Interim Stabilisation in Fragile Security Situations

Nat J. Colletta

PRACTICE NOTE

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The Challenges of Conventional Stabilisation

For more than two decades a conventional approach to security promotion has been widely applied by multilateral and bilateral agencies during war-to-peace transitions. Advocates of this approach typically recommend a combination of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) to consolidate peace-making and peace-building processes (Colletta et al 2009, Muggah 2006). Notwithstanding the broad acceptance of such activities – and the theory that underlies them – there is little evidence that such interventions have contributed to any enduring solution to conflict and fragility (Muggah 2009). Indeed, analysts have come to recognise that the political, economic and social pre-conditions for DDR and SSR – including a relatively functional government, a reasonably stable labour market and a minimum level of social trust – are seldom in place. Even when these ambitious pre-requisites have been achieved, it is not clear that they are sufficient for DDR and SSR to take hold. Nevertheless, these orthodoxies persist in security promotion policy and practice.

Policy research has endeavoured to determine why conventional approaches to securing transitions so often fall short of expectations (Colletta and Muggah 2009; Berdal 1996). On the one hand, there is widespread acknowledgment that such activities are difficult, perhaps more so than originally anticipated. The specific determinants of socio-economic reintegration of former fighters into a productive civilian life (DDR) and their effective integration within security institutions (SSR) are as complex as they are insufficiently understood (Humphreys and Weinstein 2005). This is often the case during the early phases of the transition from war to peace when conditions on the ground, particularly popular confidence in security institutions and labour market opportunities, frustrate conventional post-conflict security promotion activities. The knowledge gaps and routine operational dilemmas surrounding security provision during fragile transition processes further complicate matters.

Policy makers and practitioners confront a number of questions when it comes to promoting security in the aftermath of armed conflict. How can they deal with poorly educated and unskilled former combatants and mid- and upper-level commanders in an economy with very limited labour absorption capacity? How might they restructure a security sector while simultaneously integrating large numbers of minimally-trained combatants? How should they deal with the risks of a security vacuum in the context of a shaky political settlement? How can civic trust be re-established (or established for the first time) following decades of violence, of-

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ten in the context of extreme uncertainty? How can they implement comprehensive security transition programmes given weak government capacities? Ultimately, the key preoccupation of such actors is ensuring both short and long-term stability in high-risk, low-trust, insecure and unpredictable environments. Such efforts must be pursued amidst unsettled issues such as political and economic power sharing and elite positioning.

There is growing recognition that DDR and SSR processes often fail because the political and economic context – to the extent they are reflected in the programme design – are not ripe at the time of a ceasefire agreement or the signing of a peace agreement, nor fully settled during the initial implementation stages (Colletta and Muggah 2009). For example, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan are indicative of settings where, in spite of the emergence of an interim government and political settlements, political elites, local militias and commanders still contend for power. What is lacking in such settings is not so much a politico-technical solution to DDR and SSR but rather the requisite time and space to rebuild livelihoods and facilitate a modicum of mutual trust and confidence between the key parties and the wider polity. More specifically, transitional mechanisms are required to allow the necessary economic opportunity, trust and confidence to be established while the situation gradually ripens to the point that control over armed groups can be realistically pursued and eventually established.

Context is King

Policymakers and practitioners confront a host of trade-offs when promoting security in the early aftermath of armed conflict. They need to balance short term stabilisation imperatives with long-term peace-building and state-building goals while also considering ways to balance the political aspirations of local elites against the real day-to-day concerns of (formerly) armed groups and vulnerable populations. There is also a need to ensure that conflicting parties can move from

a reliance on "hard power" to a more stable reliance on "soft power" rooted within good governance and social and economic progress within a civilian society and economy (Colletta et al 2008).

Yet international actors' frequent reversion to past strategies and boilerplate approaches often emerges, and trade-offs between expediency and efficacy are decided without fully understanding the local context and the concerns of all stakeholders. Doing so has the tendency to create "spoilers" out of those whose interests and perspectives are set aside (Fearon and Laitin 1996; Steadman 2005). In the interest of short- and long-term stability it is important that all peace-building, state-building and stabilisation measures reflect the local context and overcome the reversion to boilerplate approaches. Policymakers and practitioners must invest heavily in understanding the key contextual factors that shape security transitions in fragile situations. A closer reading of a country´s political economy is essential in order to prepare the ground for short-term stabilisation and successful long-term peace processes. This requires investments in diagnostics to better apprehend the nature of the armed conflict, including its underlying structural dynamics as well as the motivations and characteristics of the fighting parties. Furthermore, those designing stabilisation strategies must also assess the level of trust and confidence in political commitments amongst parties and between social groups. This is typically captured in an analysis of the nature of the peace, that is, the manner in which the conflict ended (i.e., whether imposed, negotiated, or mediated by a third party). Understanding the nature of peace also requires an analysis of those factors that either helped bring about the resolution of the conflict or which enable it to persist in the fraught post-ceasefire environment.

Other factors that shape successful stabilisation efforts are fundamentally connected to the political and economic circumstances on the ground. For example, the governance and

administrative reach and capacity of the state, particularly the ability to provide public security and access to justice along with other basic services, is a key determinant. Likewise, the state of the economy or, more specifically, the ability to absorb unskilled labour, is critical for smooth transitions. Finally, the character and cohesiveness of communities and combatants and the degree of social integration is also crucial to understand when designing transitional strategies linked to DDR and SSR. Indeed, the level of ethnic and religious homogeneity at the community level are important mediating variables informing conflict resolution and peace-building.

Enter Interim Stabilisation Measures

International actors' attempts to match interventions to local contexts have repeatedly been wanting. As indicated by Colletta and Muggah (2009), there is a wide range of security promotion activities in post-conflict settings that do not easily conform to conventional DDR or SSR approaches. Policymakers and practitioner must be aware of the options available to them in order to ensure that they can identify and adapt the most appropriate approaches to the nuanced circumstances at hand. Alongside what are termed stability operations such as those described in a forthcoming volume edited by Muggah – Stabilization Operations, Security and Development (2012) – are so-called "interim stabilisation measures" (ISMs). While not necessarily described as such, these ISMs are often mobilised during security transitions (Downes and Muggah 2009). They include "measures that may be used to keep former combatants' social cohesiveness intact within a military or civilian command and control structure while creating space and buying time for political dialogue and the formation of an environment conducive to military integration and/or social and economic reintegration" (Colletta et al. 2008).

Interim stabilisation interventions mirror, to a greater and lesser degree, conventional stabilisation efforts that seek to quickly facilitate political settlements between opposing parties. However, their focus is less on engineering socio-political change and "winning the hearts and minds" of populations than on providing former combatants with an unambiguous "peace dividend". It should be stressed here that interim stabilisation is not being proposed as a mandatory first step during the peace-building process. Nor is it conceived here as a necessary precondition for or component of DDR and SSR processes. Rather, the intention is to identify a number of concrete ISMs that may be available – should they appear necessary or beneficial – during the security transition between the signing of a peace agreement and its eventual implementation.

ISMs seek to facilitate the transformation of former military groups into quasi-civilian organisations. Such arrangements can prove effective both from a collective and an individual perspective. When carefully implemented, ISMs can enable and sustain social control, social cohesion and mutual support among former combatants under civilian command structures. As noted above, they can also help open up the time and space needed for the political process and early recovery efforts to yield tangible progress. At the same time, they can enable individual combatants to ease into a productive civilian life rather than experience a sharp transition in both their livelihoods and their identities. There are a wide range of ISMs which can be organised according to a basic typology. These include: (i) civilian service corps; (ii) military or security sector integration; (iii) transitional security forces; (iv) semi-autonomous and decentralised local community forces; and (v) combined military integration and civilian reintegration programmes. Several of these are elaborated below in order to provide a more tangible understanding of ISMs and their roles within transitional contexts.

Civil Service Corps. Civil Service Corps are typically made up of an organisation of individuals who work together on a voluntary or paid basis for a period of time. For instance,

consider the case of the South African Service Corps (SASC) (Lamb and Dye 2009). Following the end of apartheid, former combatants of South Africa's conflict who did not meet the requirements of the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) were to be demobilised and reintegrated into civilian life. Two options were provided to beneficiaries. The first option included a social and economic reintegration package consisting of a cash transfer and a voluntary, two-week counseling programme. The second option was to join the South African Service Corps (SASC) for a maximum of 18 months.[1] The SASC was designed to train close to 22,000 combatants, primarily from Azanian Peoples Liberation Army (APLA) and Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK) resistance forces, between 1995 and 2001 (Williams 2005). While innovative, the SASC inevitably encountered difficulties. Poor planning and management undermined the credibility of the organisation, which was further tarnished by the perception that it would not help combatants obtain employment (Mashike 2006). Despite such difficulties, the SASC nevertheless provides an instructive example of an ISM designed to buy time for the labour market and communities to receive returning soldiers with limited skills and few employment prospects. For all of its limitations, the SASC shows how the creation of a "halfway house" for former combatants who are not eligible, or unwilling, to join the national armed forces, can be used as a strategy to ease their transition into a productive civilian life.

Military Integration. The concept of military integration is widely known and often pursued as part of a wider SSR strategy. It is typically defined as the incorporation of non-statutory armed groups (e.g. local militia, insurgents and revolutionary groups) into a statutory security framework (e.g. national police, army, reserve corps). Military integration is increasingly common in peace processes and in the post-conflict recovery process. Indeed, one third of all documented peace processes since 1990 have featured some form of military integration, includ-

ing the integration of former rebels into the national army (Hoddie and Hartzell 2003; Mills 1992). Military integration and redeployment of armed groups as "transitional security forces" may generate some security dividends. Likewise, keeping intact groups of former combatants who are subsequently given civilian policing duties and provided with life-skills training and/or socio-psychological support is another.

Transitional Security Forces. Transitional security forces represent a pragmatic form of ISM intended to prevent a security vacuum in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Transitional forces can address the immediate occupational and income needs of former combatants while temporarily maintaining the social control and cohesion of intact command and control structures. In Kosovo, for instance, the security transition was at least partially achieved through the shift of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) into the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), a civilian emergency response organisation while maintaining the cohesion, command and control of the former KLA. Members of the KPC were precluded from holding public office or from actively engaging in political affairs. All inhabitants of Kosovo ethnic societies, including Kosovo Serbs were eligible to join, though interest among groups other than the Kosovo Albanians was weak. The formation was modeled after the French Sécurité Civile while in practice the organisation basically retained the military structure of the KLA, including weapons, military uniforms and ranks.[2] Importantly, the KPC subsequently transitioned into a leaner national army combining a demobilisation and reintegration program with the conversion to the Kosovo National Army (KNA) of the newly independent entity of Kosovo. Thus the KPC provided a functional interim transitional security institution in form if not function, buying time and space for economic and political progression to a legitimate KNA. The KPC, then, is illustrative of how the interests of relative stability and alternative

civilian livelihoods can be combined through transforming one or more military groups and redirecting them towards civilian tasks.

Transitional Local Autonomy Forces. Another ISM entails the granting of a level of local autonomy and/or decentralised security capacity within an overall national security framework during a transitional period. A prominent example of such a scheme is the agreement between the Hun Sen led Cambodian government and the Khmer Rouge (KR) in Cambodia initially after signing a cessation of hostilities agreement in 1996.[3] In 1996, Hun Sen announced his Win-Win Policy to bring the Khmer Rouge back into the fold of the state. While a complex and multi-faceted policy, the Win-Win strategy included three levels of reintegration: (i) military integration[4], (ii) administrative reintegration[5] and (iii) socio-economic reintegration.[6] By offering a win-win scenario, the Cambodia People's Party was able to lay out concrete incentives to Khmer Rouge defectors. Defectors were ensured a guarantee of personal and family safety, safety of property and opportunities to continue the professions previously held. They were also allowed to maintain a degree of social cohesion, often a factor explicitly rejected in conventional DDR and SSR interventions. What is more, the process allowed Khmer Rouge followers to more gradually integrate into formal administrative structures and be exposed to sensitisation.

The scheme also underlines the need to tie transitional measures into longer-term peace building strategies, including, as appropriate, reintegration and national reconciliation programs (Colletta and Cullen 2000).[7]

What Next for Interim Stabilisation?

Conventional security promotion activities such as DDR and SSR are often ineffective because the political, economic and social circumstances on the ground are not ripe. This is especially the case in early post-conflict settings when ceasefires and peace agreements have not been signed and when transitional governments have yet to coalesce. This practice note has shown that, in certain cases,

ISMs provide important options to "ripen" a situation whether employed as military, civilian or hybrid civ-mil tools. The use of ISMs will depend very much on specific contextual factors, especially how the conflict ended, the degree to which reconciliation has progressed and the relationship between various combatant groups and the broader society. And while offering a strategic opportunity for policy makers and practitioners, it is important to stress that there is still comparatively limited empirical research on how contextual factors are likely to influence different kinds of ISMs.[8] There also remains a relative paucity of knowledge regarding the most appropriate implementation arrangements (e.g., vetting procedures, management processes, sequencing of activities) for different ISMs (Colletta and Muggah 2009).

A common aspiration of all ISMs is to temporarily hold former combatants in cohesive structures and maintain basic security and social supports in order to "buy time" and "create space" for other pertinent conditions on the ground to coalesce. The over-arching goal, of course, is to prevent and reduce the onset and severity of organised violence at war´s end while also reducing the likelihood of spoiler violence. ISMs can thus generate a host of opportunities in post-conflict settings such as: (i) facilitating the continuation of political dialogue; (ii) enabling the settlement of outstanding power sharing issues in the political and security arenas; (iii) building trust and confidence amongst parties to enable a political settlement; (iv) constituting provisional administrative structures and legal instruments to promote security and safety; (v) promoting the absorptive capacity of different economic and social sectors of society; (vi) sensitizing communities in advance of more formal DDR and SSR activities; and (vii) enhancing socio-psychological adjustment of combatants as they gradually move towards a fully civilian life or integration into the security services.

There are inevitably a number of risks associated with ISMs. As we have seen in the

brief examples presented above, ISMs run the risks of: (i) reconstructing oppressive structures or maintaining rebellious units; (ii) providing impunity from justice; (iii) facilitating criminality and maintaining illegal networks (e.g. drugs, money laundering, etc.); (iv) promoting the continuation of illegitimate control over natural resources; and (v) inadvertently de-legitimating the state by maintaining a separate and semi-intact source of potential authority and coercion. Like other peace-building efforts, ISMs also run the risk of creating new dependencies or becoming isolated from other main pillars of the peace-building and state-building processes. These are of course valid concerns that require management and mitigation. They are also common to many interventions during war-to-peace transitions. A key strategy is ensuring that ISMs are implemented under an accepted and largely legitimate civilian authority and are, from day one, accompanied by clear and transparent timelines and sunset clauses. Ultimately, high-risk strategies can also yield high gains that may justify the trade-offs entailed. Ⓢ

NOTES

1 The SASC was instituted within the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) in September 1995 (Williams 2005).

2 The KPC was to be allowed 2,000 weapons of which 1,800 would be "held in trust" in KFOR secure weapons facilities. The remainder would be available for the guarding of installations and security when units were deployed. Note, this is not unlike the dual key locked box method of placing weapons in third party trust as part of an acceptable Northern Ireland (de Chastelain 2004). These were preconditions of the KLA to accept the terms (Petersen 2005; ICG 2000).

3 Another example would be the de facto maintenance of the "Pesh Merga" in Kurdistan within the larger newly formed national army in Iraq following the American occupation.

4 All Khmer Rouge defectors were integrated into the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. The mid-level commanders continued to lead their soldiers under the Cambodian Armed Forces structure.

5 The Khmer Rouge leaders were allowed to either keep their old positions or accept alternative civilian government positions in their own communities.

6 The Government granted these Khmer Rouge areas autonomous economic development zone status: no taxes for three-years and permission to open a number of 'Border Economic Gates' with Thailand to promote trade. The economic development helped create social harmony, which was of crucial importance in the reintegration process. Land was fairly distributed within the autonomous zones. Each combatant and his or her family were provided with two cows, five hectares of land and 5,000 Baht. Many still live peacefully on this land.

7 This case also highlights the importance of not closing the door on future justice processes dealing with crimes committed during the conflict. The singling out of specific crimes of genocides as exceptions to the Law to Outlaw the Democratic Kampuchea Group has allowed for recent arrests of former Khmer Rouge leaders and has finally allowed the launch of an international criminal court on unique hybrid terms (a mixture of International and Cambodian Jurists) on Cambodian soil.

8 Even so, research indicates that there are likely a number of favorable pre-conditions that may influence the direction, shape and impacts of interim stabilisation measures. For example, Glassmyer and Sambanis (2007) have singled out factors that positively and negatively shape the outcomes of military integration or transitional civil-military mechanisms. Examples include the extent of economic opportunity; clear military victory or a negotiated peace settlement; and the existence of a broad multi-dimensional peace processes.

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