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ARTICLE

For Stabilization

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This article is a rejoinder to Roger Mac Ginty's polemic (Against Stabilization) arguing that, whilst the author is correct in identifying the inconsistencies in the concept and practice of stabilization, it is a viable concept. This article draws on field research from Afghanistan and Nepal to demonstrate that within stabilization's philosophical pedigree and practical application are components that can articulate a form of sub-national international intervention that can address political threats. Further this form of intervention is morally defensible and can promote control rather than constrict it. Stabilization is a new term that has been applied to many old practices, but it has been inconsistently used suggesting that it is both a practice for national level interventions and those directed at a sub-national level. This has been unhelpful as it confuses stabilization activity with other forms of intervention. The article explores the threats that stabilization can address, the stability that is being sought after and the manner in which interventions can be approached in order to address the threats. It suggests there is a space in which stabilization can operate, pragmatically engaging in the complexities of political conflict in states under extreme tension.

Introduction

Roger Mac Ginty is correct to note that the French Philosophers were right to say the ways in which words are used has tremendous meaning, this however has not stopped many of us, the interveners, using words in ways we should not. This, in part, explains why stabilization is misunderstood and misinterpreted but it is also because debates about stabilization are devoid of the lived experience of the populations subjected to conflict and intervention. I will argue that there is a philosophically and morally defensible concept of intervention called stabilization that can be rooted in experiences of stability and instability. This article[1] will discuss three issues that have confused the stabilization debate; what threats require 'stabilization', what is the stability we are searching for and where does it lie and; how we can conceive of stabilization interventions.

This article starts with a discussion on the strategic imperative of stability before drawing on field work in Afghanistan and Nepal. It presents a theoretical sketch and practical structure of conceiving of interventions which focus the stabilization debate much more closely on sub-national political threats to stability. The evidence base includes 151 interviews carried out over 18 months in four villages, two in Afghanistan and two in Nepal as well as other secondary data. The primary research assessed local conceptions of stability and matched those against the broad range of political, security and development interventions by the communities, local political leaders, their own states and external interveners in the four communities.

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The article is meant to stimulate debate and challenge both the interveners and the recipient nations to articulate their vision of a stable international system. I am not going to argue that all stabilization activity is positive, useful or indeed necessary. Instead this rejoinder to Roger's article aims to demonstrate that the goal of stabilization, i.e. stability, is not necessarily about control. Equally as Roger notes, stabilization is not the same as peace, though evidence from the field suggests that they are inherently linked, but we cannot assume that exercises in peace promotion are free from processes of control and imposition of order. In order to reach the point where stabilization can be articulated it must be disconnected from counter-insurgency doctrine and we have to look to ourselves, the interveners, as much as other factors and threats to understand why many regions of the world seem to be plagued by 'instability'.

As a starting point for this article it is useful to restate, in brief, the final points from Roger's piece, Against Stabilisation, from which the discussion will lead off. Ultimately, Roger sees a "logic of control that lies behind stabilization," which ensures that interventions reduce their ambition away from tackling peace. In operational terms stabilization also "normalizes the role of the military and aligned security agencies into peacebuilding." which is problematic because it "has profound consequences for issues of impartiality and consent." Finally, stabilization "is about control and ordering the transition of states emerging from civil war and authoritarianism…it is an attempt to create compliant, market-friendly any-states that do not threaten the international order" [all quotes in paragraph from Mac Ginty (2012: 26–8)].

To be clear, these criticisms are not specific to stabilization as currently conceived and practiced and have been levelled at peacekeeping, peacebuilding and statebuilding at various points.[2] Despite this, the aspiration of peace has far from been abandoned,[3] but we must not assume that aspirations of peace can be realised without the ability to resort to force. Nor can we ignore the ethical and moral dilemmas which are manifest from the implied values of international order, embodied in, for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[4] In support of peace and human rights, we the interveners, can be very interested in control and ordering transition, but this draws us away from discussing stabilization because these are the old debates about peace-keeping and peacebuilding. This is because there is a mismatch in the article's argument between the strategic aim of stability, and the local intervention activities which can be characterized as stabilisation.

Roger's critique is focused primarily at an international level where there are valid criticisms to be made about the processes of international engagement and intervention and the structuring role they can have. After decades of critique the global institutions and governments are beginning to realise that the way in which they have imposed democracy and free-trade regimes may in fact have been contributing factors to *instability* (Stiglitz 2004; Summers and Pritchett 1993).[5] That however is not the story of stabilization, which has suffered from a confused policy and academic discourse. The remainder of this article will attempt to explain the unique capabilities of stabilization to address some of the threats facing the international system, what is the stability we are aiming for and how we can intervene more appropriately in a way that supports the broader global strategic aim of stability.

What threats need addressing?

It is a well-worn maxim of international interventions that they are employed to address global threats to the international system or to the member states within the system. These threats include nuclear, chemical and biological weapons proliferation, climate change, natural disasters, cyber-attack, terrorism and criminal networks (HMG 2010: 3). Whatever the ranking or prioritisation of the

threats, these form common elements across the security priorities of the major states.[6]

While it may be tempting to lament the way in which the goal of peace is given less importance it is not simply because of the realisation of the hubris of interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq by Western powers. Non-Western states also realise that "security threats are becoming increasingly integrated, complex and volatile," and therefore their resolution or containment require different approaches (Information Office of the State Council 2011: 3). These changes have also led some states to recognise the weaknesses of existing international mechanisms. The US National Security Strategy indicates that they are clear-eyed about "the strengths and shortcomings of the international institutions that were developed to deal with challenges of an earlier time" (The White House 2010: 3). Whilst acknowledging these limitations the fact that there are frequent complex crises affecting the international community means that those charged with its maintenance are at times required to respond; events in Syria, Libya, Mali and Algeria are just the most current pressing issues.

The post-Cold War interest in peace was not short-lived and has not ended. In fact, international engagement in peace processes has continued.[7] Further, peace promotion has not become a second rate goal. It has been recognised, however, that the West does not have the right nor the ability, to extend open-ended interventions in what would essentially be a re-running of colonialism to impose peace. Stabilization is the beginning of a dawning reality where the West does not have the ability to simply impose its will in an intervention (Mac Ginty 2012: 22). It may have taken the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan to expose the limits of Western interventionism but the association of stabilization with those interventions is unhelpful when trying to bring clarity to the stabilization debate.

In response to the threats there are a number of interventions which attempt to stabilise the international system – though not all can be classed as stabilization. These include financial,[8] security, development, political and peace support interventions. Just as the threats are not equal, the responses are not the same and they cannot all lead us to stabilization interventions. Attempts to regulate and control the international trade or financial systems play their role in maintaining stability (and may also inadvertently promote instability). These actions are not the same as a humanitarian response to a crises caused by a natural disaster that may be exacerbated by climate change.[9] Both of these responses are not stabilization interventions.

Instead international interventions classed as stabilization must focus primarily on *political threats* or threats that can only be ameliorated through political processes. This would mean excluding *apolitical* threats such as natural disasters, humanitarian emergencies or epidemics. The threats that would be of concern to stabilization will primarily be intra-state conflicts because there are already international mechanisms (however limited) to address inter-state political issues.

However, the world and its crises do not come in neatly bound categories and it is probable that the interventions which the international community will be most vexed about are those that combine a number of threats. Therefore the international community is not prevented from engaging in operations to support peace or humanitarian action to protect lives and fundamental human rights but it retains the intent to engage in a more overtly political manner which would stabilise an environment. This is not as morally black and white as humanitarian action, but stabilization interventions properly conceived of would make an environment more, not less, stable and therefore save lives, prevent the destruction of infrastructure and protect fundamental social services. Achieving this is not a humanitarian prerogative; it is a national security interest meaning the application of humanitarian principles to stabilization activities

will fail. Equally, stabilization interventions may not lead to peace negotiations, but they can prevent environments deteriorating in to such sustained conflict that peace becomes more distant.

What and where is stability?

It is only at this point that I will bring in what the interveners are aiming for – namely stability. The point of interventions labelled as stabilization is that they should leave a location as, or more, stable than when the intervention began. The national level processes of intervention are relatively well developed in complex political crises. These are not without significant valid criticisms, see for example Paris and Sisk (2009). But, the reconstitution of a government, centralisation of a bureaucracy or monetary system are processes which interveners have some significant expertise in (for example East Timor, South Sudan or Afghanistan). Indeed the relative technical successes in both East Timor and Afghanistan, in the early stages, may have led interveners to assume the states were not secure which was not the case.

These are not the stability we are searching for primarily because the political threats to stability are increasingly integrated and complex as noted by the security strategies mentioned above, and are increasingly not located at a state level i.e. it is not the states themselves that present an active threat but it could be small groups within or outside the state apparatus that present a threat. It is this dual prioritisation, of political threats, at a sub-national level, where we can begin to hone the focus of stabilization interventions.

This focus on the local presents significant challenges to the states that are concerned with safeguarding stability. This is primarily because the concept of a state intervening effectively in another state's sub-national sphere is inherently constrained by the state-state relationship through which the interveners and recipient countries interact. Indeed current attempts at describing stabilization have tended to list activities rather than outcomes (HMG 2011; USIP 2009). The relationship between the intervener and host-nation becomes ever more fraught when the threat that is being addressed is fundamentally political in nature whereby local politics and national politics are not-aligned and can both be at odds with the political desires or values of the international system. Despite this problem this is exactly the environment in which interventions to support stability are conceived. This is also why Roger Mac Ginty is correct in asserting that some stabilization has been focused on increasing control. External interveners see these threats as something that must be ameliorated and the ways they can engage are inherently limited because they are outsiders and they have resorted at times to draconian and conservative notions of control as processes of stabilization when in fact they are not stabilizing and should not be characterised as stabilization.[10]

This localised form of stabilization also begs the question, what is (local) stability? Arguably there is already broad consensus on what national level stability looks like; it is the basic functioning of existing systems and structures through which the majority of a population is able to attain its basic needs. Again in terms of the national level systems that are required to provide that, the international community is broadly agreed on how to measure some key indicators; income, inflation, economic growth, education, health, employment, wage rates etc. Each indicator is inherently limited in value but it is valid to assert that significant deteriorations in these indicators suggest substantive issues or threats need to be addressed.

The problem is that basic functioning and basic needs change within and between countries so that there is no way to set a stability threshold in the same way you can set a poverty threshold.[11] So what is stable in Ghana would be manifestly unstable in Western Europe, but equally what is stable in Western Europe may not be achievable (or even desirable) in another context. It is in this ambiguity that policy makers, officials and

commanders have ended up talking about attaining a standard of stability that is 'good enough'.[12] There has however been little or no empirical evidence to suggest what actually constitutes stability at the local level,[13] which is surprising given the number of UN and multi-lateral missions which have stability as part of their mandate and the billions of dollars expended searching for stability.[14]

It is possible to point to a wide range of services as being components of stability, but that does not inform us of how they promote stability. Does building a school support stability when there are no teachers, books or electricity? If security was provided would that ensure stability? And if security is enforced by a foreign force or monitoring mission what happens when they are removed, what is the risk of instability? These questions are, in fact, largely irrelevant in understanding what constitutes stability at a sub-national level because interveners continue to think in terms of inputs rather than working from the desired outcomes.

Examples from the field suggest there are a limited set of indigenous and exogenous interventions which support stability i.e. which are stabilizing, and many which are simply not stabilizing. In the four villages in Afghanistan and Nepal significant interventions included humanitarian aid which kept people alive, fed, watered and sheltered. However stabilization is not primarily focused on the humanitarian response, because it is a space that already has competent international systems to address those threats. Further, the field evidence suggests though that humanitarian aid alone is also insufficient to sustain stability, so for example humanitarian aid in Helmand in the 1990's helped respondents return to their communities, but did little to address the ability of entire communities to stay on their land or return from refugee camps in Pakistan during the Taliban period.[15] Humanitarian aid was only the first component of successful stabilisation when there were sufficient local and national political frameworks[16] within which the communities and their political leaders can find a place. Specifically, local stability stems from the way in which local political elites are structured, the manner in which they co-opt or control the state (and vice versa) and the way in which the population is treated over *the medium term*.[17]

For example, in Kalakan district, north of Kabul in Afghanistan it was the combination of a local process of addressing the legacy of internecine killings from the 1980s and 90s within the structure of a regional political grouping (called the Koh Daman Shura) that allowed the community and wider district to stabilise after 2001 over a period of five to six years. The substantial developmental inputs in the district were largely irrelevant to the improvements in livelihoods which resulted from domestic investment in the construction and agricultural sectors. Statebuilding efforts may have made the government do a good job more effectively in Kalakan, but the early work of stabilisation by the state officials was carried out in people's homes, in mosques and in the open.

In these sub-national political relationships the use of goods, including money, land and liquidity, are critical to the maintenance of stability (and possibly control depending on the manner of the relationships). Therefore, instead of external inputs having value in themselves, it is the way in which inputs (physical or not) function and are applied through local *political systems* that promotes stability. Any intervention that does not engage with the local political system is simply hot air blowing over an area while local political actors wait out the interveners to continue their own way of life.

As Nepali respondents in Bara district noted,[18] development could be both a hindrance to stability as well as being irrelevant. During the conflict development agencies such as Plan International strove to implement programmes often in a very conflict sensitive manner during the Maoist insurgency. The projects may have had developmental impacts but in terms of stability they were irrelevant because they were not designed to address the source of the

instability – the political contest between the Maoists and the Nepali government. As one respondent noted wryly if international actors want to come and build things then why not, it is something for nothing. In the 'post' conflict period the massive influx of development funding has been funnelled through an 'all-party' decision making process which has led to rampant corruption and is in fact de-legitimizing the state presenting a threat to stability.[19]

The importance of local political systems reinforces the fact that stabilization is focused on political threats and should eschew straying in to areas already addressed through existing intervention modalities. It highlights, however, the limitations of existing interventions, particularly the governance focused statebuilding agenda whose penetration in to the sub-national layer of states has been very mixed and the humanitarian actors whose self-imposed limits mean they cannot provide longer term solutions to entrenched political crises. This presents the space within which stabilization should operate, pragmatically engaging in the complexities of political conflict in states under extreme tension.

While stabilization may be political and cannot stake any claim to the moral high ground of humanitarian principles this does not mean stabilization interventions cannot be considered, measured and appropriate in the protection of lives, property, infrastructure and governance systems. The tools and methods of stabilization also lead to the jettisoning of another principle, that of "do no harm". Whilst stabilization is not an argument for creating further harm, the idea that political interventions can be wholly benign is anachronistic.

A note of caution must be spelled out however when interveners believe they can stabilize an environment without the support of the host nation. Community evidence from Nahr-i Sarraj district in Helmand, Afghanistan, demonstrates that when stabilisation interventions are carried out without the robust backing of the host nation they can be more than irrelevant, they can invite lethal retribution against the population by opposition forces.[20]

Given this grey area of intervention it is also clear that whilst the aim of stabilization interventions should be to provide a platform for longer-term social, economic and political evolution, this does not need to predicate a free-market economy with democratic institutions. This is in large part because such evolutions are themselves destabilising, in particular if attempted by states that are already having to face a number of other existential threats. I have argued elsewhere the attempts at stabilization, counter-insurgency and statebuilding in a simultaneous transformation in Afghanistan has led to interventions across a range of areas which are simply and plainly at odds with one another (Dennys 2011). Other writers have argued that attempts at multiple transitions have often been fraught with complications (Bideleux and Jeffries 1998; Bratton and van de Walle 1997). It is important to recognise that not all good things come together and strategic patience is required with some of the more ideological components of international interventions. This presents an opportunity to discuss how interveners should conceive of their actions in other states if they are going to promote stability.

Stabilization interventions

These two conceptual points of discussion have attempted to hone down the threats that stabilization addresses, and the end-point of stability that the interventions should be aiming at. In short, stabilization interventions can address political threats at a sub-state level in a manner which preserves or maintains a situation to provide the opportunity for longer term social, economic and political evolution. However, all of this philosophical discussion would be irrelevant if we did not apply them to how interventions are conceived, and it is in its application that stabilization provides a strong alternative nar-

rative to *how* the international community intervenes, one that is not necessarily conservative in nature, but one that recognises the very real political compromises that must be made to maintain stability at a local level.

Before embarking on a stabilization intervention it fundamentally must be recognised that many interactions, let alone interventions, by the international community in other states can be destabilising. It has been argued that there may be a link between the IMF inspired fiscal reforms and violent conflict (Hartzell *et al* 2010), similarly the valuable goals of increasing education levels presents significant tensions in economies which do not have labour markets capable of absorbing large numbers of newly educated young people.[21] Therefore part of the stabilization discourse focuses not simply on doing new interventions but understanding the global environment and the pressures it places on states some of whom are unable to navigate the increasing challenges presented by the complex and volatile threats identified in the first section (OECD 2012: 3–7). Doing less, or doing existing activities differently, may be as stabilising as initiating a new mission.

A second point, which emerged from the field research about interventions, must be critically examined if we are to face up to the reality of stabilization. We as interveners are exceptionally adept at convincing ourselves that the activities we implement have the impacts we ascribe to them. In particular when new-fangled terminology comes along we are eager to demonstrate how knowledgeable we are and how effective our programming is by claiming that our programmes already address the threat or issue. This has been no less true in stabilization where I have often struggled to find interveners, civilian or military, who would suggest that their activities may contribute to instability, or did not have the potential to promote stability. Engineers claimed a bridge brought stability, governance advisors claimed the training on accountability would bring stability, military officers claimed a clearance operation would bring stability.[22] We seem intellectually incapable of admitting the limitations of our interventions or the unintended consequences our actions have.

Recognizing those two caveats, at the point where a stabilization intervention is required it is clear that the aim is not just to maintain the status quo, quite simply because the world is changing rapidly and all states must change and adapt to face this reality. Stabilization is not simply about trying to help states address threats within their territories; when properly conceived of it allows those states to grow, change and establish an equilibrium between their political class, the state and the population in a manner which is consistent with fundamental basic human rights.[23]

This challenges the current tools and conceptions of stabilization which do not, broadly speaking, provide clarity in the aims and objectives of interventions. Neither are current interventions coherently monitored allowing many things to be labelled stabilization incorrectly (SIGAR 2012). There is, for example, an inherent over-reliance on development as a way of promoting stability, (HMG 2011; USIP 2009) and there is a simplistic association with stabilization and one specific form of military operation, counter-insurgency. Both of these tendencies need to be de-bunked if stabilization is to be relevant and some basic truths about intervention need to be spelled out.

Development is a change process. *Any* intervention providing liquidity, cash, infrastructure, employment, better access to education, health or crop seeds etc, is about change. If the interventions fail to change the area they are implemented in the programmes are simply badly designed and implemented development activities. When they are successful, development interventions can be transformative. At their best they emancipate communities, broaden the horizons of a new generation and allow people to live healthier more productive lives. These

impacts are not going to be stabilising unless they are implemented in a sensitive manner – if they alter social and political dynamics too fast they can lead to a backlash by conservative groups or unrealistically increase expectations leading to frustrations which can become violent.[24] If the interventions are co-opted by those already in power they just perpetuate an unfair status-quo. The application of development projects in search of stability is therefore illusory without a political process to harness their potential impacts in a way which allows gradual change. Stabilisation is not about development, but development can be hugely destabilising in the wrong hands.[25]

Security interventions are equally conflicted. In the paradigm that connects stabilization with counter-insurgency (as often currently practiced) there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of counter-insurgency warfare. Counter-insurgency is a form of warfare that seeks to undermine a revolution or insurgency, and was correctly identified as being a form of counter-revolution (Galula 1964). A revolution, counter or otherwise, is destabilising.[26] It is not simply about attempting to extend the writ of a government it is about attempting to refashion the polity in its entirety. In the context of Afghanistan that project is liable to fail because the Afghan political elite itself is significantly divided about whether to support such an approach.[27] In Nepal, the state failed simply because it failed to present a counter-revolution to the Maoist ideology, particularly in areas like Bara where the Maoist threat was well within the technical capability of the Nepali state to address.[28]

Secondly security interventions, including both peacekeeping operations and counter-insurgency, can have a tendency to enforce a form of 'dead stability'.[29] This applies to the interventions of Western states (including the US Colonel noted above), but resonates strongly with the experiences of populations formerly living under feudal monarchies or authoritarian regimes (such as Nepal prior to 1990; or North Korea now). The security institutions clearly have a role in stabilization and to suggest, as Roger Mac Ginty (2012: 27–8) does, that the role of the military should not be normalised in peacebuilding fails to recognise the fact that in most of these situations there are likely to be bouts of extreme violence. Having the ability to respond with force is a necessity if the international community is going to engage or it risks repeating the mistakes in peacekeeping missions in, for example, Srebenica or more recently in DR Congo (HRW 1995; Amnesty International 2012).[30] While the military are ultimately structured and trained to fight wars and their role in providing stability should be secondary to the political imperative, it is not possible to discount their essential contribution.

This is where we come to the final component to the comprehensive approach; diplomatic action.

This is both the area that has the least developed thinking about how to intervene and yet is probably the key component of stabilization because it is fundamentally about addressing political threats. The failure to develop effective sub-national political action is largely because states struggle to provide diplomatic interventions at a sub-national level because they are bound by convention to engage with another state not their sub-national structures (United Nations 1961). However, when the issue they are attempting to address is sub-national, and the host nation state itself may be conflicted about how to address a sub-national threat, it becomes difficult for diplomatic action to conceive of stabilization in another state because they are simply not set up to intervene in this manner. It was in to this vacuum that protagonists of the development-led and security-led stabilization paradigm have incorrectly stepped.[31]

Political stabilization is the most significant component of a stabilization intervention, and re-asserts what seems to have been forgotten from counter-insurgency doctrine, that interventions to address political

problems must be led and directed by a civilian mission. This would then sub-ordinate both the military and development spheres under political direction which is critically important when conceiving of interventions at a sub-national level because sub-national level political stabilization is less about elections, and more about the cut-and-thrust of politics, the division of spoils, access to power, patronage and resources. Those processes are unlikely to be edifying but interventions which fail to engage with this reality will either be irrelevant or will be co-opted by the local political elites for their own ends. There are clear lessons from experiences in Afghanistan where short-term deployments directed by programmes often designed in capitals and not on the ground have themselves contributed to what has now become an endemic, and state threatening, problem; corruption (SIGAR 2012).

In summary, a sub-national stabilization intervention which is aimed at addressing a political threat might involve both military and development actors. But, whatever the particular context of the environment the intervention must be led by a civilian with executive authority who is able to use the interventions to promote stability rather than undermine it. It is possible to identify basic and rudimentary principles for whether an environment has become more or less stable which focus on the ability of the population to live their lives as they had done previously, the functioning of pre-existing state structures and justice systems and delivery of previously existing development goods and services. Anything beyond that, which brings in new goods, services or finance is the domain of the development sectors to provide and should not be provided by those seeking to support fundamental stability.

Concluding remarks

In starting this article I said that many of us, the interveners, have used the terms of stability and stabilization incorrectly. I then suggested that we have all been guilty of claiming a piece of the stabilization pie by suggesting our own interventions have been 'stabilizing'. If we fail to restrain ourselves, stabilization will fail to develop any credence as a mode of intervention as the nation states of the world grapple with a range of threats and attempt to ameliorate the effects global change will bring in the 21st Century. This is potentially dangerous as both the security-led and development-led paradigms of stabilization currently, and incorrectly, dominate debate about how to address sub-national political threats.

Stabilization does not circumvent attempts at finding peace, of addressing pressing long-term development challenges and certainly does not in any manner prevent the delivery of basic humanitarian support. There are existing systems and bodies for addressing these threats within the international system. However, stabilization is distinct, it provides a way for intervening states to maintain sufficient stability (i.e. sufficient functioning of the society as it had previously) to prevent humanitarian disasters from occurring or becoming worse. It also provides a way for the sub-national structures of recipient nations to access support in how to, politically, grapple with changes associated with development, technology and climate change and prevent political tensions from becoming overtly and significantly violent. Most critically it is the primary form of intervention for dealing with political threats that cannot be addressed through inter-state diplomatic action.

As important as the existence of other modes of intervention are to addressing other threats, it must be recognised that stability at a national level is broadly already under the purview of existing institutions and processes. These interventions themselves are not without significant risks and may have promoted instability in which case those concerned with sub-national stabilisation must engage with those responsible for national reforms and processes to highlight

the dangers of ill-informed change. The focus of stabilization must be fixed at the sub-national level. This focus also means it is possible to avoid long lists of what constitutes stabilization at a local level because it is quite simply the maintenance of sufficient security for the population and maintenance of existing government systems and economic activity as is the norm in that region. For that reason what is required to stabilize one area depends not only on what existed in that area before a conflict, but the depth of damage inflicted by the conflict.

Finally, stabilization is not focused on preserving an unjust status quo. A coherent stabilization intervention would use all available tools, which may be civilian or military or a combination of both, to maintain space for social, economic and political evolution. It is about gradual change and is precisely why stabilization must be civilian led; to ensure that military action is not used to impose a form of dead stability which will erupt into violent conflict once the military mission leaves. Stabilization operations can provide limited inputs to help local political elites grapple with these risks and threats over the medium to long-term. In this conception stabilization is able to address some of the threats to international stability identified by the Western and non-Western states.

Notes

[1] This article draws on research which supported a wider doctoral thesis on stability and stabilisation submitted to Cranfield University in the UK. The doctoral thesis compared experiences of intervention and stabilisation in Afghanistan and Nepal. The paper also draws on the author's own professional experience.

[2] Amongst many examples see Call and Cook (2003); Goodhand (2008); Yannis (2003); Paris (1997).

[3] The most recent re-stating of these principles by a world leader was President Obama's inauguration speech where he said "We will defend our people and uphold our values through strength of arms and rule of law. We will show the courage to try and resolve our differences with other nations peacefully – not because we are naïve about the dangers we face, but because engagement can more durably lift suspicion and fear. America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe; and we will renew those institutions that extend our capacity to manage crisis abroad, for no one has a greater stake in a peaceful world than its most powerful nation. We will support democracy from Asia to Africa; from the Americas to the Middle East, because our interests and our conscience compel us to act on behalf of those who long for freedom. And we must be a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the victims of prejudice – not out of mere charity, but because peace in our time requires the constant advance of those principles that our common creed describes: tolerance and opportunity; human dignity and justice (Obama 2013).

[4] UDHR Article 1 states "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," (UN General Assembly 1948). As the most fundamental right ascribed to humanity it begs the question what should the response of onlookers be when they see one person's dignity and rights being abused. http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml

[5] Within the range of issues identified by OECD (2012: 3–7) it should also be recognised that the very systems of aid and development may be promoting fragility and dependencies. Indeed, the field work in Afghanistan and Nepal highlighted that not only are the states dependent on aid, but the communities themselves are dependencies on the international system through direct development programming and remittances from those who work outside the country (interviews in Afghanistan and Nepal, Sep–Dec 2010 and Aug–Oct 2011).

[6] This is not limited to the Western powers and would include Russia, China and India (Russian Federation 2010: 3–5; Information Office of the State Council 2011: 4; Indian Army 2004: 5–8; Sarkozy 2008).

[7] To give only one example international engagement in Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement from 2002 through to South Sudan's independence was substantial.

[8] These are not only interventions by the IMF or World Bank, but also include instruments such as the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) to respond to the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis.

[9] Webster *et al* (2009: 2) provides a striking analysis of the future implications of climate change on humanitarian disasters and responses but also notes "that extreme weather events do not occur in isolation and the increasing interconnectedness of world economic and political systems has made disasters more complex and destructive."

[10] The quote Roger uses from a US Colonel describing operations to the north of Kandahar where villages had been 'turned in to parking lots' is indicative of this problem (Mac Ginty 2012: 21).

[11] The World Bank's current international poverty rate is $1.25 a day, which provides some comparability for extreme poverty but even that broad measure has very significant weaknesses (World Bank 2010: 3, 41–2).

[12] One example being Cordesman (2012).

[13] One of the few was a monitoring tool developed in Afghanistan by the US contractor Development Alternatives Inc (DAI) however the sampling frame and method focused on beneficiaries using closed questions may be subject to very significant social desirability bias which in other surveys in Afghanistan has been estimated to be as high as 50% [interviews in Kabul in December 2010 (DfID Afghanistan 2010: 31)]. Audits reports indicate that the $400m stabilization programme implemented by DAI had "not met its overarching goal of extending the legitimacy of the Afghan government and had not brought the government closer to the people or *fostered stability*." Emphasis added (Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction 2012: 2). Other attempts include Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments (MPICE) and Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP) (Ahmar and Kolbe 2011; Agoglia *et al* 2010).

[14] The size of the stabilization sector is substantive if we consider that stability was one of the overarching objectives for several substantive civilian and military interventions in the last two decades to name two military missions the Stabilization Force (SFOR) for Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996); the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) 2001 and three civilian missions UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH); the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) within these five interventions alone billions of dollars have been spent intent on stability.

[15] Interviews with community leaders from a Village in Nahr-i Sarraj, Helmand Sep-Dec 2010

[16] These frameworks were not necessarily democratic and it is an uncomfortable reality that some of the most stable periods were far from democratic, in fact the introduction of democratic competition had a net destabilising impact in at least one community.

[17] This is an important distinction because whilst the field data suggests that instability can arise very quickly, the formation of stability takes substantial time. If stability cannot be restored quickly it suggests not only the priority of what interveners do is important, as discussed in the next section, but the modality of how that intervention is delivered is also critical.

[18] Interviews carried out in Bara, Nepal, August and September 2011.

[19] The original 'all-party' mechanism in Nepal dates from the 1990's but has been used in the post conflict period by the international donor community as a way of spending development funding.

[20] This community asked not to be identified but was subject to a range of military and civilian interventions with little back of the Afghan state, though clearly in other parts of Helmand, notably the areas in, around and between Lashkar Gah and Gereshk there was greater state engagement. Interviews carried out Sep–Dec 2010, the community remains outside state control.

[21] For further discussion on both the pacifying and risk factors associated with expanding education see Østby and Urdal (2010: 4–5) and Lange (2012). From a field level it is worth noting the important role of education during the Maoist insurgency that respondents in Rolpa district in Nepal noted, interviews in October 2011.

[22] This applies not only to my field work in Afghanistan and Nepal (Interview carried out between Sep–Dec 2010 and Aug–Nov 2011) but other interventions such as Iraq or Pakistan (South Asia Terrorism Portal 2012).

[23] This would include the right to life and freedom from oppression (UN General Assembly 1948).

[24] A point reinforced by Nepali respondents in Rolpa, Nepal, October 2011 whose insurgent era leadership had all been at school togetger.

[25] Interviews in Afghanistan and Nepal, Sept-Dec 2010 and Aug–Nov 2011.

[26] A point also made by Roger, illustrating that the confusion about the aims of stabilisation are clearly evident to the academic community but may be less well understood amongst practioners (Mac Ginty 2012: 27).

[27] The existing of what the US termed the Malign Actors Network demonstrate what has been clear to observers that the links between the government, anti-government and criminal actors are in fact strong and resilient, the fact that the CIA has then been supporting some of the very actors other parts of the US administration view as malign illustrates the way in which our own interventions undermine one another (Rosenberg 2010; Filkins 2010).

[28] Interviews with combatants, local leaders and state officials, Kathmandu and Bara, Nepal, Aug–Nov 2011.

[29] This phrase was used by a respondent interviewed in Rolpa, Nepal, October 2011.

[30] It also fails to recognise that their contribution is very much normal and dates back several decades in previous international interventions which have sought to stabilise environments such as the Multi-National Force sent to Rhodesia as it transitioned to Zimbabwe in 1979/80 (Wiseman and Taylor 1981: 7–22; Stedman 1988: 177–203).

[31] Interviews with staff managing a stabilization programme in Afghanistan, Kabul, December 2010 (SIGAR 2012).

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