The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation

Executive Summary

Stabilisation activity is undertaken as an **initial response to violence or the immediate threat of violence**, where the capacity of local political structures and processes to manage conflict have broken down.

The **UK government's objective** in undertaking stabilisation interventions is to support local and regional partners in conflict-affected countries to **reduce violence, ensure basic security and facilitate peaceful political deal-making**, all of which should aim to **provide a foundation for building long-term stability**.

In supporting stabilisation, the UK adheres to three central **stabilisation principles**:

- **Protecting the means of survival**: Address any immediate security deficit to build space for peaceful political processes and – in time – support the restoration of long-term security, the rule of law and access to justice. The direct provision of security by external actors alone will not in itself achieve stabilisation. Stabilisation activities should focus on addressing key obstacles to the emergence of a stabilising political deal. Essential service delivery is a vital part of protecting the means of survival and forms an inherent part of stabilisation activities. Such engagement must be coordinated with other actors, including humanitarians.

- **Promoting and supporting a political process to reduce violence**: Stabilisation must work to support and foster political deals and bargains among key conflict elites and actors. These are vital to securing reductions in violent conflict, building support for more formal peace agreements and facilitating stable transitions out of conflict. Stabilisation activity must always be locally owned and requires the buy-in of local elites to be effective. Who we choose to support, however, carries risks, in that it may empower some warring parties to 'capture the state' and exclude wider political, social and economic participation in the post-conflict state.

- **Preparing a foundation for longer term stability**: There is no set period for stabilisation – it can range from months to years – but it is always a transitory activity contributing to the wider goal of creating the conditions for long-term stability. Shorter-term stabilisation interventions and other activities to build longer-term stability will often run simultaneously and overlap with other approaches, such as DFID'S Building Stability Framework.

A **conflict-sensitive approach** is vital in any stabilisation intervention, ensuring that interventions do not inadvertently fuel or exacerbate conflict, or sow the seeds for future conflict. A **gender-sensitive approach** is of equal importance, considering how gender norms and roles shape the effects, causes and drivers of conflict.

Stabilisation **activities are likely to involve local military actors possibly augmented by UK and/or allied forces**. An integrated civilian-military approach, underpinned by the UK's Fusion Doctrine, is vital to effective delivery. Activity undertaken with bilateral or multilateral partners requires broad agreement on the parameters and objectives.

It is **vital to identify and acknowledge difficult policy trade-offs**. There are considerable tensions between stabilisation actions to secure immediate security and reduce violent conflict and those activities designed to generate longer-term stability and resilience or respond to humanitarian needs. Setting up early mechanisms to manage risks and potential trade-offs should therefore be a priority.

Chapter 1: The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation

1. The UK government's objective in undertaking stabilisation interventions is to support local and regional partners in conflict-affected countries to reduce violence, ensure basic security and facilitate peaceful political deal-making, all of which should aim to provide a foundation for building long-term stability.

2. This document sets out the key elements of the UK's Approach to Stabilisation interventions ('the UK approach'), summarising the key themes from the UK Stabilisation Guide.[4] It establishes why and when the UK will engage in stabilisation and how this approach links to other conflict resolution tools and policy priorities. It describes the central principles of the UK's approach and sets out some of the policy dilemmas stabilisation interventions present.

3. The **UK Approach supports wider UK government strategic and policy frameworks**, including those articulated in the UK government's National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (2015),[5] which incorporates and develops the Building Stability Overseas Strategy (2011).[6] It complements DFID's Building Stability Framework (2016),[7] which provides guidance on how to develop long-term stability. The UK Approach and the wider Stabilisation Guide are informed by the lessons identified by the Iraq Inquiry, and from recent interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Libya, South Sudan and elsewhere. The UK uses the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) as its main financial instrument to fund stabilisation.

What is stabilisation?

4. **Stabilisation is an activity undertaken as an initial response to violence or the immediate threat of violence.** All stabilisation interventions will be different and shaped by context specific factors. But there are circumstances common to all conflict contexts in which the UK may wish to undertake stabilisation activities. Insecurity is likely to threaten the viability of the state and/or the wellbeing of its civilian population. The capacity of local political structures and processes to manage conflict is likely to have broken down. Violent conflict will have thrown the political settlement into turmoil, and national, local and regional actors will be competing to further their interests and authority. Security, justice and services will be absent or degraded, and threats to UK national security may be emerging.

> " Stabilisation is an activity undertaken as an initial response to violence or the immediate threat of violence "

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4   This document updates the UK's Approach to Stabilisation, last revised in 2014. For further information please see www.gov.uk/stabilisation-unit
5   HM Government (2015) *National Security Strategy*, revised and updated in HM Government (2018) op. cit.
6   FCO, DFID and MOD (2011) op. cit.
7   DFID (2016) *Building Stability Framework*

5. Therefore, when undertaking stabilisation interventions, the UK seeks to **protect** the means of survival and restore basic security, **promote** and support a political process to reduce violence as well as **prepare** a foundation for longer term stability. These stabilisation principles are set out in more detail below. In doing so, the UK aims to help establish necessary foundations where – over time – structural stability is able to take hold through "political 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".[8]

6. The **UK puts engagement with the politics of conflict at the heart of its stabilisation activity**. The UK seeks to help local partners restore security and create political opportunities and openings, such that a locally-determined path out of conflict can be found. Stabilisation should be seen as a process designed to facilitate this political objective, which needs to be managed flexibly with the understanding that any progress can easily be reversed.

🔍 Case study: Sierra Leone 2000–02, a stabilisation success

Sierra Leone provides a positive example of how stabilisation can work in practice. The period between 2000 and 2002 saw the resolution to Sierra Leone's eleven-year conflict, largely due to an effective stabilisation intervention involving local, regional and international actors.

The British military intervention in May 2000 acted to restore and provide a guarantee of security trusted by all the warring parties and protected the population from further depredation. The development of a sustainable peace, in place since 2002, was only possible once both physical security and trust had been re-established. Previous peace agreements between the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the government failed to reflect the arrangements of power in the country. Mutual distrust, expedient deals between armed groups, and the failure of international peacekeepers to restrain the warring parties and enforce disarmament had allowed the conflict to continue.

Additionally, the British along with the United Nations peacekeeping force (UNAMSIL) and regional forces from Guinea were able to apply decisive military force in a way that convinced the RUF to enter into political negotiations. These negotiations brought the RUF leadership into a political process which provided reassurances about their post-conflict security as well as confirming their participation in future elections. This allowed for all armed groups to disarm and set in place the conditions for longer-term reform of the security sector and greater political inclusivity.

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7. The **UK's engagement in stabilisation may take place alongside local military actors possibly augmented by UK and/or allied forces**. This requires an integrated approach, with civilian leads having access to military support that can provide security and – if necessary – reduce the threat posed by those unwilling to enter into a political process to end violence. This does not imply military forces will always be involved but that they can be called on if deemed necessary.

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8   FCO, DFID and MOD (2011) op. cit.

8. The **parameters for stabilisation, with the option to use force, will be determined by the political and legal underpinning of the operation**. The UK may be involved on the basis of host-state consent. It may be involved on the basis of a United Nations Security Council mandate. In exceptional circumstances the UK reserves the right to act with neither host-state consent nor Security Council authorisation.[9]

9. Any **use of force as part of a stabilisation intervention must be directly linked to achieving the desired political end state**. UK forces may be involved directly in providing immediate physical security, through a bilateral or multilateral mission, through to support and training for local or regional military forces. UK military engagement may be to encourage conflict parties to enter into negotiations and to pursue their grievances through a peaceful political process. The use of force will change the balance of power and shift incentives, which will shape the broader political context. When undertaking stabilisation activity conscious political choices will have to be made and sides taken, which makes working politically a contested and difficult process.

10. The **UK Approach requires the conscious identification and acknowledgement of policy trade-offs**. This necessitates the recognition that while some stabilisation actions will secure immediate security and reduce violent conflict, they may be at odds with other activities designed to generate longer-term stability. In some cases they may even serve to undermine them. For example, while stabilisation activities may facilitate a political deal between elites which ends fighting, they may also entrench some of the political conditions under which the conflict started in the first place.

11. It is worth noting that the UK Approach sets out an idealised model of stabilisation. In reality delivery of stabilisation activities will be messier, contingent on the local contextual circumstances and defined by the required level of support to local authorities.

> " *In reality delivery of stabilisation activities will be messier, contingent on the local contextual circumstances and defined by the required level of support to local authorities* "

Stabilisation's relationship to other approaches to tackling conflict

12. There is a need to **differentiate stabilisation from other responses to violent conflict and instability**, some of which may be conducted in the same physical and temporal space. Understanding the different approaches and objectives allows for proper consideration of the dilemmas and trade-offs involved. In the past there has been a conflation of stabilisation and other concepts such as peacebuilding, early recovery, state-building and counterinsurgency. This confusion is compounded by the degree to which many of these approaches are pursued simultaneously in conflict contexts, and the absence of agreed definitions of stabilisation: the UN, for example, does not have one.[10]

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9   The legal and political context determines the extent to which the use of force, where necessary and appropriate, can be used to: constrain the behaviour of aggressors and deter further violence against the population of a conflict-affected state, contain the conflict, and limit violence being used as a political tool. In all instances the UK's use of force will also be constrained by applicable international laws.

10 See Cedric de Conig, Chiyuki Aoi and John Karlsrud eds. (2017) UN Peacekeeping Doctrine for a New Era: Adapting to Stabilisation, Protection and New Threats (London: Routledge)

13. **While stabilisation should be seen as closely related to peacebuilding, there are differences.** Unlike stabilisation, peacebuilding situates itself as a transformative activity designed to address the underlying drivers of conflict, whether it be to prevent conflict, resolve conflict or to consolidate post-conflict peace. In some contexts, stabilisation activities may support and create the foundations for achieving peacebuilding outcomes. UN peacebuilding, however, requires relatively permissive environments where state capacity already exists, in contrast to stabilisation. DFID's Building Stability Framework sets out a similar approach to peacebuilding, seeking to help countries and communitities manage change peacefully.[11]

14. **State-building, along with peacebuilding, has also been a central component of many external interventions in conflict-affected countries.** In using developmental tools to improve state capacity, state-building also seeks transformative change. But it risks being destabilising in conflict contexts, where the division of power and resources is being violently contested. State-building, as practiced in many contexts, has often involved the imposition of inappropriate templates and unrealistic timeframes. In contrast to stabilisation, both peacebuilding and state-building are long-term activities, going well beyond restoring security and establishing political processes to reduce violent conflict.

Peacebuilding is defined by the United Nations as 'a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development.'

UN Resolution on Review of United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture (2016); see also *UN Secretary-General Report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, 18 January 2018*

State-building is defined by the OECD as 'action to develop the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state in relation to effective political processes for negotiating the mutual demands between state and societal groups.'

15. **Counterinsurgency (COIN) has frequently been confused and conflated with stabilisation**, especially during the implementation of military-led 'hot stabilisation', most obviously during the international interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. This has compounded the tendency to see stabilisation as a form of state-building designed to win over popular support as part of a COIN campaign. COIN, like stabilisation, acknowledges the primacy of politics in addressing instability, but there are several significant differences, most notably that there is a heavy emphasis on supporting a state and its government against insurgents, whereas in some instances stabilisation might work against the state if that is deemed to be the source of instability and violent conflict.
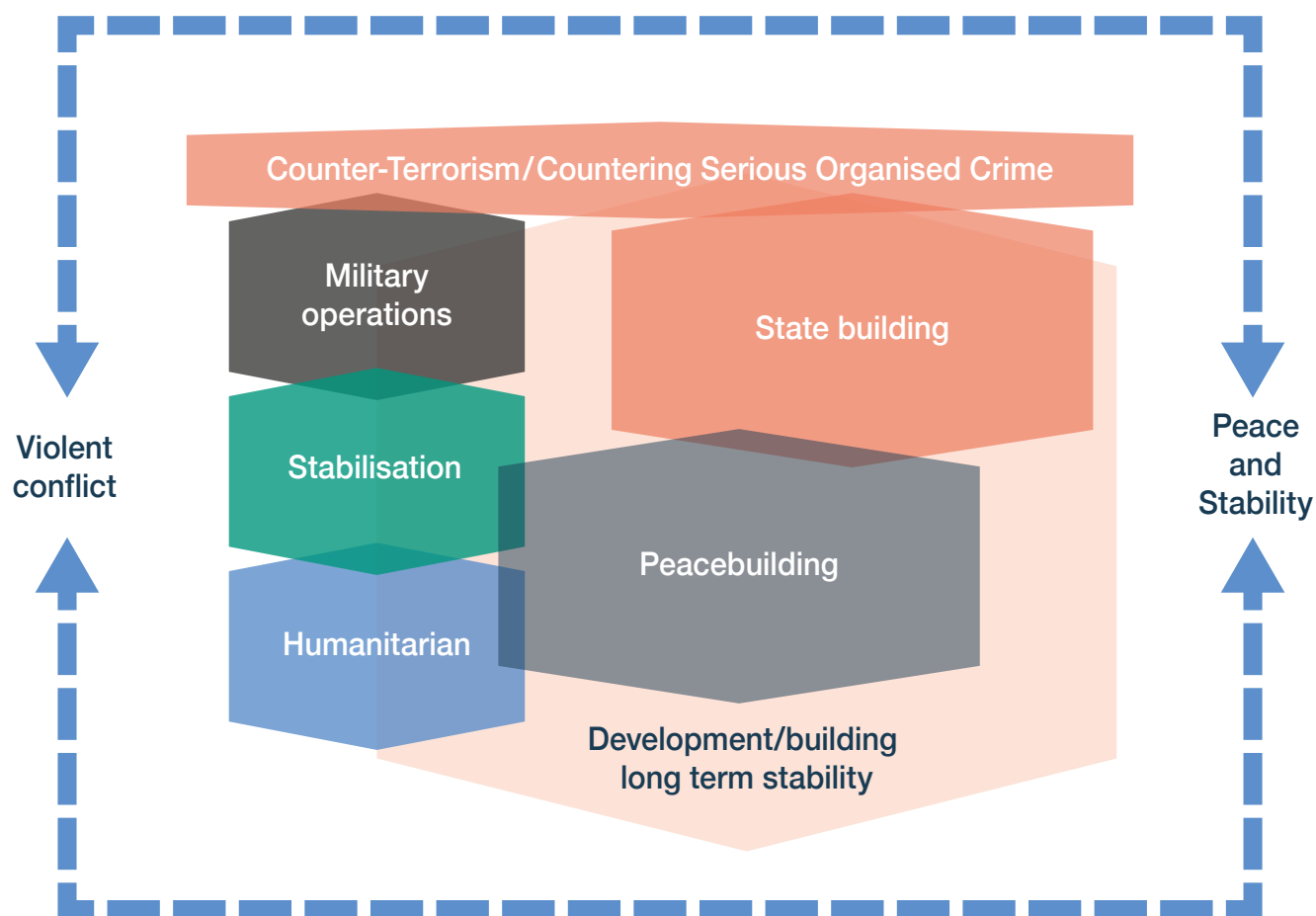
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11   DFID (2016) op. cit., executive summary para. 3

The relationship between stabilisation and other responses to violent conflict and instability*

"Stabilisation is distinct from concepts such as peacebuilding, state-building, and counter-terrorism. However, these approaches are often pursued simultaneously in conflict contexts. This diagram indicates roughly how they overlap, but is only intended as an accessible visual representation of a complex inter-relationship." *Diagram adapted from S.Collinson, S. Elhawary and R Muggah (2010), *States of fragility: stabilisation and its implications for humanitarian action* (Humanitarian Policy Group/ Overseas Development Institute), p.11.

16. **Stabilisation efforts will often take place alongside other interventions, such as humanitarian engagement.** In particular, it is important to acknowledge that humanitarian aid is often delivered in the same space, on the basis of assessed needs and according to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.[12] Agreeing coordination mechanisms should be a priority to manage any potential tensions with humanitarian and other interventions. Stabilisation actors should also refrain from any action that could contribute to the politicisation and securitisation of humanitarian aid.

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12 International commitments in this field are detailed in the UK's humanitarian policy paper.
   - DFID (2017) *Saving lives, building resilience, reforming the system: the UK Government's Humanitarian Reform Policy*
   - Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2015) *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery*
   - DFID (2017) Delivering differently in Protracted Conflict and Refugee Crises. Unpublished

Stabilisation principles

Protecting the means of survival and restoring basic security

17. A **priority in any stabilisation intervention must be to address any immediate security deficit to build space for peaceful political processes** and – in time – support the restoration of long-term security, the rule of law and access to justice.

18. The **direct provision of security by external actors alone will not in itself achieve stabilisation**. Such interventions are simply ways of restoring security and creating space for political processes. Security and justice issues **are at the heart of questions about who holds power and how that power is managed**, and usually form part of both formal peace negotiations and more informal political deals.

> *The* **direct provision of security by external actors alone will not in itself achieve stabilisation***. Such interventions are simply ways of restoring security and creating space for political processes*

19. **External actors must be careful not to import assumptions about what form the security and justice sectors should take**, providing templates based on Western security and justice models. This can lead us to misunderstand who is currently either providing or undermining security and justice and develop overambitious or misaligned interventions. We risk assuming that the main reason that there is violent conflict is because the state has been unable to suppress it, and thus that if external actors help to strengthen state security institutions, it will be possible to end the conflict.

20. Engagement must be underpinned by a consideration of the livelihoods and dignity of civilian populations caught up in violent conflict. Immediate interventions should focus on **addressing key obstacles to the emergence of a stabilising political deal**. In doing so it is important to consider the nature of violence predating, during and after conflict. While stabilisation needs to reduce violent conflict as much as possible, it may also be the case that addressing all forms of structural violence in a society will be not be possible during stabilisation.[13]

21. Security and justice interventions in stabilisation contexts also **set the foundations for longer-term stability**. While the early stages of stabilisation may require robust action to establish security, as the situation begins to stabilise it will necessary to transition towards more civilian-led and ideally more democratic forms of maintaining security.

22. It is advantageous not to think of programmatic activities in the security and justice sphere as one-off initiatives aimed at single issues but rather to take a wider perspective, considering how all state and non-state actors interact with each other. This will also assist in addressing short-term needs preparing for the longer longer-term development of security and justice.

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13 See Stabilisation Unit (2013) *Security Sector Stabilisation*

23. **Evidence has shown that the delivery, or non-delivery, of services in a violent conflict context can have a considerable impact, both positive and negative, on the extent and trajectory of conflict.**[14] Effective service delivery interventions must be founded on a clear understanding of the context. This includes an appreciation of what came before the armed conflict, notably the way that services form part of the distribution of power and resources, the nature of violence, and, critically, beneficiary expectations.

24. **There is a role for essential service delivery (i.e. health, education, power and fuel, communications, water and sanitation) to operate in support of stabilisation and to pave the way for broader stability.** During stabilisation, service delivery interventions should focus on protecting the means of survival, allowing the population to resume their livelihoods and access to markets and services without fear of predation, exclusion or denial of essential resources.

25. **Protecting a population adversely affected by conflict will not solely be a stabilisation activity.** The UK's humanitarian policy commits the UK to a principled, non-political approach to humanitarian aid, autonomous from political, military, security or economic objectives. Stabilisation actors should exercise caution to avoid politicising and or securitising humanitarian action, which could risk making humanitarian activities and assisted populations a target for violence.

26. **Service delivery interventions must be coordinated with humanitarian and development actors.** Stabilisation actors should take deliberate and systematic steps to establish mechanisms to identify and manage the opportunities, risks and tensions associated with coexistence of stabilisation, humanitarian and development approaches. Stabilisation efforts in support of service delivery can be considered where they have a comparative advantage and address a critical gap. They should be avoided where longer-term development initiatives can fill the gap, or where critical needs are addressed through humanitarian assistance.

27. **Service delivery interventions do not automatically increase the legitimacy of those providing them.** Failure to deliver services will however disadvantage an already vulnerable population affected by conflict, and deepen further political disaffection and existing grievances. Although the delivery of services will not elicit popular consent, it may act as a vehicle for local authorities to re-engage with communities as to what they want and how it should best be delivered.

> *Failure to deliver services will however disadvantage an already vulnerable population affected by conflict, and deepen further political disaffection and existing grievances*

28. **Service delivery interventions as part of stabilisation should not seek to be transformative and should have appropriate levels of ambition.** They should prioritise giving the population access to essential services in a broad-based, non-exclusionary manner, while working to maintain national systems for delivery and accountability where they already exist. They need to be sensitive to the fact that how a service is delivered (in terms of accountability and responsiveness) can be as important as what is delivered.

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14   Jonathan Di John, Simon Carl O'Meally, Richard Spencer Hogg (2017) *Social service delivery in violent contexts: achieving results against the odds – a report from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal* (Washington DC: World Bank Group)

29. **UK actors should be aware that delivering services can have the effect of generating revenues (rents) for local political elites** that can often underpin the local post-conflict status quo. While rents can act as a 'peace dividend' for local elites, in other situations they can act to distort and jeopardise post-conflict developmental outcomes. Political and military actors may seek to manipulate patterns of service delivery and perceptions around them to their advantage. Uneven access to services across societal groups or regions is also likely to create grievances and should be avoided wherever possible.

Promoting and supporting a political process to reduce violence

30. **Stabilisation interventions must work to support and foster political deals and bargains among key conflict elites and actors.**[15] These are vital to securing reductions in major conflict violence, building support for more formal peace agreements and facilitating more stable transitions out of conflict. External interveners must minimise actions and interventions that harm, distort or prevent these vital local political processes while still seizing viable opportunities to improve their inclusivity.

31. **External actors must undertake a careful analysis of the key conflict elites and the deals and bargains that exist between them**, the underlying division of power and resources, as well as an understanding of how any intervention may affect these dynamics. These dynamics must be looked at in the broadest terms, factoring in local, national, regional and transnational actors and their interconnections.

32. **External political interventions can build trust and confidence and support the emergence of stabilising political deals between conflict elites.** Issues around privileged access to power and resources and degrees of inclusivity are likely to be central to such interventions. External actors can help these tentative political processes stick and hold through the judicious use of resources. Geographic and thematic expertise and resources can provide important support. But external actors should avoid trying to control these highly 'local' processes from afar.

33. **Externally-backed peace processes and agreements that are significantly misaligned or out of sync with the underlying distribution of power and resources are likely to fail.** If one is already in place, policy makers should consider which activities will help foster local support for an agreement, or reassess its scope and ambition, advocating an iterative, sequenced approach to political engagement that enhances opportunities for political and economic inclusion where possible.

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15 C Cheng, J Goodhand and P Meehan (2018) *Supporting Elite Bargains to Reduce Violent Conflict Synthesis Paper* (Stabilisation Unit)

34. **Engagement in these political processes brings considerable trade-offs.** Bargains and deals between conflict elites can de-escalate major conflict, but can limit the possibility of more inclusive change, and themselves result in elite capture, other less visible forms of violence (such as domestic violence) and continued fragility. When planning interventions, policy makers and practitioners must recognise that the transition from war to peace is never linear. The emergence of informal political deals rarely lead to a formal peace process which culminates neatly in an inclusive political outcome.

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35. **There are greater opportunities for more inclusive and equitable outcomes when the post-war transition entails a significant break from pre-war structures.** These outcomes are, in turn, more likely to contribute to structural stability which proves to be resilient and sustainable. At the same time, where there is misalignment between the formal peace agreement (and the new institutions and structures it is likely to generate) and the actual division of power and resources on the ground, there is a greater risk of a return to conflict.
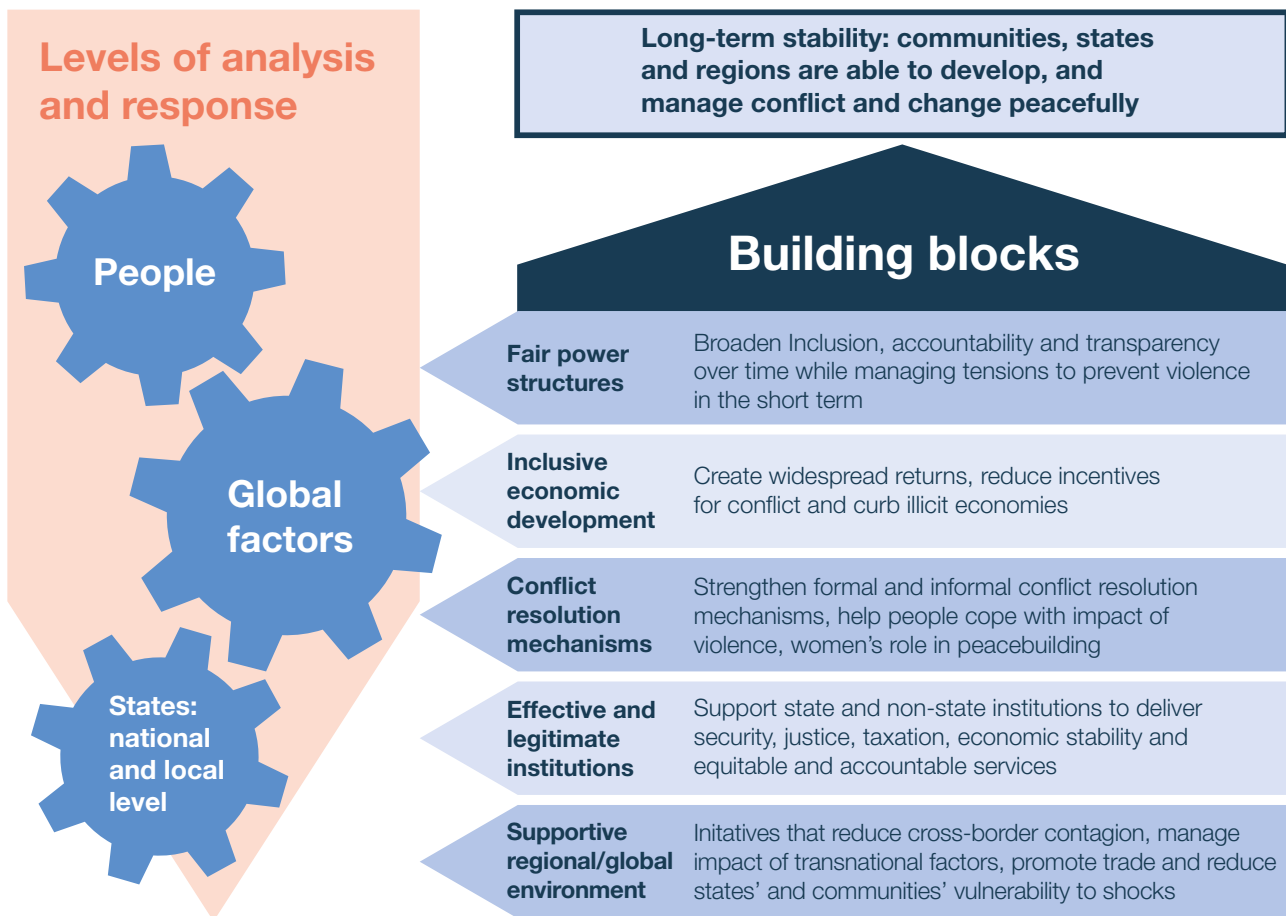
Preparing a foundation for longer-term stability

36. **Stabilisation interventions must help build a foundation for transitions out of conflict and longer-term stability.** Even when stabilisation activities successfully end immediate violence, provide security and facilitate deal-making, the risk of a return to violence in the future may still remain high if the underlying causes of the conflict remain unaddressed. As such, preparing for long-term stability is a fundamental component of stabilisation.

37. The 2011 cross-government Building Stability Overseas Strategy discusses 'structural stability', "which is built on the consent of the population, is resilient and flexible in the face of shocks and can evolve over time as the context changes".[16] DFID's Building Stability Framework describes long-term stability as a condition where "communities, states and regions are able to develop, and manage conflict and change peacefully".[17] Stability allows communities, societies and states, in the context of a supportive regional environment, to enact transformative change through state building, peace building, and development processes which enable the peaceful contestation of power and start to address grievances. In particular, it requires the consolidation of political arrangements which cannot be imposed from the outside.

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16 FCO, DFID and MOD (2011) op. cit.
17 DFID (2016) op. cit.

The Building Stability Framework

Levels of analysis and response

People

Global factors

States: national and local level

Long-term stability: communities, states and regions are able to develop, and manage conflict and change peacefully

Building blocks

Fair power structures	Broaden Inclusion, accountability and transparency over time while managing tensions to prevent violence in the short term
Inclusive economic development	Create widespread returns, reduce incentives for conflict and curb illicit economies
Conflict resolution mechanisms	Strengthen formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms, help people cope with impact of violence, women's role in peacebuilding
Effective and legitimate institutions	Support state and non-state institutions to deliver security, justice, taxation, economic stability and equitable and accountable services
Supportive regional/global environment	Initatives that reduce cross-border contagion, manage impact of transnational factors, promote trade and reduce states' and communities' vulnerability to shocks

38. **DFID's Building Stability Framework sets out five key building blocks for longer-term stability** in states emerging from, affected by or at risk of conflict:

- fair power structures which broaden inclusion, accountability and transparency over time while managing tensions to prevent violence in the short term;
- inclusive economic development that creates widespread returns across society and reduces incentives for conflict and illicit economies;
- conflict resolution mechanisms, both formal and informal, that help manage conflict, help people cope with the legacies of violent conflict and strengthen the role of women;
- effective and legitimate institutions, both state and non-state that build trust with those they govern and grow in effectiveness over time;
- supportive regional environment and resilience to transnational stresses and shocks (see the Building Stability Framework diagram).

39. **Shorter-term stabilisation interventions and longer-term efforts to build stability will often run simultaneously and overlap.** For example, conflict resolution mechanisms, such as inter-group peacebuilding initiatives between social groups, will often exist parallel to stabilisation efforts, as well as efforts to create a supportive regional environment. In addition to these temporal differences in approach there may also be spatial variation, as different localities in a country may also be in different stages requiring either short-term stabilisation activity or will be sufficiently secure and politically stable for longer efforts to build stability.

40. **Stabilisation activities influence transitions towards the outcomes envisioned in the Building Stability Framework.** The nature of a political deal between elites to end violence will shape the extent to which power structures are inclusive. This, in turn, will shape institution-building and how inclusive future economic development is. For those directing or delivering stabilisation activities, this makes considering how they can contribute to the building blocks for lasting stability critical. While in some cases outcomes will be complimentary, in others there may be trade-offs that need to be honestly assessed against broader UK objectives.

41. There is **no set period for stabilisation – it can range from months to years – but it is always a transitory activity.** The timing of efforts to shift the balance of effort between stabilisation objectives and those of building of longer-term stability is ultimately a matter of judgement. It is not a question of absolute standards but rather what can be said to be 'good enough'. A key consideration is whether a collapse in basic security is still likely and whether early recovery work has been achieved ensuring sufficient popular access to essential services. Above all, it requires a sufficiently durable political agreement, which can become more inclusive over time, to prevent a re-occurrence of violent conflict.

42. Any move to **a longer-term 'stability'-focused intervention needs to be owned by the host government**. This will be a particular issue where the transition involves the withdrawal of foreign forces that have been supporting security. This must be carefully negotiated to avoid counter-productive approaches. Downstream actions should take place within an agreed multinational and inter-agency framework.

Countering threats to the UK

43. **Stabilisation interventions increasingly take place in contexts where the UK is also seeking to address cross-border threats, transnational crime and violent extremism.** In these dynamic and multi-faceted environments, an adaptive approach is required. The interconnectivity between different regions, events and movements, and the inter-relationship between non-state armed groups and organised crime networks has narrowed the divide between 'upstream' security issues in countries affected by conflict and instability and domestic national security issues.

44. **Constraining insurgent or criminal groups' activity can yield dividends when integrated within a wider stabilisation campaign.** But this is a long-term endeavour. Countering violent non-state groups and transnational organised crime is inherently difficult, especially in contexts where such groups have either captured state structures or where they benefit from considerable support.

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45. **Interventions should be informed by analysis that accounts for political and economic drivers of support for such groups and the role of inclusion and exclusion.** This will help avoid the risk that overly technical solutions fail to address the key drivers of conflict and crime.

46. In some circumstances, **the overriding priority of a stabilisation intervention may generate real trade-offs with apparent national security threats**. For example, counter terrorism objectives may rule out dialogue with powerful elites and even commit the UK to use force against them. Their exclusion from political deal-making may mean that these deals do not reflect the reality of the arrangements of political power. Such contradictions can also arise in the immediate aftermath of external military interventions, where external forces seeking to ensure their own force protection find themselves (often unintentionally) making security deals with warlords and powerful criminal actors.

Conflict sensitivity and stabilisation

47. **An adoption of a conflict-sensitive approach is vital in any stabilisation intervention.** This entails understanding conflict dynamics in any given context, and taking deliberate actions to minimise the potentially negative effects and maximise the benefits of any intervention.

48. **In stabilisation contexts, this means ensuring that interventions do not inadvertently fuel or exacerbate conflict, or sow the seeds for future conflict.** Stabilisation contexts are by their very nature highly volatile and dynamic. They are situations where rapid change makes understanding the political context, and how external intervention might interact with that context, both challenging and time-consuming. However, conflict sensitivity demands that our actions be determined not only by an ongoing and regularly-refreshed understanding of the rapidly changing conflict dynamics, but of the pre-existing power structures underlying them.

49. A conflict-sensitive approach to stabilisation acknowledges that 'not all good things come together'. When working to restore security and facilitate a peaceful political process to reduce violent conflict, there will be a requirement for effective prioritisation and sequencing to manage competing demands. While the concept of 'first do no harm' is laudable it is arguably unachievable in stabilisation contexts, not least because non-intervention can cause harm. The goal should therefore be to identify and minimise harm within a broader framework of understanding the required priorities along with potential trade-offs and dilemmas.

50. **Stabilisation interventions will impact the context they take place in, both in positive and sometimes negative ways.** Like other interventions, they may unintentionally exacerbate human suffering and humanitarian need. Stabilisation actors should therefore be sensitive to the context they operate in, and the level and drivers of humanitarian need, and local coping mechanisms and resilience. Stabilisation interventions should work with others where appropriate, to build the evidence of their impact. They should adopt adequate measures to minimise any negative impact they have on disaster resilience,[18] and refrain where possible from actions that will exacerbate humanitarian needs.

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18 DFID defines disaster resilience as "the ability of countries, communities and households to manage change, by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses – such as earthquakes, drought or violent conflict – without compromising their long-term prospects." DFID (2011) *Defining Disaster Resilience: A DFID Approach Paper*, para. 2.1, p. 8

> ### 🔍 Case study: Afghanistan, a conflict-insensitive approach
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> The illicit cultivation and trade in opium has been a central conflict driver in Afghanistan. There is significant evidence that the Taliban has, since 2002, raised millions of dollars in revenue by taxing farmers and smugglers involved in the opium trade. Consequently, counter-narcotics became a key pillar of coalition stabilisation objectives.
>
> Alternative livelihood programming was central to coalition efforts to diminish and eradicate poppy cultivation. While such programmes did successfully lead some farmers to diversify away from poppy production, such gains were short-lived and offset by increases elsewhere. In many cases such programmes contributed to increased poppy production and in turn Taliban revenues by, for example, improving infrastructure such as roads and irrigation systems.
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> Sources: 'Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan', Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), June 2018; Christopher J. Coyne, Abigail R. Hall Blanco and Scott Burns, 'The War on Drugs in Afghanistan: Another Failed Experiment with Interdiction', The Independent Review, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2016.

Gender and stabilisation

51. **Violent conflict is experienced differently by women, men, boys and girls.** As in peacetime, gender defines the expectations on women and men in conflict.[19] In conflict, the type of harm women and men face is also influenced by gender-specific vulnerabilities. In many contexts men and boys are at increased risk of forced recruitment by armed actors, detention and torture, including the use of sexual violence.

52. **Women and girls bear a specific burden of harm in conflict**, and are at increased risk of different forms of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence and practices such as child, early and forced marriage, which may ostensibly be aimed at protection. Conflict exacerbates gender inequality. In and after conflict, maternal mortality increases, girls' education decreases, and the space for women's exercise of public voice and participation shrinks.

53. A **gender-sensitive conflict analysis** helps to understand how gender norms[20] and roles shape the effects, causes and drivers of conflict (see case study). Stabilisation interventions will be more effective when based on an understanding of the gendered differences in experiences of the conflict.

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19 Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men.

20 Gender norms refer to the standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform, within a range defined by a particular society, culture or community at appoint in time. See *European Institute for Gender Equality*

54. In all UK government activity, gender equality is a priority in its own right.[21] Furthermore, gender equality correlates strongly with peace and stability. Societies that are more equal experience less inter- and intra-state conflict, and less intense conflict when it does occur.[22] Stabilisation activities should therefore promote gender equality and be gender-sensitive by:

    - **supporting** women's meaningful participation in peace processes, helping increase the likelihood of an agreement being reached, implemented and sustained;

    - **addressing** the context specific harm women and men have suffered in the conflict;

    - **avoiding** entrenching harmful norms, particularly when these norms have been altered or made more extreme by the conflict;

    - **promoting** gender equality where possible in a locally relevant and owned way, recognising the trade-offs that will occur between support for equality and efforts to support other stabilisation activities.

🔍 Case study: Gender norms as contributing drivers of conflict in South Sudan

Cattle raiding in **South Sudan** has taken place for centuries. It has become increasingly violent due to the proliferation of small arms. Gender norms are a contributing factor to the ongoing practice. Research suggests that for adolescent boys owning a gun and participating in cattle raids are a rite of passage, and for men a symbol of manhood which confers social status. Similarly, marriage is a means to attain manhood. However, in pastoralist communities this requires the payment of bride price in the form of cattle to a prospective bride's family. Increases in bride price since 2005 have fuelled cattle raiding and therefore wider conflict, as men seek to obtain sufficient cattle to pay the bride price.

Source: Saferworld (2014). 'Masculinities, Conflict and Peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens'

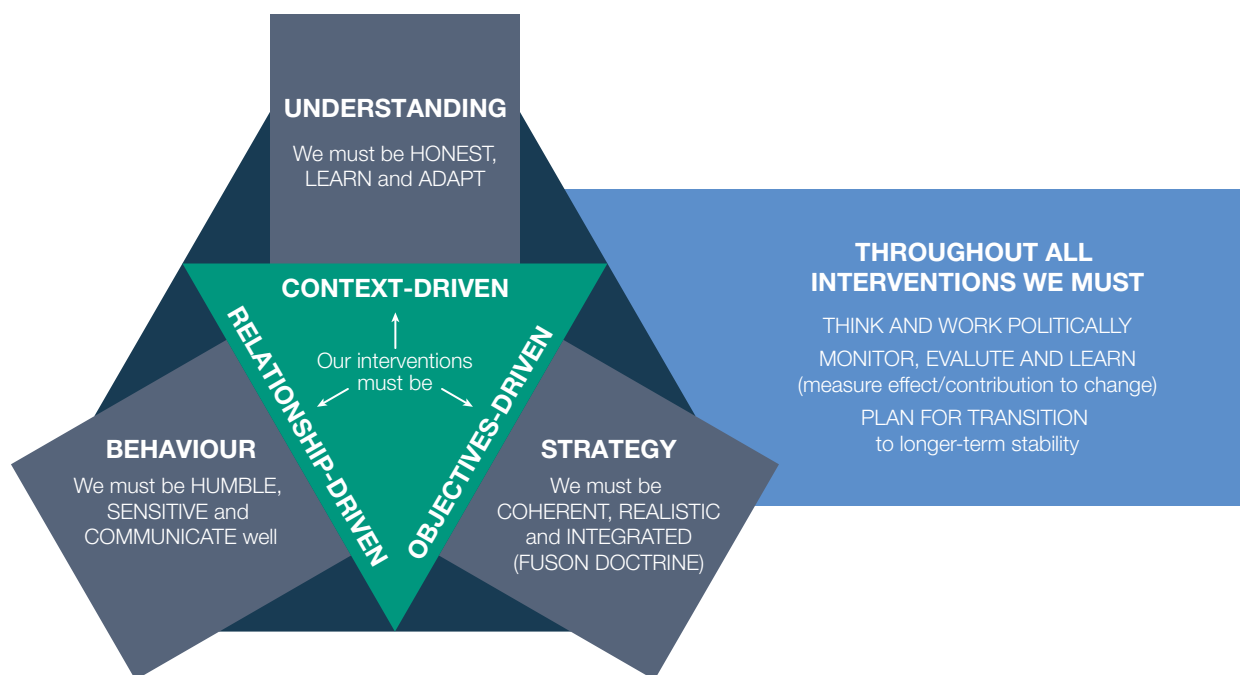### How do we do stabilisation: an integrated approach to applying the Fusion Doctrine

55. The **UK government uses the Fusion Doctrine "to deploy security, economic and influence capabilities to protect, promote and project our national security, economic and influence goals"**.[23] The Fusion Doctrine calls for better use of all of the UK's capabilities, from economic levers, through military resources to wider diplomatic and cultural influence, to provide the National Security Council with better choices. Stabilisation, given its inherent complexity, requires such an approach in order to deliver a coherent and effective cross-government response, coordinated effectively with our international partners.

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21 UK Government (2018) *UK national action plan on women, peace and security 2018 to 2022*
22 See Sian Herbert (2014) *Links between women's empowerment (or lack of) and outbreaks of violent conflict*, GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report
23 HM Government (2018) op. cit.

Essential elements for effective delivery

56. The **UK's approach to delivering a stabilisation intervention should embody an integrated civil-military approach**, with clear civilian direction and leadership. An integrated approach is undertaken within the Fusion Doctrine through forming a single multi-disciplinary and multi-departmental team (virtual or real), improving the flow of information, and contributing to a shared understanding to ensure greater effect.

57. **Approaches to stabilisation should self-evidently be tailored to address the specific characteristics of the conflict.** This approach should balance past experience (in the form of lessons and good practice tested against the specifics of the current conflict) with appropriate stabilisation methodology.

58. The next chapter sets out the seven key issues that will allow those engaging in or planning for stabilisation-related policy and programming to develop a response tailored to the context, rather than applying ill-fitting, templated approaches developed from elsewhere.

Working multilaterally

59. This paper describes the UK approach to stabilisation. However, the **UK government usually seeks to work in partnership with its allies and with multilateral organisations**. Stabilisation approaches which are based on broad international ownership benefit from greater legitimacy, as well as being able to draw on a greater range of resources and expertise.

60. How the UK government engages multilaterally is dependent upon a range of factors, including the extent and nature of UK national interests, the UK government's comparative advantage, physical presence, and the activities of other stakeholders. The UK government attaches high importance to reinforcing and strengthening the rules-based international system, including using our role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to try to identify, prevent and resolve conflicts.

> *The UK government attaches high importance to reinforcing and strengthening the rules-based international system, including using our role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to try to identify, prevent and resolve conflicts*

61. **Working multilaterally demands that we achieve broad agreement on the parameters and objectives of the intervention**, which can be taxing, not least because mandates for multilateral missions can be subject to a variety of interpretations. This can present challenges to the stabilisation approach because it has an intensely political orientation and focus.

62. Currently there is no internationally recognised definition for stabilisation and no accepted standards or best practices. Reaching a working definition and accommodation with international and multilateral partners will always be challenging but is absolutely necessary.

🔍 Case study: Iraq 2015–17 and contemporary stabilisation

The campaign to remove Daesh from northern Iraq and restore the authority of the Government of Iraq between 2015 and 2017 usefully illustrates contemporary stabilisation operations. The operation was led, planned and executed by the Government of Iraq with international coalition forces and the UNDP acting in a supporting role.

The immediate priority was to restore security and protect both the Iraqi population and state from further Daesh aggression. In a series of operations, the Iraqi security forces, supported by largely Shia militias, regained control of the urban centres in the north east culminating in the liberation of Mosul in 2017. Coalition forces acted to advise and support the Iraqi security forces.

Coordinated with this military activity, the UNDP, using a multi-donor Funding Facility for Stabilisation, addressed both the immediate humanitarian crisis and the large number of internally displaced persons while also implementing relatively simple projects designed to restore essential services to the population.

Given Daesh's extreme political ideology, direct dialogue with the group has played a much less prominent role in this stabilisation operation. Nonetheless, deal-making between national and local Iraqi elites has determined the post conflict redistribution of formal and informal power. The long-term process of building sustainable stability has begun, but major issues such as the grievances between the dominant Shia and marginalised Sunni and minority communities remain unresolved.

Stabilisation tensions and trade-offs: what lessons have we learnt?

63. **There is a need to recognise the significant trade-offs and tensions between stabilisation actions to secure short-term stability and activities designed to generate longer-term stability and resilience.** External interveners are often forced to focus on preventing the worst outcomes, such as major human rights violations and mass atrocities.

64. **More transformative agendas that are not underpinned by supporting political deals and bargains will not prove sustainable.** External interventions that are significantly misaligned with the underlying division of power and resources will fail. These challenges are compounded by the fact that at the point of intervention, when there is with the greatest potential to affect change and cause harm, understanding of the specific context and its political dynamics will be at its lowest.

> *at the point of intervention, when there is with the greatest potential to affect change and cause harm, understanding of the specific context and its political dynamics will be at its lowest*

65. **External interveners must act iteratively and prioritise.** The rushed and uncoordinated pursuit of transformative policies designed to (for example) counter criminal activities, target violent extremism and promote inclusive economic development all risk undermining the consent of local actors for the very deal that has led to a reduction in violence.

66. **The need for the consent of local parties gives them a significant advantage.** Conditionality and carefully calibrated support will be necessary to prevent dominant elites from 'capturing the state' and excluding wider political and social participation. In keeping as many key actors within a particular political process as possible, external interveners may jeopardise the inclusion of marginalised groups. Often, not all local parties will consent to an external intervention. Even when in support of a state, consent must be constantly negotiated.

67. **External interventions will always distort local politics.** External interventions provide new economic inputs, generating additional opportunities for corrupt officials, warlords and conflict entrepreneurs. Equally, there is a danger that, in trying to use local forces to provide security, interveners shift power dynamics in the short term and may considerably reduce the possibility of conducting longer-term security sector reform.

68. These lessons highlight the need for prioritisation, pragmatism, empathy, humility and the recognition of the impact and limits of external interventions.