![Stabilisation Unit logo]

Supporting Elite Bargains to Reduce Violent Conflict

1.   The **Stabilisation Unit has completed a major review into how international interventions in conflict-affected countries have contributed to violence reduction and sustainable transitions**. Developed over 18 months in conjunction with a multi-disciplinary academic team it provides a more robust evidence base for the UK's politically-led approach to stabilisation and will help policy makers deliver more effective interventions in conflict contexts.[1] The key findings of the project highlight how:

➢ **Elite bargains play a vital role in reducing violence, building support for formal peace agreements and successful transitions out of conflict**.

➢ **Externally driven transformative peace processes and agreements that are *not* underpinned by supporting bargains are likely to fail.** Proposed or existing peace agreements that do not reflect the underlying distribution of power and resources are very likely to collapse and there is a high risk of continued violence.

➢ **External interventions can support the emergence of stabilising elite bargains**, help elites address their security dilemmas and support bargaining processes by forming international 'protection pacts'.

➢ **External support for elite bargains can be critical to making them 'stick'**. To increase the likelihood of an elite bargain sticking, it is necessary to consider: the importance of elite **access to political privileges and economic opportunities**; and **the extent and form of the inclusion of elites and their constituencies** within a particular bargain.

➢ **External political, security and economic interventions – however well intentioned – are never costless** and can exacerbate conflict by affecting elite calculations and behaviours. Significant external interventions and interests will often prevent stabilising elite bargains from emerging.

➢ **Elite bargains are less likely to occur in contexts where issues such as identity and ethnicity have been framed indivisibly.** They are more likely to occur where the key issues are fundamentally divisible, such as access to resources or particular political opportunities.

2.   These findings **challenge some of the existing approaches used to try and end violent conflict**. External actors have often expected formal peace agreements or moments of rupture in the underlying settlement to enable a linear transition away from conflict. Yet pathways out of violent conflict are always messy. Most conflicts either see a return to violence or forms of 'elite capture', where the peace dividend is shared very unequally. The evidence is clear that externally driven transformative peace processes, premature state and institution building and an excessive focus on peace process design has at times over-shadowed the need to focus on and engage with the configurations of power, and take an iterative, political, deal-making approach.

3.   This project has also **exposed the difficult trade-offs external actors face when their key policy objectives clash.** In some instances the requirement for a stabilising elite bargain may be at odds with other objectives, which can preclude engagement with powerful elites. Challenging trade-offs also occur following major military interventions, where the presence of external military forces becomes

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both key to preventing state collapse and an important – albeit unintended – factor driving conflict and distorting local elite bargaining processes.

4.   The findings therefore emphasise the **importance of adequately sequencing political, security and economic interventions**, and understanding their potential political impact. They make clear that in some contexts there is a near-term need to provide pragmatic support to emerging elite bargains that help deliver stability and reductions in violence. But they also show that **for stability to hold in the long term, inclusivity must be increased over time, so that those constituencies that provide elites with their authority are brought into a political process**.

5.   The key steps, drawing on the synthesis paper, that should aid policy makers in the analysis, planning and delivery phases of an intervention, are set out below.

Analysis and Planning:
➢ Assess how the relevant elite bargains, underlying distribution of power and peace agreement fit or 'align' with each other (the analysis set out in the Synthesis paper will aid this process).
➢ Consider how external interventions will affect these dynamics. Tailor objectives and activity accordingly.
➢ Where an *existing* peace agreement and the distribution of power do not 'fit or align', prepare to support and foster elite bargains that generate greater coherence.
➢ Where a *proposed* peace agreement is unlikely to fit or align with the underlying settlement, look to reduce its scope. Formal externally driven peace processes and agreements should not become objectives in and of themselves.

Supporting bargaining processes and transition:
➢ Consider which external diplomatic interventions and/or security guarantees could help to overcome a lack of commitment from conflict parties to a bargain. Establish whether external interventions would help provide space for and facilitate elite bargains, or help make a bargain stick: be flexible and prepared to take risks.
➢ If the priority is stability and violence reduction, take a maximalist approach to the inclusion of elites in the initial post-conflict period. Let the local politics drive the process: minimise the extent to which other external policy priorities (for example counter-terrorism) preclude the possibility of stabilising elite bargains.
➢ Ensure you have the right expertise and resource to support bargaining processes: there may be a requirement to do so at the regional, national and sub-national levels. Establish whether adequate expertise is available and what opportunities there are to draw on external experts.
➢ Help set *the conditions* for long term stability. Do not commit to hasty attempts to secure the peace through transformative state and institution building processes. They are likely to threaten the stability of any nascent elite bargains.
➢ Over time, cautiously encourage increasingly inclusive bargains. A failure to do so is likely to result in initially stabilising elite bargains becoming more and more exclusive over time, enabling a return to conflict.
➢ Prepare policy responses for the likelihood that, even where major political conflict between warring parties has ended, other forms of criminal violence or violence embedded in nascent state structures will generate longer term challenges to stability.