. When such a ‘war’ is being pursued, a significant degree of blindness to the misdeeds of one’s allies seems to be built into the system, and this has been the cause of significant human suffering. Overlaid onto concerns about ‘terrorism’ have been concerns about the threat that poor nations (and mass migration) can pose to richer nations: Mark Duffield in particular has argued that Western security agendas have centred to a large extent on controlling the ‘borderlands’ of poor (and threatening) countries; within this context, aid is routinely ‘securitised’ – that is, it is pressed into the service of Western security projects.¹⁸⁰

Significantly, under new coordination arrangements established within the UK Government, cooperation between the Home Office, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the intelligence services is increasingly to be shaped by national security priorities under the tutelage of the National Security Council (NSC). An important mechanism here will be the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, to which the Home Office and intelligence services will have access, which will support strategies covering roughly 80 conflict-affected countries – strategies that are ultimately approved by the NSC.¹⁸¹

While the potential for coherence provided by such arrangements has obvious potential benefits – and in many other countries development departments are much more explicitly subordinated to diplomatic/defence objectives than in the UK – there are clear risks that the pursuit of short-term national security objectives could come to dominate the collective decision making and actions of all these departments, at the expense of a focus on long-term peace that would ultimately be more productive.

International vs human security?

The way that international security concerns can take precedence over local security is illustrated by Ethiopia’s military intervention (with US encouragement and approval) in Somalia in 2006. The ICU government that was thereby ousted had actually restored a significant degree of order to the country, gaining a degree of popular approval in a country that had grown tired of its warlords. Abdi Ismail Samatar observed that, “the vast majority of Somalis supported the UIC [ICU] and pleaded with the international community to engage them peacefully.”¹⁸² However, American security concerns led to a different outcome. The US government, which had been cooperating with several of the incumbent warlords in apprehending suspected ‘terrorists’,¹⁸³ suspected that the ICU was itself harbouring East African terrorists. There were growing fears that Somalia was becoming a haven for al Qaeda (even though most Somali experts estimated that there were no more than half a dozen ‘terror’ suspects on Somali territory). In the event, US opposition to the ICU helped radicals to gain sway over more moderate Islamists.¹⁸⁴ And Ethiopia played on US fears of a ‘new Taliban’ to secure approval for its military action to topple the ICU.¹⁸⁵

Acting tough and meeting violence with violence

At the international level, the use of force can be useful to leaders as a way of presenting their party or government as resolute in the face of a particular threat. Equally, at least part of the impetus for deposing rogue regimes and taking a hard line in relation to rebel/terror groups may be a desire to avoid the ‘shame’ that is often associated with

¹⁸⁰ Duffield, 2001.

¹⁸¹ As set out during a meeting entitled ‘The UK’s Approach to Conflict, Stability and Security: Rethinking the UK’s Approach to Instability’, held at the British Academy, London on 5 November 2014.

¹⁸² Samatar, 2011.

¹⁸³ Samatar, 2011; see also Menkhaus, 2010; and Leduc and Neuman, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ Verhoeven, 2009.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

failing to respond violently or ‘vigorously’ to violence inflicted on, or threatened against, you. As with extreme criminal violence,¹⁸⁶ there may be a radical ‘disconnect’ between the person (or people) causing the original violence and humiliation, on the one hand, and the eventual choice of victim on the other, just as there was a radical disconnect between the violence and humiliation of 9/11 and the targeting of Saddam Hussein.¹⁸⁷ Understanding the role of shame can help us to understand why the choice of targets – whether in Western-led wars or other wars – is so often indiscriminate, even to the point of making ‘winning’ much less likely.¹⁸⁸

Motives stemming from the military-industrial complex

Apart from demonstrating a robust response to security threats (and avoiding the ‘shame’ of ‘inaction’), a further major factor encouraging relatively belligerent approaches – as well as the routine use of military forces in ‘stabilisation’ operations – would seem to be the military-industrial complex within the West (and the US in particular).¹⁸⁹

In March 2011, the US-based Project on Defense Alternatives charted US defence spending since the Second World War and found peaks during the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Reagan years. With the end of the Cold War, spending drifted downwards before surging from around 2001, spurred in large part by the response to 9/11.¹⁹⁰ The Project on Defense Alternatives noted, “US defense spending is stabilizing at levels significantly above Cold War peaks (adjusted for inflation) – and far above the Cold War average in real terms.”¹⁹¹ Pentagon insiders have reported that the end of the Cold War led to a search for new enemies, with China considered by many to be the frontrunner.¹⁹²

If military spending was threatened by the end of the Cold War, there was also the prospect of large-scale redundancies among military *personnel*. Significantly, it was just as the Cold War was ending that Western militaries began to push for an increased role in international humanitarian and peacebuilding operations. Stabilisation projects have played their part here, and indeed “the concept of stabilization normalizes the role of the military and aligned security agencies into peacebuilding.”¹⁹³ A related process is emerging today: as Western forces withdraw from Afghanistan, Western militaries have been looking to become more involved in peacebuilding and conflict prevention in Afghanistan.

In examining the interests behind relatively belligerent approaches, it is also important to look at incentive structures *within* particular military establishments. Revealingly, during the Vietnam War, incentives within the US military were conducive to an aggressive strategy that few senior officials seem to have believed would actually work. As David Hunt notes, “Promotions for artillery and air-unit commanders went to those who fired off the most rounds and launched the most bombing sorties.”¹⁹⁴ Even the killing of civilians could be counted as part of the ‘score’ or ‘body count’ by which the performance of American soldiers was often assessed.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁶ Gilligan, 2003.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Girard, 1977.

¹⁸⁸ D Keen, 2012.

¹⁸⁹ Melman; Hossein-zadeh, 2006; Bacevich, 2005; Chomsky, 2006; Keen, 2006, 2012.

¹⁹⁰ Project on Defense Alternatives.

¹⁹¹ Conetta, 2010, 1.

¹⁹² Barnett, 2004.

¹⁹³ Mac Ginty, 2012, 27.

¹⁹⁴ Hunt, 2010, 38. See also Faludi, 1999.

¹⁹⁵ In his book *Vietnam at War*, Lt. General Phillip Davidson, a senior intelligence officer in Vietnam, notes, “There were often civilian casualties, either Viet Cong supporters or innocents, who ended up as a ‘body count’” (Davidson, 1991, 401). In her book *Stiffed*, Susan Faludi recalls a conversation with Sergeant Michael Bernhardt: “In every encounter with a Vietnamese, he said, you could decide whether ‘the person is a threat to the security of yourself and your unit, or not a threat. The person is a threat and you decide to kill the person and that’s a correct action... Or the person is not a threat, and you can kill the person. The trouble is, the outcome looks the same as the correct action. It doesn’t look any different, and it’s not scored any differently. And you need the score. The individual soldiers need the score, the commanding officer needs the score, the battalion commander and the division commanders need the score. So what else is going to happen?” (Faludi, 1999, 331–2). See also Bourke, 1999, 217.

Rapid rotations made it difficult for the Americans to learn from experience in Vietnam; yet these rotations were strongly encouraged by a sense that higher-ranking officers all needed their 'turn' in Vietnam if they were to get promoted.¹⁹⁶ As US Colonel William Corson put it, "The intellectual recognition of the subtleties and nuances of the Vietnam War was displaced by the emotional requirement to 'get my command – be it a company, battalion, regiment, or division.' Peacekeepers may be blessed, but war makers get promoted... Each of the military services has seen in Vietnam an opportunity to 'get theirs.'"¹⁹⁷ Rivalries between different arms of the military fed into aggression too, with each part trying to establish a 'high profile' role. In his well-known book *Sideshow*, William Shawcross noted:

The US Air Force emphasized the importance of strategic bombing over tactical bombing (close air support for ground troops) in part to guarantee its independence from the army. The Air Force had no real strategic mission in Korea but it immediately saw possibilities in Vietnam.

Noting that some senior soldiers were complaining about the lack of 'approved' targets in South Vietnam, Corson noted, "By definition an insurgent force lacks an air force. The bombing of North Vietnam is the means to allow our own air forces... to get a piece of the Vietnam action and to enhance their own positions."¹⁹⁸

Higher technology and lower casualties

If there are many interests pushing for relatively belligerent approaches, one might expect this to be counteracted, at least in part, by the *high cost* of war for the West – notably in terms of Western lives. This was certainly a factor inhibiting US willingness to go to war after Vietnam. However, the high political costs of Vietnam (with its associated draft) have been reduced to a significant extent by the adoption of a 'volunteer only' professional army and by the adoption of 'high-tech', targeted warfare techniques such as drones, and a growing range of sophisticated autonomous weapons systems.

Given the interests behind the repeated use of force and given also the desire to avoid large-scale Western casualties, the stabilisation agenda may be very well adapted to Western political requirements. It tends to embrace a reality of more-or-less constant warfare but also one in which Western casualties are low by historical standards. If asked whether their country was at war, many people in the US or UK (and perhaps many readers of this paper) might have some trouble deciding. 'Stabilisation' also seems to occupy this strange – but perhaps politically convenient – 'neverland' somewhere between peace and war.

Keeping up appearances

It is also important to note that, even where military interventions are failing to weaken the named enemy, the political costs can be reduced through information management. Given sufficiently skilled management of the information environment, even policies that feed into the *creation* of an enemy can be made to appear relatively benign and even, to a degree, successful.

This is likely to be facilitated when the aims of an intervention are periodically redefined. In Afghanistan, for example, the aims have arguably been reshaped from 'preventing terrorism' to 'reducing flows of drugs' to, more recently, achieving a 'good enough' security that will allow Western troops to withdraw. In this sense, the very proliferation of aims within 'stabilisation', a proliferation that as noted gives the term a slippery quality, is arguably functional. Whichever aim is *not* achieved can be retrospectively deemed marginal to the whole enterprise.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Sheehan, 1990, 510–511.

¹⁹⁷ Corson, 1968, 75, 80.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁹⁹ Compare Marriage, 2006.

In the context of the Vietnam War, Hannah Arendt noted in 1971:

when all signs pointed to defeat in the war of attrition, the goal was no longer one of avoiding humiliating defeat but of finding ways and means to avoid admitting it and 'save face'. Image-making as global policy – not world conquest, but victory in the battle 'to win the people's minds' – is indeed something new in the huge arsenal of human follies recorded in history.²⁰⁰

Among the most important (and generally unstated) aims in a stabilisation operation may be: managing the crisis; avoiding the appearance of outright failure; and getting to the point where you can withdraw. A relatively belligerent approach to peacemaking is likely to create pressures to withdraw, particularly as Western casualties mount, and the aim may be to get to a point (perhaps through some combination of information management and changes on the ground) where security can be deemed 'good enough' to allow a withdrawal. Roger Mac Ginty notes the increasing tendency for British and American officials to talk about 'good enough security', particularly in relation to Afghanistan and the planned withdrawal of international forces.²⁰¹ Thus, even 'security' may no longer be the aim; rather a level of security/insecurity that is deemed acceptable in the light of need to withdraw (driven largely by political pressures within Western countries). In a perceptive comment, Mac Ginty notes: "In some cases, it is as though the exit strategy has become the central plank of the mandate."²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Arendt, 1971.

²⁰¹ Mac Ginty, 2012, 22.

²⁰² Mac Ginty, 2012, 22.

4

Alternatives to the mainstream approach

THIS PAPER HAS IDENTIFIED A NUMBER OF RECURRENT PROBLEMS within the ‘mainstream’ approach (as defined in section 1 – Introduction). It is possible to argue that these problems have arisen because of situations where decision makers have already sought to identify the least bad of several problematic alternatives. However, based on the lessons presented in this paper, it would be advisable for certain courses of action to be taken only after carefully pondering the likely consequences and searching for possible viable alternatives.

Beyond seeking to learn lessons from past engagement and avoid doing harm, there are a number of important alternatives to the mainstream approach noted in this section. They include:

- Adopting a different conceptual framework and approach
- Changing international and national policies and approaches that have fuelled grievances
- Looking for opportunities to negotiate peace – and to do so in a way that balances pragmatic considerations with a determined focus on achieving inclusive and just political settlements as swiftly as possible in any given context
- Using sanctions to target particular actors
- Pursuing legal and judicial responses
- Supporting transformative governance reform efforts – to achieve inclusive, fair, responsive and accountable state–society relations
- Bringing a peacebuilding perspective to the fore in political and public debate
- Choosing not to engage if substantial harm cannot be avoided and no clear solution is evident.

It is important to remember that as well as being offered as constructive alternatives to the mainstream approach, these approaches have also sometimes been employed *alongside* it and there are even certain points of similarity and intersection. However, while stabilisation and statebuilding may in theory embrace some of these alternatives already, in practice they tend to do so with a different emphasis – in particular in terms of a focus on reinforcing the capacities of states as they are rather than prioritising wider social empowerment models that seek to help people in *transforming* states into something more inclusive and just.

Of course, it would be naïve to see any of the approaches set out below as unproblematic alternatives to the use of force. *Every* approach to peacemaking has problems. Some of these have already been noted in section 3, and others are noted where relevant below. Nevertheless, given the pressures that shape responses to security threats and humanitarian crises, and given the prevailing norms of working with and through states to achieve stability, the existence of these alternatives tends to be obscured and needs to be given greater emphasis.

An important first step towards constructive alternatives is to minimise harm, and therefore before discussing the range of possible alternatives, this section begins by recapping on a number of situations in which alternatives need to be explored much more routinely, building on the lessons identified in earlier sections.

Learning from the past

First, 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.

Second, because governance deficits are very significant in driving conflict, support for repressive and corrupt actors and regimes should 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, this reduces the pressure on them to be inclusive, accountable, responsive and fair towards 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.

Third, much greater effort is needed to question assumptions about the motives and behaviours of apparent ‘allies’ in counter-terror operations, in stabilisation and in statebuilding. The consequences of working with allies whose motives differ from one’s own have included (as shown in this paper) 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.

Fourth, this paper has also shown the need to avoid casual assumptions about aid contributing to counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding objectives. 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 if 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’, 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. There is a clear risk that development is ‘reified’ as a solution to complex political problems, even sometimes providing an alibi for not tackling fundamental political issues.

This study illustrates the tendency to overlook the way in which aid and other resources (such as military equipment) provided to allies is diverted for counter-productive 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.²⁰³

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 counterproductive: they compromise the principle of impartiality, render assistance ineffective, alienate the local population, and make aid agencies a target for attack.

Fifth, this paper argues that 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. Additionally, military force should not be used to demonstrate the resolve or power to retaliate in response to violent provocation, and indeed military responses of this kind may play into the intentions of ‘terrorists’.

Sixth, significant efforts are also needed to strengthen adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law by international actors and those they cooperate 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 efforts to minimise grievances.

Towards constructive peacebuilding alternatives

1. Conceptual framework and approach

The rest of this section articulates a range of constructive alternatives to the mainstream approach.

The first and most important shift in the pursuit of constructive alternatives 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’. To construct a strategy oriented towards lasting and positive peace it is then crucial – even and indeed 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, which provides a way to:

- **Avoid biased actor analysis.** Designating certain actors as ‘spoilers’, ‘radicals’, ‘terrorists’ or ‘extremists’ risks framing the problem as lying with those actors alone, the solution being to change their wrong-thinking (or physically eliminate them)

²⁰³ See, for example, Keen, 2014.

rather than seeking to identify what *all* relevant actors – including national, regional and international governments – can change to contribute towards lasting peace.

- **Avoid narrow analysis of the causes of a conflict.** Approaching conflict as a problem of ‘terrorism’, ‘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 ‘terrorists’ have not always turned out to be from impoverished backgrounds. But a focus on socio-economic disadvantages may also preclude a focus on other causes of conflict – including the actions of governments enjoying various degrees of immunity to international criticism. A classic example is the attempt (in the 1994 Oslo Accords and subsequently) to use development in Palestine as a means of bringing peace to Israel/Palestine without properly addressing the ability of Israel to undermine the Palestinian state and economy. Grievances created by powerful political actors at national, regional or international level 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 changed approaches not only by extremists and local actors but also by national, regional and international leaders, governments, security forces and so on.
- **Connect apparently local or national dynamics to transnational factors.** Conflict systems are not bound by national borders, and therefore peacebuilding strategies will need to factor in the way different conflicts and responses to them affect each other. In particular, 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 are indeed unjust or unlawful and which they feel powerless to change through constructive means.²⁰⁴
- **Consider how different responses to conflict will play out through the development of forward-looking scenarios.** Many interventions appear to have evolved in recent years as a reaction to short-term events and public pressure, without a long-term strategy in mind. Scenario development may be especially valuable for envisaging the negative potential consequences of acting and not acting – including the backlash that can result from the use of force – and for considering more routinely the likely consequences of different approaches in the long term.
- **Examine lessons from past engagement.** Such lessons provide a crucial guide on what to avoid and what may be successful in a given context, and can help to identify capacities for peace – that is, to identify actors that could play roles in a long-term strategy oriented towards achieving a positive and lasting peace, and how they should best be approached.
- **Facilitate diverse actors to recognise their role in a shared long-term peace-building strategy.** Conflict analysis can also play a key role in ensuring that those working on conflict from diverse perspectives come together to consider how their respective actions can contribute to or undermine a coherent strategy oriented towards lasting and positive peace. This can be extremely important, given the lessons from contexts like Somalia, where the priorities of those engaging for different purposes (peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, combating organised crime and corruption, counter-terrorism, statebuilding, justice, community empowerment, economic development, democratisation) have at times appeared wildly contradictory.²⁰⁵ The imperatives understood by each of these actors from their different perspectives need to be balanced within coherent, context-specific, and long-term peacebuilding strategies with buy-in and mutual understanding between the different actors involved.

²⁰⁴ A point illustrated in former CIA officer Michael Scheuer's book on the US and radical Islam: Scheuer M 2006, *Through our enemies' eyes* (2nd ed.) (Washington: Potomac).

²⁰⁵ See, for example, K Menkhaus, 2010.

While there are examples of attempts to establish procedures for joint analysis by diverse actors (such as the UK government's 'Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability'), at the same time concerns remain that actual strategy and funding priorities will in practice continue to be dominated by national security agendas and objectives (just as the UK's National Security Council has authority over the strategies to be supported by the UK's new £1 billion Conflict, Security and Stability Fund).²⁰⁶ Ultimately, whatever tools are used, what is most important is to orient engagement (security, diplomatic, development and economic) around the objective of working towards positive and lasting peace in effective ways.

2. Changing international and national policies and approaches that fuel grievances

If conflicts defined as stemming from 'extremism', 'radicalisation' or 'terrorism' are driven in part by moral objection to policies and actions that 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, as well as to strengthen channels through which objections of the public around the world can be channelled constructively to those responsible (without recourse to violence).

Unjust policies that need to be reconsidered in order to lessen the grievances that feed into violent political activity 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), diplomatic (support for allies who are violating human rights and/or international law), or development (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.

3. Dialogue towards a negotiated settlement

The recent emphasis on suppressing rebel 'spoilers' and on deposing rogue governments contrasts with the 1990s, when negotiated settlements had a good deal more international favour, with that decade seeing a huge increase in the number and remit of international peacebuilding operations.²⁰⁷ Certain kinds of international climate (for example, a 'war on terror') seem to reduce the possibility of negotiation with (or even assistance to) large sections of a society (as in Somalia and Afghanistan). Yet long-term peace is unlikely when powerful groups are systematically expelled or excluded from power, as persistent instability in Afghanistan and Iraq reminds us. Moreover, as Greenhill and Solomon argue, even an apparently implacable 'spoiler' may sometimes change – in new circumstances – into a less violent entity.²⁰⁸

Attempts to achieve a negotiated settlement may be supported by a number of interventions, including sanctions, programmes for the DDR of combatants; a variety of international peacekeeping operations (including those under a UN umbrella); and attempts to secure prosecutions under international law, notably via the International Criminal Court.

Some of the problems with negotiated settlements have already been mentioned, and we have seen how these problems seem to be particularly severe when only a relatively narrow and elite group is accepted into negotiations and into the political settlement that results. It is therefore necessary to balance pragmatic considerations focusing on

²⁰⁶ HM Treasury, 2013, 7.

²⁰⁷ See, for example, Duffield, 2001.

²⁰⁸ See Greenhill and Solomon; Stedman.

ending violence through negotiation with a determined focus on achieving inclusive and just political settlements as swiftly as possible in any given context. This should be a prompt to seek the inclusion in peace processes of those who have not resorted to violence.

Where it is judged that a reduction in violence and progress towards peace cannot be achieved except through negotiation and eventual power-sharing with actors who have used violence and have weak commitment to good governance and human rights, much greater effort should go into envisaging how broader inclusion in the political settlement of the public, including women, youth and any marginalised groups, can be achieved through ongoing processes of political transformation. The failure to pay sufficient attention to such issues in the years following the exclusive settlement made in Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and the subsequent outbreak of renewed conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile (2011) and of civil conflict in South Sudan (most significantly in 2013), illustrate both the dangers of reinforcing authoritarianism and the imperatives of retaining momentum towards inclusive and just political orders once a peace agreement has laid the first stone.²⁰⁹

Of course, negotiating and other efforts to influence a political settlement may require striking a balance between the importance of inclusion and justice for long-term peace, on the one hand, and on the other taking care to ensure that rapid change does not destabilise the entire peace process or have other perverse effects (such as incentivising the fragmentation of armed groups).

4. Using sanctions to target particular actors

Sanctions may be imposed against a 'rogue' government or rebel group. Of course, this approach has sometimes been applied alongside more militaristic tactics, but it can also be used independently. Assessing the positive and negative effects of various kinds of sanctions is an extremely complex task, and a more in-depth discussion of these advantages and disadvantages can be found, for example, in my own paper called 'Economic Initiatives to Tackle Conflict'.²¹⁰

Four points, perhaps, are worth stressing here. First, although sanctions can have negative impacts, they have the significant advantage of offering an alternative to more violent responses, and therefore their negative consequences need to be assessed in light of both the damage they may cause and the damage they avoid.

Second, sanctions can be used to influence both governments and non-state actors. Thus Sierra Leone, Cambodia and Angola all provide examples of sanctions – including restrictions on particular commodities – that helped to weaken rebel groups.²¹¹

Third, while sanctions can help to weaken those playing a negative role in conflict, they can also have the opposite effect. Some have argued that sanctions weakened the Milosevic regime in Serbia. But there are also many cases where regimes targeted by sanctions – and this includes Serbia – have been able to manipulate sanctions for

²⁰⁹ See Brereton and Ayuko (forthcoming); Young, 2007; Young, 2012. On South Kordofan and Blue Nile, see also Saferworld, 2011; Saferworld, 2010.

²¹⁰ Keen, 2009a.

²¹¹ A key factor fuelling Sierra Leone's war economy – as in Angola's enduring war further south – had been the willingness of the de Beers international cartel in particular to 'mop up' any diamonds that might fall outside its worldwide buying operation, an operation that underpinned diamonds' artificially high prices on world markets. But de Beers was coming under pressure to dissociate itself from 'blood diamonds' and the UN was now pushing for tougher regulations. Suspicions that al Qaeda was laundering funds by buying West African 'blood diamonds' added to this momentum. In June 2000, the UN passed a resolution demanding that all states take measures to prohibit the direct or indirect import of rough diamonds from Sierra Leone, and requiring the government of Sierra Leone to implement a certificate-of-origin system for diamond exports so that diamonds from RUF areas could be distinguished from other diamonds. This was no panacea: some diamonds from the RUF were still getting certificates within Sierra Leone; and smuggling into Liberia remained an option. Another problem was that sanctions on Liberia itself were being significantly weakened by richer countries' interests: China and France blocked timber sanctions for two years (until May 2003), reflecting their own import interests. Even so, the smuggling of diamonds into Liberia (where de Beers had been buying) was addressed when increased diplomatic pressure, notably from the US, was applied to Liberia to stop its dealings with the RUF. In March 2001, Liberian diamond exports were banned by the UN Security Council and a travel ban was imposed on senior Liberian officials. (See: Le Billon, 2001a, 75–6; Global Witness; Panel of Experts, 2000; Pugh and Cooper; Cooper; Malone and Nitschke).

economic and political purposes.²¹² For one thing, elite actors linked to abusive regimes have benefited economically from transgressing sanctions that raise the price differences between a targeted country and surrounding countries, producing a 'wind-fall' for those who are able to breach the sanctions. In Iran, it has been pointed out that hard-liners have gained tremendous political and economic power through their large stake in Iran's official and underground economy.²¹³ Access to government patronage frequently becomes more important in a country where sanctions are in place, giving the targeted government additional leverage over its own people. And 'rogue' regimes have frequently extracted propaganda from international sanctions by suggesting that they indicate the desire of international actors to victimise the country and its people.

A fourth point to stress in relation to sanctions is that the costs in terms of inflicting human suffering and alienating the public are frequently high.²¹⁴ In Angola, the human costs of depriving UNITA-held areas of humanitarian aid were enormous.²¹⁵ If the aim of policymakers is to promote human welfare, then imposing measures that damage human welfare is, at the least, problematic. Commodity sanctions may damage 'coping economies', undermining the livelihoods of large numbers of people struggling to survive.²¹⁶ Sanctions can also undermine humanitarian aid. Depriving civilians of humanitarian aid contradicts humanitarian law, but in practice there have been several instances (for example, in Gaza, Somalia and Syria) where aid to civilians has in practice been restricted in circumstances where it is feared that some of this might fall into the hands of 'terrorists' or reviled rebel groups.²¹⁷ Furthermore, theoretical exemptions do not always work: for example, international sanctions imposed on the Sierra Leonean junta of 1997–98 exempted humanitarian aid; but in practice food aid dried up and high rates of malnutrition and mortality began to emerge.²¹⁸

Significantly, in Serbia, it was the use of *carefully targeted* sanctions – restricting travel and access to bank accounts – that eventually helped to encourage politicians and officials to defect from Milosevic.

5. Pursuing legal and judicial responses

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, as we have seen, 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

212 Sanctions imposed on Serbia and Montenegro from 1992 – and renewed over Kosovo – in many ways gave a boost to Milosevic's cabal, which was able to profit economically from the artificially high gaps between prices inside and outside the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Meanwhile, Milosevic, who controlled most of the key media, was able to present sanctions as another example of the 'international conspiracy' against the Serbs. Some diplomats felt that sanctions ceased to help Milosevic only when he effectively ran out of plausible wars to wage. (Author's research in Belgrade, 1999; Woodward, 1995.)

213 Professor Muhammad Sahimi at the University of Southern California noted in 2009: '... better relations with the United States will necessarily imply the lifting of at least some of the economic sanctions imposed by Washington and its allies on Iran. This will threaten the immense economic power of the hard-liners, who control a significant part of Iran's official and underground economy. A few years ago Mr. [Mahdi] Karroubi [former speaker of Iran's Parliament] disclosed that the hard-liners control 63 ports that are outside the government's control. They use these ports to import cheap, low-quality materials and commodities from China and other East Asian nations, greatly hurting Iran's own industrial production, but becoming fabulously rich. If the sanctions are lifted and a more open society emerges, the hard-liners will lose much of their economic power. Moreover, the potential for the emergence of a freer press will most likely reveal the depth of their corruption, bringing with it the loss of their political power.' (See: Sahimi).

214 Cortright and Lopez, 2000.

215 Messiant, 2004; on a related process in DRC, see Stockton, 1998; more generally, see Weissman.

216 Goodhand, 2008.

217 Mackintosh and Duplat; Keen, 2013b.

218 Cortright and Lopez 2000, 176; Porter, 2003.

defendants and their equal treatment before the law – thereby helping to dispel perceptions of discrimination against particular groups. A legal approach may also include reforming the justice and policing sectors within a particular society. (This is covered briefly in the sub-section on transformative governance reform below).

A number of problems with a legal approach to insecurity should at the same time be mentioned. First, it may not be possible to get hold of those who are believed responsible for abuses. They may have ways of resisting arrest, and the capacity for apprehending and detaining them may be weak to non-existent. Importantly, threatening belligerents with legal action may itself create an incentive for them to steer clear of a peace process and to use continuing war as a way to insulate themselves from being held accountable.²¹⁹

In some circumstances, the prospect of criminal trials can itself be a trigger for violence, as seems to have been the case when the prospect of trials for those responsible for human rights abuses in Rwanda encouraged some of those facing this threat to participate in the organisation and perpetration of the 1994 genocide.²²⁰

6. Supporting transformative governance reform 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 counter-insurgency 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 thus tends to align behind and reinforce 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 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 control in the wake of institutional breakdown and civic unrest.

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. For example, ‘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.

Past research by Saferworld²²¹ 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
- Offer fair access to social services, resources and opportunities to all social groups
- Resolve grievances and disputes constructively

²¹⁹ For example, Allen, 2006; Tull and Mehler, 2005.

²²⁰ African Rights, 1994.

²²¹ See Saferworld, 2012.

Inclusive political dialogue and decision making

As noted above, problems of ‘terrorism’, ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’ present dilemmas about when to engage in dialogue, whom to include and what kind of ‘deals’ and wider ‘political settlements’ can provide progress towards lasting peace. These dilemmas must not obscure the imperative of working towards inclusive dialogue mechanisms and decision-making structures.

The degree to which countries are peaceful correlates strongly with indexes on a range of measures of democracy and rights produced by organisations including the Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House, World Bank, Legatum Foundation, Brookings Institute, UN Human Development Index and Gallup.²²² Paffenholz also finds that more exclusive political settlements negatively affect peace.²²³ In Ecuador and Bolivia, ethnic mobilisation and participation of indigenous groups in mainstream politics has tended to discourage outright rebellion, in contrast to Guatemala and Peru, where indigenous groups were largely excluded from formal politics.²²⁴

Such evidence strongly reinforces the point that it is crucial to encourage states and societies towards more genuinely inclusive political settlements that can better mediate between the interests of different groups through non-violent processes and thereby reduce political grievances. At the same time, pursuing changes in political structures is sensitive, and has in many contexts proved destabilising. Therefore it can be crucial to encourage long-term change in a way that is carefully paced and sequenced to avoid precipitating the renewal of conflict.

People-focused security and justice

There are a number of examples that illustrate the crucial importance of seeking to transform the security and justice sectors in conflict-affected contexts. In Sierra Leone, the re-establishment of integrity within the army through relevant reform processes was fundamental to addressing interrelated problems of institutional dysfunction, corruption and abuse of civilians that were driving the conflict.²²⁵ Likewise in Colombia, it proved crucial to address abuses within the *counter-insurgency* and to deal with the paramilitaries rather than simply assuming they would disappear once the ‘insurgent’ problem had been solved.²²⁶

The dangers of not addressing security sector challenges are equally evident. In the DRC, governmental ‘spoilers’ have often been damagingly absent from international radar screens.²²⁷ The embezzling of soldiers’ pay by senior military officials has often encouraged looting of civilians. The International Crisis Group pointed out the contradictions of vast spending on international peacekeeping operations in DRC alongside the failure to ensure even basic living conditions and remuneration to the Congolese military.²²⁸ Poor or non-existent pay also reportedly encouraged government army soldiers to take bribes from the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) (which was linked to the Hutu genocidaires), to tolerate the presence of FDLR

²²² Institute for Economics and Peace, 2011, 6, 18, 25.

²²³ Paffenholz, 2008, 15; OECD, 2011, 35, 31–32.

²²⁴ Caumartin, Molina and Thorp, 2008.

²²⁵ The case of Sierra Leone shows the importance of reforming state structures rather than simply focusing on the elimination of a rebel spoiler. The civil war in Sierra Leone was powerfully fuelled by grievances centring on the increasing inability of the state to provide basic services. It was also fuelled by government soldiers who stoked the violence (and frequently attacked civilians) often in preference to confronting armed and elusive rebels. Soldiers had a combination of power (in relation to civilians) and powerlessness (in relation both to their superiors and to the elusive rebels). It was this combination that seems to have been so conducive to abuse. In these circumstances, progress towards peace (when it eventually became manifest) depended not only on confronting rebels but reforming government structures, including the government army (which benefited from better salaries and training under a ‘security sector reform’ that was spearheaded by the British). Britain’s willingness directly to confront the rebels themselves has often been exaggerated. Another important contributor to peace was international effort to rein in a ‘war economy’ that had sucked in numerous factions in Sierra Leone, including the government army. (Keen, 2005a)

²²⁶ Theidon.

²²⁷ Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, 2009.

²²⁸ While donors have supported MONUC [United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo] at an operational rate of approximately \$1 billion a year to improve the situation in the East, they have balked at the concept of providing basic equipment to the integrated brigades, let alone decent living conditions... The integration centres at Mushaki, Nyaleke and Luberizi were largely unsuitable for human habitation, let alone training, forcing some soldiers to live in straw huts amid outbreaks of disease such as cholera and tuberculosis. (See: International Crisis Group, 2006, 25–26)

soldiers, and even to assist the FDLR in taxing and looting civilians.²²⁹ Crucially, the willingness of an allied government to confront a named enemy is likely to be undermined by the existence of a corrupt, abusive or otherwise dysfunctional military – as was also evident during the Vietnam War.

Although security sector reform is, therefore, often crucial and necessary, there are many examples where international support has been provided – either to buttress political alliances, or under the assumption that supporting state security will contribute to stability – and where this has actually fed powerfully into local grievances (and hence *insecurity*). US support to the Egyptian military and security services under Sadat and Mubarak is but one example. In Afghanistan, alongside the major international effort to expand the army, there was relatively little effort to *reform* the security services so as to make them accountable to civilian authorities.²³⁰ While a functioning police might have compensated for the army's weaknesses, Afghanistan's police force has been beset by significant problems of corruption and indiscipline.²³¹

These examples illustrate both the need to engage on security issues in conflict-affected contexts, and also the dangers of doing so in the wrong way. Numerous international policy frameworks and agreements – the OECD's Fragile State Principles (2007) and Handbook on Security System Reform (2007), the Dili Declaration (2010), the World Bank's 2011 World Development Report, plus a number of DfID, EU and US peacebuilding and statebuilding strategies – recognise the importance of focusing on state–society relations in order to improve people's experience of peace and security.²³² Yet, despite the recognition that collective efforts need to focus on achieving lasting changes in state–society relations, very often international support for security sector development has continued to focus on technical and institutional reforms at the central government level.

Whereas in some cases constructive-sounding policies have recognised the importance of fostering legitimate institutions,²³³ the prevailing logic underpinning security programmes often works against this. Security and justice programmes typically seek to build the capacity of official security and justice providers, fostering more effective and responsive service delivery. While it is often hoped that such programmes will contribute to the legitimacy of the state, and thus to the stability of countries as a whole, in practice programmes have typically failed to consider the role of society in setting the direction for and maintaining commitment to reforms. In the worst cases, programmes risk simply reinforcing the effectiveness of security actors that are actively involved in corrupt or predatory behaviour.

Programmes that go beyond the technical approach to security and justice institutions – and that support longer term, more arduous and politically complex processes in which communities are encouraged to shape the security and justice institutions that they want and need – have been rare. Moreover, the idea that the state can and should exercise authority over security and justice obscures contexts in which authority is contested and fragmented and in which multiple sources of legitimacy compete with one another.²³⁴ Community-based approaches to reforms in security provision (or 'community security' approaches) therefore have a potentially important gap to fill: they offer the potential to support both immediate and long-term solutions to security deficits; but crucially, they may do so in a way that seriously engages with the long-term objectives of achieving legitimacy, public confidence and improved state–society relations. Rigorous evaluation of diverse initiatives for promoting community security

²²⁹ Autesserre, 2007.

²³⁰ International Crisis Group, 2011a.

²³¹ As Chandhuri and Farrell noted in 2011, "Often, the police are little more than a militia of the local powerholder; they commonly prey on the population, and through their extortion and violent abuse of civilians can turn local people towards insurgency." (See: Chandhuri and Farrell, 278).

²³² See e.g. Stabilisation Unit, 2014a; Stabilisation Unit, 2014b.

²³³ For example, the World Development Report 2011 points out that: "Government capacity is central, but technical competence alone is insufficient: institutions and programs must be accountable to their citizens if they are to acquire legitimacy." (World Bank, 2011)

²³⁴ OECD, 2010.

may thus offer the prospect of providing a credible and evidence-based alternative to more militaristic approaches.

Ensuring access to justice is very important to the success of peacebuilding efforts, which can founder if effective steps are not taken to deal with the past, reconcile the actors involved and prevent future injustice. However, similar caveats apply to the need to promote justice in contexts where grievances are feeding into conflicts defined as problems of 'terrorism', 'extremism' or 'radicalisation'. Thus, while it is evident that legal approaches offer an alternative to violence, support to the reform of justice institutions would need to be undertaken with care. The building of civic trust in justice institutions is a delicate process, and seeking to ensure good behaviour from institutions – particularly of the state – that have played a role in past violence and human rights violations demands an approach that goes beyond mere technical support and capacity building.

In particular, biased and/or selective criminal justice can create or compound 'impunity gaps', and even do harm – for example, by provoking renewed or cyclical patterns of violence. All of this once again suggests the need to avoid a state-centric approach that simply focuses on the service delivery capacity of state institutions – but instead to develop customised approaches which aim to foster the cooperation of different conflict actors in ways that facilitate reconciliation and the prevention of future injustices. This may also involve building on the potential of informal, local or traditional justice systems (which can operate both as conflict resolution and justice mechanisms, and which are crucial in contexts where state systems are weak, absent or illegitimate). However, at the same time, these systems need to be subjected to the same critical scrutiny as any other systems of law – for their accessibility, fairness, responsiveness, and accountability.

This again underlines the need to build transformative justice and security strategies on context-specific understandings of the conflict and the relevant political economy.

Reducing corruption and bribery

There is significant evidence to suggest that corruption is very closely linked to conflict and indeed specifically to the problems of state weakness, and the grievances underpinning 'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' that are targeted under the mainstream approach.²³⁵ Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and the World Bank's World Governance Indicator on Control of Corruption both have a very strong correlation with the peacefulness of countries ranked on the Global Peace Index. At the same time, the most peaceful countries also tend to be the least corrupt.²³⁶

Examples of the effect of corruption in conflict contexts include Yemen, where elite families have used private banking channels to transfer large amounts of money out of the country into safer jurisdictions. This undermines the country's tax base, worsening the vicious circle between weak institutions, weak property rights, insecurity, low growth and capital flight.²³⁷ Similarly in South Sudan, President Kiir in a letter of 3 May 2012 directed 75 current and former senior government staff to return over \$4 billion in stolen funds.²³⁸ It is unsurprising that it has remained so easy to mobilise rebellion in a context where elites have done so little to share wealth.

One reason for the correlation between high levels of corruption and conflict, aside from the resentment of those who are routinely cheated by corrupt systems, appears to be the interest that those who gain from corruption may have in the corrosion of

²³⁵ See Chayes, 2014.

²³⁶ Institute for Economics and Peace, 2011, 30–31.

²³⁷ Chatham House, 2013, 8; Hill G et al, 2013.

²³⁸ Smith D, 2012.

institutions: from tax agencies, public audit offices, police services, court systems, and legislatures, to opposition parties, public services and property rights.²³⁹

If it is clear that corruption is indeed central to conflict dynamics and needs to be reduced in order to foster lasting solutions to ‘terrorism’, ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’, there is a clear need to avoid support to corrupt actors and to enhance controls on diversion of any support provided in conflict-affected contexts.

While this serves to underline the importance of a transformative agenda for governance reform, a carefully balanced and context-sensitive approach to reducing corruption is at the same time paramount. Development of the capacities to track financial transactions, administer taxation, regulate customs, and investigate and prosecute offences may prove critical to success in dealing with corruption and building peace.²⁴⁰ This necessitates the development of laws, institutions and well-trained and sufficiently empowered staff to take on powerful interests.

However, there are again important challenges affecting what capacity-building efforts are able to achieve. Most importantly, capacity-building efforts need to be underpinned by political will, and can achieve little where it is absent.²⁴¹ Likewise, as with unrealistically rapid democratisation, hasty attempts to dismantle patronage systems may precipitate destabilising breakdowns in the political settlement – thus the establishment of a viable alternative to the problematic kind of instability underpinned by patronage systems is likely to take considerable time if it is not to prove destabilising.

Additionally, measures taken to tackle corruption at national level have often been used to suppress internal dissent and undermine political opponents: the banner of anti-corruption has been used for political purposes in Nigeria, for example;²⁴² likewise, in Yemen, anti-corruption measures (by the Central Organisation for Control and Auditing) were politicised by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saleh used the organisation to keep potential political opponents in line and enforce support for the regime.²⁴³ Somewhat similarly, efforts to tackle flows of illicit finance have arguably strengthened authoritarian responses to conflict in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Turkey, among other contexts.²⁴⁴ Thus *anti-corruption measures themselves* have the potential to exacerbate injustices and fuel rather than resolve conflict, and it is therefore crucial that they are undertaken within a wider peacebuilding approach that includes ensuring transparency, public access to information, and public voice and participation – including the creation of constructive channels for dialogue. This is crucial to ensure grievances are dealt with rather than suppressed, and that public accountability underpins political will to tackle corruption over the long term.

Importantly, much of the world’s illicit finance flows through Western financial systems. Thus in this sense corruption is an area in which Western actors can potentially exert strong influence on one of the key drivers of conflict and instability overseas, if they develop more coherent and effective controls on their financial systems and companies.

Fair access to social services, resources and opportunities

While we have established that the grievances motivating ‘terrorists’, ‘radicals’ and ‘extremists’ are too often assumed to be confined to the socio-economic domain (rather than, perhaps, requiring international actors to consider adopting different political, military or economic policies), at the same time it is important to recognise

²³⁹ Moore M, 2012, 474.

²⁴⁰ World Bank, 2011, 34.

²⁴¹ Reuter P, 2012, 488: “Tim Daniel and James Maton, in their review of recent cases (chapter 13), show that courts and police in Switzerland and the United Kingdom have helped return stolen assets to Nigeria, whereas the systems in African countries such as Kenya have singularly failed in dealing with their own grand corruption.”

²⁴² On use of anticorruption for political purposes in Nigeria, see de Waal A, 2010.

²⁴³ Phillips 2011b, 22.

²⁴⁴ FitzGerald V, 2003, 14. FitzGerald uses this to illustrate the pertinent point that “Clearly incumbent states (and some other regional or international powers) have a vested interest in declaring internal opposition illegal, particularly when armed conflict is involved. If this is automatically ratified internationally, then oppressive regimes are reinforced and genuine self-determination becomes virtually impossible – despite being enshrined in the UN Charter” (*ibid*, 17).

that social, economic and political inequalities can *indeed* fuel the grievances that underpin conflict. This makes inequalities of all types potentially relevant to addressing conflict: from unequal access to security, justice, health, education and resources to exclusion from political decision-making.²⁴⁵ For example, access to social services has fuelled inter-group hostility in Kosovo. Gender inequality has motivated girl fighters to join rebel forces in Liberia. Political exclusion has underpinned destabilising protests and violence in Yemen. And unequal security and justice provision has deepened conflict divides in many countries across Africa and South and Central Asia, such as Sri Lanka.²⁴⁶ In particular, horizontal inequalities – or inequalities between different identity groups – appear to play an important role in fuelling conflict.²⁴⁷

A crucial step in strengthening the coherence between development and peacebuilding would therefore be a greater emphasis on addressing *horizontal* inequalities. Such inequalities are often the product of political choices rather than the mere absence of resources and capacities. Therefore, rather than simply promoting access to services, resources and livelihoods in general, development efforts need to be actively *transformative* – seeking to address different levels of access to different groups within society. At the same time, such a transformative development approach may need to take account of the potentially destabilising implications of seeking to alter the relative power and wealth of different groups within society too rapidly and without broad-based buy-in to the process. Again, this process requires conflict sensitivity and a strategy that is underpinned by careful conflict analysis.

7. Bringing a peacebuilding perspective to the fore in political and 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, thinktanks, campaign groups 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.

The importance of advocacy and lobbying towards parties to a conflict is generally well understood at certain levels, and can be effective in changing the course of conflicts, but there are a number of common challenges. 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 regarding the tactics to be used, the allies to be supported, and the coherence of longer-term strategies. For example, having established the need to oppose Gadhafi in Libya in 2011 and militants in Mali in 2012, media coverage in the West offered a relatively shallow critique of the methods used and their long-term impact.

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

²⁴⁵ Brinkman H-J, Attree L, Hezir S, 2013.

²⁴⁶ Brinkman H-J, Attree L, Hezir S, 2013.

²⁴⁷ See for example: Langer and Stewart, 2012; Keen, 2012.

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, and to challenge the methods that are justified through this discourse at different levels. Much rights-related advocacy occurs at the international level – making it easy for domestic leaders to dismiss criticisms as external bias against the national cause. What tends to be lacking is collective resolve to construct a counter-narrative in support of constructive and long-term peacebuilding solutions that can win the public debate within conflict-affected contexts and beyond. Building a well-informed public constituency for peace is typically as essential as changing the approach of key individuals and organisations involved in a conflict.

8. Choosing not to engage

In addition to the abovementioned alternatives to the mainstream approach, another is worth mentioning briefly: *do nothing*. Of course, this suggestion is not entirely serious. First of all, it is not politically feasible. Second, conflicts that are left unaddressed tend to fester and metastasise. Third, there are many things that can usefully be done – and indeed *should* be done – to address the drivers of conflict and change the relationships that underpin it as discussed above. Nevertheless, the point raised by Fawaz Gerges remains highly pertinent: ‘terrorist’ atrocities frequently produce a sense of revulsion even among those the terrorists claim to represent; it is the heavy-handed approach of *counter-terrorists* that frequently counteracts this process (an over-reaction that the ‘terrorists’ themselves may be trying to provoke).²⁴⁸

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.²⁴⁹ Where such support is provided, this may make the gestation of political will or the emergence of reformist leadership *less* likely, whereas supporting social empowerment while waiting for the emergence of governmental allies that are worthy of support may prove a more effective peacebuilding strategy. Choosing not to work with abusive governments could also have an important demonstration effect beyond any immediate conflict context.

A further pertinent realisation is that international actors may not be able to influence the dynamics of each and every conflict effectively: in such circumstances, it is important for decision-makers to consider not only what drivers of conflict need to be addressed and what a lasting solution would consist of – but also whether there is any feasible way of encouraging such a solution to emerge.

²⁴⁸ Gerges, 2005.

²⁴⁹ An analysis that is supported by the evidence presented by development economist Angus Deaton in chapter 7 (‘How to help those left behind’) of *The Great Escape*. See Deaton, 2013.

5

Conclusion

ALTHOUGH THE APPARENT AIM OF WAR IS VICTORY, it is also important to keep in mind that a war (and some kind of accompanying ‘state of emergency’) may have important political and economic functions, whether this is at the level of in-country interests, interests within the region, or interests at a further remove (for example, among Western governments). Mesmerised by ‘rebel violence’ or ‘terrorist violence’, observers and officials frequently become blind to the complex and manifold sources of violence in any given context, including violence that is fuelled by international actors, states and their proxies, and even violence at the household level. A telling contemporary example is the focus on militarily weakening Islamic State (IS) while giving insufficient attention to the international support that IS has received (notably from people in Gulf states) and insufficient attention to some of the weaknesses in the Iraqi state in particular that have helped to nurture IS and allow its rapid advance.

Where the international community accepts too readily a particular definition of what conflict is about or who it is between, the opportunities to carry out economic exploitation and internal political repression under the cover of such a conflict are likely to be manifold. Certain groups of civilians (associated with a rogue rebel or terrorist group) are likely to be victimised with a significant degree of impunity. There are many cases in which spoilers have been wrongly or misleadingly identified while highly self-interested definitions of the enemy have been allowed to hold sway.

The role of ‘development’ as part of a package to prevent or reduce violence needs to be carefully considered and evaluated. Meeting people’s basic needs (including their need for security) promises to remove one of the most important causes of violence in recent decades, particularly where violence is not simply instigated ‘from the top’ but also fuelled by ‘bottom-up’ processes²⁵⁰. At the same time, we have often seen ‘development’ invoked as a kind of ‘magical solution’ for problems that development policies actually cannot fix – either because the main drivers of conflict lie elsewhere, or because development is practically impossible under conditions of insecurity (or both). In the Palestinian territories, the inability of international development policies to bring peace illustrates how key problems may lie elsewhere (notably in Israeli, Fatah and Hamas policies) and how such ‘development’ may be periodically and continuously undermined by these ‘elsewhere’ problems. The attempts to invoke ‘development’ as a way to turn around floundering counter-insurgencies in Vietnam and Afghanistan also illustrates the limitations of invoking development under conditions where key conflict drivers lie elsewhere and where development may prove practically impossible.

Although it can often appear that ‘war’ is the only option for dealing with those designated as rogue regimes, terrorists, extremists, radicals or spoilers, this is not the case. While all the alternatives carry potential problems, the problems with the mainstream approach described in this paper have so far been seriously under-recognised, and thus have been very poorly factored into decision-making. By going about protecting their interests in counter-productive ways, and neglecting the perspectives of the people worst affected by conflict, external actors have repeatedly exacerbated the problems their interventions were intended to overcome. Through military action, support to actors whose behaviour has worsened 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. It is thus high time to apply more rigorously the lessons of past experience – with the goal of lasting peace for the people of conflict-affected societies much more clearly in mind, in response to the next generation of conflicts.

This means that it is important to look for constructive alternatives to the mainstream approach to counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding. Doing so should involve not only striving to do less harm bearing in mind the lessons of the past, but also a number of positive steps. The first of these would be reinstating lasting and positive peace (rather than victory over specific criminals or enemies or national security interests) as the overall objective underpinning all strands of engagement with conflict contexts. Proceeding from this objective, a more open-minded, impartial approach to conceptualising and analysing conflict – its actors, causes and dynamics – can help us to move beyond the reductive lens offered by approaching the problem as one of ‘terror’, ‘extremism’ or ‘radicalisation’. Such analysis should be a collective exercise that sits at the heart of public policymaking towards conflict situations and enables diverse actors to identify their roles in contributing to a long-term solution.

Reframing and analysing conflict in this way can help us to envisage holistic strategies for building peace that give due emphasis to less violent, more constructive alternatives. Such constructive alternatives include:

- 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 on achieving inclusive and just political settlements as swiftly as possible in any given context
- Using sanctions to target particular actors
- 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 substantial harm cannot be avoided and no clear solution is evident.

While many of these options have pitfalls of their own, the search for peace should leave no stone unturned.

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COVER PHOTO: African Union troops driving Al Shabaab from Mogadishu, Somalia, in 2011.

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