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STABILIZATION
ASSISTANCE REVIEW

A FRAMEWORK FOR MAXIMIZING THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF U.S. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO
**STABILIZE CONFLICT-
AFFECTED AREAS**



2018





FOREWORD FROM SECRETARY OF STATE, USAID ADMINISTRATOR, AND SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Increasing stability and reducing violence in conflict-affected areas are essential to realize America's national security goals and advance a world in which nations can embrace their sovereignty and citizens can realize their full potential. The United States and our allies face an increasingly complex and uncertain world in which many of our adversaries sow instability and benefit from it. Protracted conflicts provide fertile ground for violent extremists and criminals to expand their influence and threaten U.S. interests. These conflicts cause mass displacements and divert international resources that might otherwise be spent fostering economic growth and trade.

The U.S. Armed Forces and our allies and partners are defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other terrorist groups on battlefields in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere, but we are entering a new phase in this struggle. We must consolidate security gains, reduce levels of local instability, and work with local partners to peaceably manage change and provide legitimate and responsive governance. Our national experience over the past two decades has taught us that it is not enough to win the battle; we must help our local partners secure the peace by using every instrument of our national power.

At the same time, we must resist the temptation to throw more money at these complex problems. American taxpayers are right to demand tough scrutiny of such investments. Transitioning too quickly to large-scale reconstruction and longer term development efforts can backfire without a clear strategic and political approach. Our organizations must more rigorously define stabilization missions based on national security interests and undertake institutional reforms based on hard-learned lessons. We must press our international partners to share the costs for these efforts, and hold our local partners accountable for demonstrating sustained leadership and progress.

To meet these imperatives, our Departments and Agency are recommending steps to maximize the effectiveness of U.S. Government efforts to stabilize conflict-affected areas. This report outlines a framework to systematically apply lessons from the past; to strategically and selectively direct our resources; to increase burden-sharing with key international partners; and to improve the efficiency and impact of our efforts.

We have approved this report as the first step in a process to position the U.S. Government's defense, diplomatic, and development capabilities to meet strategic stabilization requirements. We are committed to advancing this process together. Reducing armed conflict is a perennial challenge, and there are many factors that are outside of our national control. By refining our respective organizational roles and capabilities and institutionalizing discipline and learning in our approach, we will increase our likelihood of success and improve accountability to the American taxpayer.

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“We will give priority to strengthening states where state weaknesses or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland...Political problems are at the root of most state fragility.”

—National Security Strategy of the United States of America (December 2017)

ABOUT THE REVIEW

The Stabilization Assistance Review was led by the Department of State’s Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources (F) and the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO); the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM), and Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL) in the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); and the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs (SHA), and the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI).

The Review was conducted through several research methods, including:

1. Literature review of more than 300 articles and reports;
2. Analysis of eight cases of current or past U.S. engagements in conflict-affected areas;*
3. Interviews of more than 250 experts inside and outside of government, including key international partners;
4. Qualitative questionnaire completed by six DoD combatant commands;
5. Quantitative survey of more than 125 U.S. Government experts; and
6. Quantitative analysis of U.S. foreign assistance spending in conflict-affected areas from Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 to FY 2017.

*Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Somalia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States has strong national security and economic interests in reducing levels of violence and promoting stability in areas affected by armed conflict, especially to consolidate security gains against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other non-state armed groups. At the same time, there is no appetite to repeat large-scale reconstruction efforts, and therefore our engagements must be more measured in scope and adaptable in execution. The United States must be more selective and targeted about how we define stabilization missions, deploy our limited resources, burden-share with local and international partners, and ultimately produce more tangible, long-term outcomes for our taxpaying public.

Stabilization is an inherently political endeavor that requires aligning U.S. Government efforts—diplomatic engagement, foreign assistance, and defense—toward supporting locally legitimate authorities and systems to peaceably manage conflict and prevent violence. Stabilization requires adaptive and targeted engagement at subnational and national levels. More important than dollars spent is having a singular, agreed-upon, strategic approach to unify efforts in support of a consolidated local impact executed through sequenced and contextual assistance.

Over the past year, the Department of State (State), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Defense (DoD) have reviewed the significant lessons learned from past stabilization efforts. The principles for effective stabilization have been widely studied, but they have not been systematically applied and institutionalized. The review has shown that the performance of U.S. stabilization efforts has consistently been limited by the lack of strategic clarity, organizational discipline, and unity of effort in how we approach these missions.

In response, this report outlines how the United States can improve

- ◆ Promote a fair, purposeful division of labor with national partners and international donors.
- ◆ Clarify agency roles and responsibilities to improve performance and reduce duplication.
- ◆ Improve the capacity of our civilian workforce to address stabilization needs in tandem with the U.S. military and partner forces; and
- ◆ Sequence and target our assistance to conflict-affected areas in a more measured fashion.

Now is the moment to focus and revitalize how the United States approaches stabilization. Stabilization is a critical part of how

“This report defines stabilization as a political endeavor to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict...”

the outcomes of our stabilization efforts through more efficient and disciplined bureaucratic structures, processes and engagement with international partners. Specifically, our proposed framework includes steps to:

- ◆ Establish a U.S.-Government wide definition of stabilization.
- ◆ Develop and evaluate political strategies based on evidence and rigorous analysis.

the United States seeks to address conflict-affected states, as part of a spectrum that also includes both conflict prevention and longer term peacebuilding and reconciliation. Through these reforms and sustained leadership, the United States can avoid mistakes of the past and better advance America’s national security interests in conflict-affected environments.

INTRODUCTION

Despite global gains in prosperity, armed conflicts in many parts of the world remain as complex and intractable as ever. Continued gains are by no means guaranteed. An increasing trend in internationalized and non-state conflicts (reflected in Figure 1) has resulted in crises that are more protracted, violent, and difficult to solve. According to data from the Uppsala Conflict Database, unresolved grievances and often a failure to address political reform mean that more than one-half of armed conflicts that achieve peace lapse back into violence—at a median of seven years—often introducing new grievances and actors to perpetuate bloodshed. More recently, the conflict landscape is increasingly exacerbated by the rise of ISIS and competing networks of non-state armed and extremist groups.

These armed conflicts have dire consequences for the people residing in affected countries and impose a significant security and financial burden on American and international taxpayers as well as the global economy. Over the past decade, the U.S. Government has consistently provided more than one-third of its foreign assistance to countries with ongoing violent conflicts [see Figure 2]. Similarly, these same countries account for the vast majority of the peacekeeping budget of the United Nations (UN).

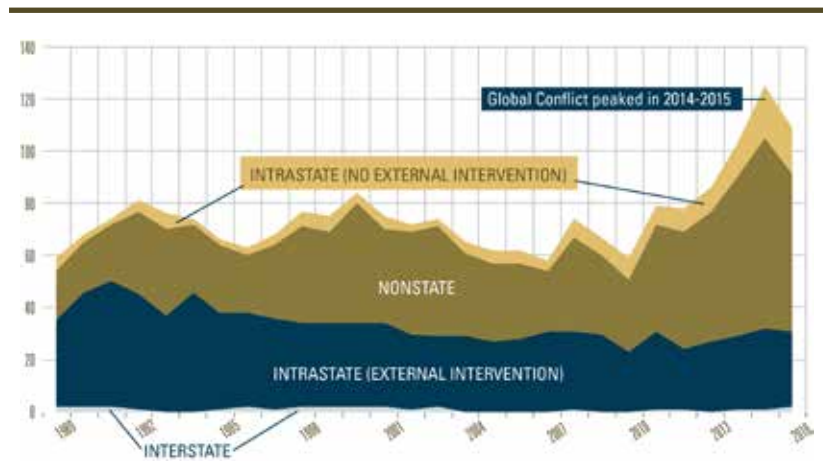


Figure 1: Number of violent conflicts per year (at least 25 fatalities per year). *Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Project*

These persistent armed conflicts directly affect the security interests of the United States and our allies by creating instability that terrorist and criminal organizations and competitors exploit. Recognizing this threat, the United States and our Coalition partners are actively working in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Nigeria, and elsewhere around the world to defeat ISIS and other transnational terrorist groups. As the Coalition makes security progress against ISIS, it is essential to consolidate operational gains through strategic political engagement and targeted assistance to establish basic security and restore responsive, legitimate governance.

At the same time, there is no public appetite to repeat the large-scale reconstruction efforts of the past. The United States and other countries are scrutinizing and reducing the

resources spent outside our borders. Our taxpaying public is demanding greater accountability of our resources and their impact. Moving forward, our stabilization efforts must be better prioritized and measured and our partners must carry their fair share of the burden. New ways of thinking and operating are needed to reduce dependencies on U.S. Government assistance, increase cost-sharing, and scope realistic outcomes for stabilization efforts. We cannot continue to employ the same approaches or tools in these endeavors and expect different results.

To this end, the Department of State (State), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Department of Defense (DoD) have reviewed past stabilization efforts in conflict-affected areas and identified steps to more effectively

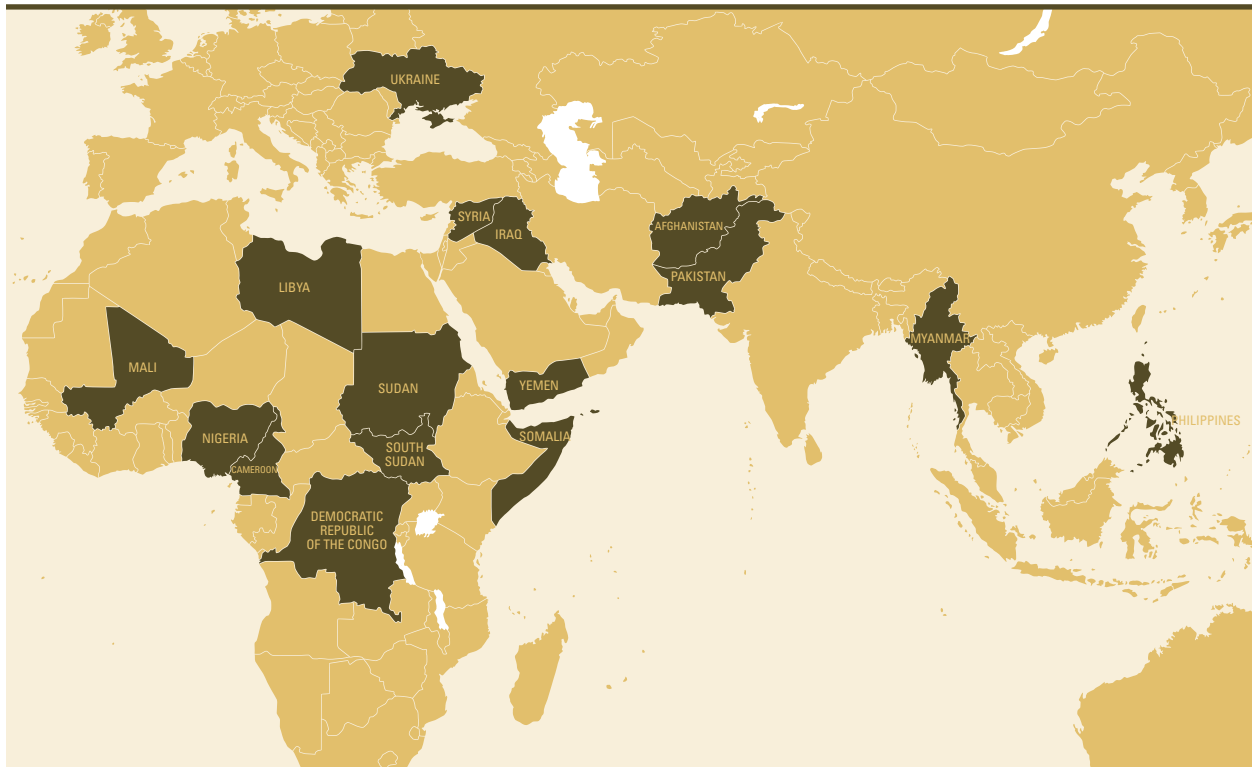


Figure 2: Map of select countries with more than 1000 battle-related deaths over the last five years (Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Project) where internationally-supported “stabilization” efforts have been active.

leverage the U.S. Government’s diplomatic, defense, and foreign assistance resources in these difficult environments. The Stabilization Assistance Review (“the Review”) built on many of the findings from the “2016 Department of Defense Biennial Assessment of Stability Operations Capabilities.” The Review was also coordinated

with related ongoing processes at the UN and World Bank.

This report outlines findings from the Review and presents consolidated approaches to maximize the impact of U.S. engagement as well as reduce inefficiencies and wasteful spending. The first section outlines why a narrowed, revitalized approach to stabilization is

essential for addressing today’s challenges and advancing U.S. national security. The second section describes the core principles and lessons learned for the U.S. Government’s stabilization. The third and final section outlines a proposed framework for the U.S. Government’s efforts to advance stabilization in conflict-affected areas.

“We will work to consolidate military gains against ISIS, al Qa’ida, and other terrorist organizations and stabilize liberated areas by supporting local partners that can reestablish the rule of law, manage conflict, and restore basic services.”

—State and USAID Joint Strategic Plan, FY 2018-2022

THE IMPERATIVE FOR A REVITALIZED APPROACH TO STABILIZATION

The United States and our partners need a new and more disciplined approach for conducting stabilization in conflict-affected areas. This approach includes analyzing risks and focusing our efforts on what is absolutely necessary to achieve stability, rather than pursuing disparate agendas all at once. A critical first step toward more harmonized stabilization efforts is agreeing on the core tenets of the concept itself. Despite significant international experience over recent decades, the concept of stabilization remains ill-defined and poorly institutionalized across government and multilateral structures. This lack of standardization in definition and process leads to repeated mistakes, inefficient spending, and poor accountability for results.

Now is the moment to refocus and revitalize the U.S. Government's approach to stabilization. There is a clear imperative from policymakers to consolidate security gains in ISIS-affected areas through stabilization. At the same time, policymakers want to be more

selective and targeted about how we engage in stabilization environments to maximize the value of American and international taxpayer resources. The revitalized approach to stabilization outlined here can help target diplomatic engagement in these environments toward advancing a strategy connected to stabilization outcomes, enable greater sequencing and layering of assistance to support locally legitimate actors, achieve cost-saving efficiencies, and foster a better division of labor between the U.S. Government and international donors and institutions.

With these lessons in mind, State, USAID, and DoD have developed a refined definition of stabilization that can guide our efforts in this regard. We define stabilization as a political endeavor involving an integrated civilian-military process to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence. Transitional in nature, stabilization may include efforts to establish civil security, provide

access to dispute resolution, deliver targeted basic services, and establish a foundation for the return of displaced people and longer term development.

Stabilization is distinct from humanitarian assistance, which the U.S. Government provides impartially on the basis of need, from longer term reconstruction and development activities. Although context-dependent, stabilization is intended to be short-term in nature (typically between one and five years). Without first achieving legitimate political stability, longer term development efforts are unlikely to take root and can even exacerbate lingering conflict dynamics. Stabilization starts to set the conditions for building legitimate societal and governing institutions. USAID defines these as institutions that are inclusive, responsive, and accountable to all groups, including minority and marginalized populations. The nature of relations among identity groups, the capacity of civil society to engage government, and the extent of economic opportunity all affect the legitimacy of state-society relations.

We define stabilization as a political endeavor involving an integrated civilian-military process to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence. Transitional in nature, stabilization may include efforts to establish civil security, provide access to dispute resolution, and deliver targeted basic services, and establish a foundation for the return of displaced people and longer term development.



U.S. Army civil affairs forces provide veterinarian assistance to Iraqi communities following successful operations against ISIS. *Photo: USASOC*

In the past, there has been a rush to initiate high-cost, sectoral programming before there is a foundation of inclusive political systems, basic security, and a reliable and legitimate partner government at the national level. A deliberate approach focusing planning and operations on stabilization outcomes can ensure the right conditions are in place for broader development resources to be well-spent. At the same time, it is imperative that stabilization efforts incorporate transition plans to economic growth, private sector vibrancy, and responsive governance, with an end state of self-sufficiency, lest any progress achieved by those activities is not sustained and lost.

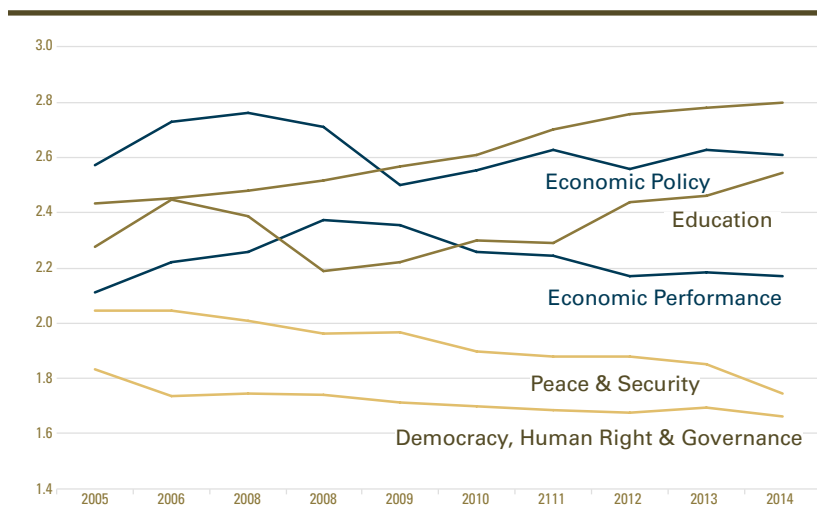


Figure 3: The State/USAID “Country Data Analytics” index average scores for the 16 conflict-affected countries identified in the previous map over the past 10 years. This figure shows a measurable decrease in peace and security scores, while health and education have improved.



USAID is helping to bring community leaders together in northeastern Nigeria to build trust and restore stability in areas affected by Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. *Photo: USAID*

LESSONS FOR EFFECTIVE STABILIZATION

Designing and pursuing stabilization are complex tasks involving many context-specific factors that are outside of a single actor's control. Our approach must be flexible and adjust as non-state armed groups adapt, and address the political challenges of possible spoilers to stabilization. Yet even as we remain agile, we must apply evidence-based lessons to increase the chances of success. The Review identified the following set of core principles that undergird effective stabilization efforts.

Set realistic, analytically-backed political goals

Stabilization is inherently political, which means it must focus on local, national, and/or regional societal and governing dynamics, agents, and systems that lead populations toward inclusive, non-violent settlement and agreement. Its success depends on having a goal-oriented political strategy that aligns with local interests. Through analysis and deliberate iterative planning, stabilization requires decisions

about which specific legitimate political systems and actors we will support, why and how, and associated tradeoffs. This strategy should be based on a clearly articulated and achievable political end state. It should include a realistic assessment of the level of commitment and risk tolerance required to implement the strategy. With a clear political strategy and defined end state, we can delineate a phased approach to target and sequence our engagement and assistance programs—as well as those of others—in a unified fashion.

Establish a division of labor and burden-sharing among international donors and local actors that optimizes the strengths of each

There needs to be a clear understanding at the outset of a stabilization effort of what the partner nation government is willing and expected to deliver in terms of political and financial commitments. There should also be a clear division of labor among international donors, based on analysis that accounts for each

donor's comparative advantage. Multilateral approaches to stabilization, particularly by the UN and World Bank, can mobilize contributions by other bilateral partners. Multilateral partners bring different strengths and weaknesses, and the U.S. Government should engage when they have a comparative advantage. For example, the World Bank has mobilized funds for Yemen, but turned to the UN for implementation.

Use data and evaluation systems to assess strategic progress and hold partners accountable

Although stabilization requires flexible and adaptive mechanisms, teams should identify clear strategic-level political objectives at the outset to track and analyze impact on an iterative basis. This approach should comprise metrics to ensure that the host-nation partner is following through on commitments and fully embracing mandated anti-corruption and transparency efforts. Tying diplomatic engagement and assistance to local qualitative impacts rather than solely quantitative

activity outputs and using strategic level analysis will enable senior policymakers to consider whether policy adjustments are required to achieve objectives. The Review's case study in Afghanistan found that using consistent data tied to specific political objectives—and sharing relevant information across U.S. Government Departments and Agencies—would have enabled better review and analysis by policymakers.

Forward deploy U.S. Government and partnered civilians and establish local mechanisms that enable continuous engagement, negotiation, targeted assistance, and monitoring

Deploying civilian stabilization experts on the ground to work with and alongside deployed military elements is essential to success because it enables a unified approach and helps ensure the overarching political strategy is driving all mission components. The “2016 DoD Biennial Assessment of Stability Operations Capabilities” cited as a critical shortfall the lack of institutionalized DoD mechanisms to enable regular collaboration with interagency and international partners. It is imperative to have civilians with the appropriate knowledge and skill sets on the ground and able to engage with citizen groups, analyze local dynamics, identify the right local partners to advance the political strategy, and routinely monitor and adjust

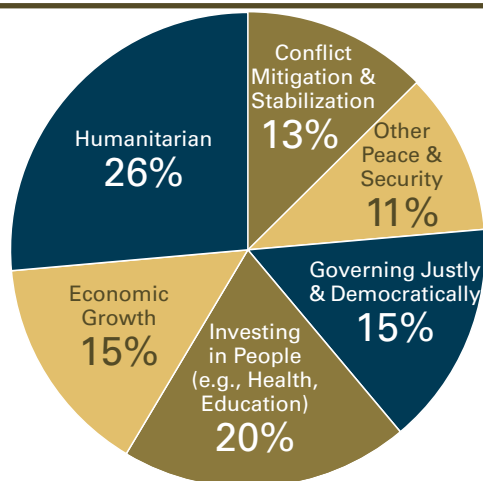


Figure 4: State/USAID foreign assistance to the 16 conflict-affected countries identified in the previous map from Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 to FY 2016, by designated program goals/areas. Analysis of spending trends in case-study countries reinforced the need for greater flexibility, sequencing and/or integration of non-humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected areas.

programs and strategy to keep pace with the evolving political dynamic. For example, the Review's case study analysis showed that State and USAID have worked closely with the UN and third-party contractors in Somalia and Syria to improve our monitoring of local dynamics that informs and connects programming to overall political objectives. Still, significant security limitations on U.S. Government civilian presence in conflict and post-conflict areas impede our ability to identify and respond to emergent political opportunities and quickly adapt our programs.

Start with small, short-term assistance projects and scale up cautiously

According to multiple studies, targeted and smaller programs are better at the outset to

achieve local outcomes and build momentum. Smaller projects driven by host-government and communities in support of a unified political strategy and diplomatic engagement are best suited to achieve short-term stabilization objectives and to set the stage for eventual management, financing, and ownership by national governments or regional administrations. For example, the Review's case study showed that in northeastern Nigeria, the U.S. Government has worked effectively at the community level to develop a nuanced village-by-village understanding of stabilization challenges and political dynamics fueling violent extremists. Such a focused understanding enables the United States to target assistance to support stability and diminish the appeal

If we are to achieve our strategic objectives in a conflict, American policymakers must accept that the political dimension is indispensable across the spectrum of conflict.

—Dr. Nadia Schadlow, Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States, *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success into Political Victory* (2017)

of extremists. Operating within and in cooperation with local communities allows increased local support and the ability to build legitimacy from the bottom up by strengthening local political and social systems. This approach is true not only of bilateral funding, but multi-donor efforts as well. Large-scale projects run a higher risk of creating perverse incentives, distorting the local economy, and being manipulated by corrupt actors who benefit from the conflict. Often a country's absorptive capacity after conflict remains low and realistic expectations are needed about the time it will take to strengthen local and/or national ownership.

Prioritize, layer, and sequence foreign assistance to advance stabilization goals

If stabilization is a top goal for international engagement in a country, then the full range of non-humanitarian assistance the U.S. Government allocates to that country should be considered in terms of how it can advance the established political and diplomatic strategy without creating dependency. Stabilization assistance is not an entitlement, and continued U.S. Government assistance should depend on results. Program planning and design

of development and security sector assistance should be considered through that lens. In some cases, certain types of assistance should be delayed or sequenced if they cannot be accountable or implemented successfully without adequate stability. This process includes being deliberate and precise about how and when we seek to promote private sector investment, taking into account the risks and challenges. Greater consideration of the exact role of the private sector as well as the appropriate ratio for immediate versus long-term funding needs (including international donors) is necessary. If engaged effectively, the result would be cost-savings in the short-term and enable better overall development outcomes in the long run. Unfortunately, in many cases, this lack of prioritization has resulted in disparate and competing assistance efforts that made engagement ineffective.

Link subnational engagements with national diplomacy to advance stabilization

Both national and subnational engagements are needed to advance stabilization, and need to be eventually nested together to achieve optimal effect. For example, our Review's case

study of Mali showed that failure to achieve a durable political settlement at the national level can undermine local stabilization efforts. Assistance targeted at the subnational level is most effective when it is informed by national-level policy reforms. However, in other cases such as Syria today, subnational engagement will need to begin first, while national-level dynamics are still being resolved. This process requires a flexible approach, recognizing that subnational dynamics can vary radically from one geographic region to another.

Reinforce pockets of citizen security and purposefully engage with security actors

Stabilization is most likely to be successful where there is basic security on the ground. Basic security is defined as minimum conditions where U.S. assistance partners can operate and monitor activities, access appropriate local stakeholders, and where security actors can engage in building trust with local communities. Furthermore, focusing on precise subnational areas where there are pockets of security is more likely to succeed because there will be an ability to work consistently with local actors, including local security forces.

Stability gains are not sustainable without citizen-responsive governance. Early transition work lays the foundation for long-term development by promoting reconciliation, jumpstarting local economies, supporting emerging independent media, and fostering lasting peace and democracy through innovative programming and evidence-based approaches.

—USAID Administrator Mark Green, speaking to the House Appropriations Committee, November 1, 2017



Young activists attend a peace rally in Ansongo in northern Mali where local actors demanded rebels to sign the Algiers Peace Deal. *Photo: USAID*

The Review's case study of Afghanistan showed that most experts, including the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, concluded that prioritizing U.S. stabilization programs in areas without local-level commitments to reduce violence and increase physical security negatively affected overall momentum toward stability. Alternatively, tailored place-based assistance strategies that marry violence-reduction and citizen security efforts with targeted law enforcement have proven successful in stabilizing some of the most at-risk locales in Central America.

Seek unity of purpose across all lines of effort

One of the greatest challenges to stabilization is that different U.S. Departments and Agencies have different priorities, and regional and international actors often have other agendas that work at competing purposes. Counterterrorism operations are prioritized in many conflict environments today, but some

operations may have destabilizing effects. Stabilization cannot be an afterthought. Rather, it needs to be fully integrated and elevated across lines of effort. It should be incorporated into campaign planning as early as possible to help shape operational design and strategic decisions. The "2016 DoD Biennial Assessment Operations Capabilities" recommended that civil-military annexes be drafted for all Combatant Command concept plans and operations plans, with interagency input. Close civilian-military planning and coordination has been a key determinant in effective stabilization outcomes across all cases examined. For example, in Pakistan, close synchronization of stabilization programming with security operations facilitated targeted, impactful programming.

Employ strategic patience and plan beyond stabilization for self-reliance

There is no single set time frame for stabilization that is

generalizable to all cases, but in no case should it be open-ended. While stabilization efforts are intended to create targeted short-term effects, it usually requires time to achieve durable and legitimate political settlements at local and national levels. Strategic and resource planners should take this reality into account to build realistic, flexible, and achievable milestones and enable consistent funding. Effective stabilization efforts also intentionally incorporate linkages to longer term development efforts into planning. Multilateral development banks, other donors, and the private sector should be part of the process as early as possible, while being realistic about the challenges and risks in post-conflict investment climates. Stabilization should also include strategic communication strategies that emphasize host-nation ownership from the outset to avoid creating dependencies or local resentment.

LOOKING AHEAD: A FRAMEWORK FOR U.S. STABILIZATION

A revitalized approach to how the United States works to stabilize relevant conflict-affected areas—an approach that takes into account the current imperatives and past lessons—needs organizational structures, budgets, processes, capabilities, and personnel that are fit for this purpose. Most of the above findings are not new, but they have not been systematically applied or institutionalized in how we approach stabilization in conflict-affected areas. State, USAID, and DoD have identified the following areas to improve how our Departments and Agency work individually and together to advance stabilization goals.

Establish Strategic Engagement Criteria and Priorities to Guide Stabilization

The U.S. Government should institutionalize a process by which we identify conflict-affected countries/regions that warrant increased attention, assess the U.S. interests and priorities for advancing stabilization in these countries/

regions, and then conduct deliberate strategic planning to contend with stabilization challenges. Key criteria for determining whether, when, and how to pursue a stabilization mission should include the assessed U.S. national interest; national and local partner ownership; risks, constraints and opportunities in the operating environment; the level of risk we are willing to assume; and the level of sustained resources we are willing to commit.

As noted above, successful stabilization begins with developing an outcome-based political strategy that outlines our core assumptions and achievable end states and guides all lines of effort—diplomatic engagement, defense, foreign assistance, and private sector engagement where appropriate—to ensure unity of purpose within the U.S. Government. In those places of highest priority for stabilization, State, USAID, and DoD should work with the relevant U.S. Embassy, regional bureau, Combatant Commands, and other stakeholders to develop

89%

of surveyed USG experts

Support development of a defined interagency strategy and implementation plan for places where U.S. policymakers determine that the U.S. has a vital national interest in pursuing stabilization.

a political strategy for the stabilization mission.

Key elements to address in the political strategy include: partner nation goals and capacity; the defined U.S. Government interests and areas in which interests may compete; mapping key actors; desired political end states and objectives; the interests and goals of partners; anticipated resource requirements; the role of different U.S. Government actors and international donors; mechanisms for civil-military coordination; assessment of risks; and strategic analytics to track over time and measure progress. The strategy must then be institutionalized into Department and Agency plans and reviewed

“A wise approach to reform [of stabilization and reconstruction operations] would aim at producing a unified system that plans and executes operations integratively, averts significant waste, increases the likelihood of tactical success, and better protects U.S. national security interests.”

—Final Report of Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Learning from Iraq, March 2013

on a regular basis to assess its effectiveness and make adjustments as needed.

Pursue a More Purposeful Division of Labor and Burden-Sharing with Multilateral Bodies, While Mobilizing Other Bilateral Donors on Stabilization

Engaging in stabilization missions means the U.S. Government must advocate that our partners co-invest with purpose in line with mutually agreed strategic outcomes. Developing coordinated donor approaches toward fragile and post-conflict contexts based on lessons learned has increased significantly over the past decade and spurred new international frameworks such as the New Deal for Engagements in Fragile States, but these efforts have not yet resulted in standardized or efficient approaches adaptable across conflicts. Effective donor coordination includes pressing donor partners to develop systematic approaches and share the burdens and risks of stabilization.

At a policy level, State and USAID should seek dedicated dialogues with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UN, World Bank, and other regional and international organizations to press for coordinated reforms in how they approach and invest in conflict-affected areas. The U.S. Government should encourage the UN to adopt a single common approach to stabilization that can integrate efforts across its peacekeeping and political

missions. Similarly, the United States should actively engage with the World Bank and the regional development banks as it considers significant expansions in its engagement and funding in conflict-affected areas.

At an operational level, we should continue to engage pooled donor mechanisms in some cases to mobilize other partner resources. We should press that donor coordination bodies approach these pooled financing mechanisms strategically, building on best practices for risk-mitigation, local government support, accountability and monitoring, as well as flexible structures. We should also actively engage with these pooled funding mechanisms to ensure they reinforce our political objectives, and mobilize donors to take on greater costs. The U.S. Government and international community should be clear on our expectations of the financial and political responsibilities of each partner-nation government. Financing mechanisms should reflect the capacity level at the outset with clear guidance on measuring progress over time.

In some cases, other donors could want to build on our implementation mechanism. Through targeted agreements bilateral donor funding can flow through existing U.S. Government procurement mechanisms. One example is the United Kingdom's recent contributions to a USAID-led stabilization program in Libya.

Define Department and Agency Roles and Responsibilities for Stabilization to Improve Performance

Clear lines of authority between and within U.S. Government departments and agencies would improve effectiveness, reduce duplication and confusion, enable greater accountability, and fully operationalize a whole-of-government approach. The U.S. Government should formally define lead agency roles for stabilization missions, with State as the overall lead federal agency for U.S. stabilization efforts; USAID as the lead implementing agency for non-security U.S. stabilization assistance; and, DoD as a supporting element, to include providing requisite security and reinforcing civilian efforts where appropriate. DoD is refining its stabilization policy to incorporate the concept of "Defense Support to Stabilization." Other Departments and Agencies, including members of the Intelligence Community, can also play critical supporting roles.

With clear roles, State, USAID, and DoD should then ensure that we each have the appropriate structures and staff in place to perform these roles in

86%

of surveyed USG experts

Are not clear which U.S. Government agencies have lead responsibility for different elements of stabilization.

an efficient, coordinated fashion. For example, State should institutionalize a structure that can lead and coordinate inter-agency stabilization analysis, policy formulation, and strategic planning as well as diplomatic engagement. At the same time, USAID should designate and empower an entity to serve as its technical lead for stabilization to engage with the interagency and support relevant regional bureaus and Missions in coordinating, planning, implementing, and monitoring non-security stabilization assistance in conflict-affected environments. This process would help ensure coherent management and implementation of this type of U.S. assistance. DoD should assign stabilization planners throughout the Department, especially at the Geographic Combatant Commands, and ensure professional military education prepares future leaders to operate effectively with civilian partners at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Recognizing the interlinkages between our organizations, these respective entities must be prepared to train, exercise, and work closely together to advance integrated stabilization efforts before a contingency occurs.

Build the Capacity of a U.S. Expeditionary Civilian Workforce to Meet Stabilization Objectives and Establish Policies to Allow for Co-Deployment

To advance stabilization success, the United States requires a mechanism to rapidly deploy civilian-led stabilization teams into conflict-affected areas to assess local conditions, engage local authorities, and direct and monitor programs. We have faced delays in the past in deploying civilian experts alongside U.S. military elements—despite overwhelming policy consensus—because of a lack of standing authorities and structures, missing critical opportunities to address overlapping civilian and security objectives. State, USAID, and DoD should work together to develop a framework for Stabilization, Transition, and Response Teams (START) that can support Chiefs of Mission and Combatant Commands to coordinate, plan, and implement a U.S. Government stabilization response in conflict areas. This approach would build on lessons from, and address shortcomings of, the previous Civilian Response Corps, by setting up a much smaller and dedicated set of stabilization specialists who can rapidly

deploy and have the support systems to do so.

Specifically, the START framework for both Washington and abroad should streamline roles and procedures; establish an enduring human resources, training, and operational support platform; provide expanded authorities to deploy civilians with and alongside DoD operational and tactical elements; and, when necessary, recruit and deploy further qualified surge personnel. The teams can be tailored to specific planning and implementation objectives based on the directive and needs of the relevant Chief of Mission.

Establishing interoperable, co-deployable capabilities depends on instituting more flexible security and risk-management standards and making strategic investments in human resources and training. State and USAID should review and adapt existing risk-management standards and processes to provide leaders and employees with accepted approaches to defining and making decisions in the face of challenging, fluid, and unclear circumstances. These mechanisms must take into account the central issue of Departments' and Agencies' unique authorities

“If you take good people and good ideas and you match them with bad processes, the bad processes will win nine out of ten times.”

—General James N. Mattis USMC (ret.) interview with Peter Robinson at the Hoover Institution, March 6, 2015



U.S. Special Operations Forces engage in Shura discussion with Afghan elders about security and governance. *Photo: DoD*

and regulations governing security responsibility.

At the same time, State, USAID, and DoD should pre-identify and prepare a pool of civilians with requisite experience who can deploy on short notice to support joint stabilization missions, drawing heavily from existing State staff with experience working in conflict environments and incorporating lessons from their experience. State and USAID will need to maximize and expand agile hiring mechanisms of non-tenured staff to fill critical gaps that can incentivize expeditionary missions and enhance retention. State, USAID, and DoD should reinforce and formalize existing joint training efforts to meet minimum and prerequisite deployment standards. To

bolster these efforts, DoD is reviewing whether to request new authorities to support the deployment of civilian advisors for stabilization on a non-reimbursable basis.

Leverage Flexible Funding to Enable Sequenced, Targeted Approaches to Assistance

Stabilization does not require extremely high funding levels; rather, stabilization depends on consistent, flexible funding accounts unencumbered by Congressionally-directed earmarks, that can enable agile, targeted, and sequenced approaches to stabilization programming. Existing funding accounts, such as “Peacekeeping Operations” and “Transition Initiatives,” provide critical authorities for

State and USAID to assess and respond to emergent stabilization requirements, while bilateral and regional funds can provide consistency over time. The new Counter-ISIS Relief and Recovery Fund provided by Congress is another good example of the kind of flexible funding that is useful. The U.S. Government should continue to engage with Congress to build confidence and support for this goal to increase our flexibility to respond quickly to stabilization needs.

State and USAID should also engage with other donors to better coordinate their dedicated funds for stabilization and associated efforts in conflict-affected areas. The UN Peacebuilding Fund and World Bank’s State and Peacebuilding



USAID is supporting communities in the wake of Colombia's civil war to solidify the peace process and promote reconciliation PHOTO. Photo: Juan Carlos Sierra/USAID

Fund as well as the United Kingdom's Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund are important models for operational reform in support of stabilization. We should seek to promote greater alignment and rationalization of how these funds are deployed along with the relevant U.S. accounts, based on their respective strengths and limitations.

At the same time, State, USAID, and DoD need to put in place appropriate structures and mechanisms to better use our existing flexibilities and resources. We should be more disciplined in assessing the risks of prematurely providing certain types of assistance in conflict-affected environments before there is a foundation of legitimate political order, basic security, and appropriate anti-corruption controls. Flexible and adaptive procurement mechanisms are also crucial to

function in challenging environments. Where we are pursuing stabilization programming in conflict-affected areas, State and USAID should work to adapt and align procurement tools for security and non-security assistance and delegate authorities closer to the field.

Promote Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Justice and Security Sector Assistance

The U.S. Government and other donors need to carefully tailor all assistance and training programs in conflict-affected environments to ensure they mutually advance stability and do not inadvertently exacerbate conflict dynamics. Over the past decade, USAID has developed important guidelines for conflict-sensitive democracy and governance, education, and economic growth programming in conflict-affected areas, which the Agency should streamline

throughout all efforts. A similar effort is needed to align and adapt justice and security sector assistance programs in these environments. In support of counterterrorism objectives, the international community is providing high volumes of security sector training and assistance to many conflict-affected countries, but our programs are largely disconnected from a political strategy writ large, and do not address the civilian-military aspects required for transitional public and citizen security. More focus needs to be placed on helping security forces to secure population centers and restore trust with local communities. This approach is true not only for U.S. programs, but also for other donor efforts.

In addition, more efforts and resources need to be tailored to address trauma and psychosocial well-being within conflict-affected communities, promote local justice and the rule of law, and address local grievances related to access to justice and corruption concerns. The ability of the state to re-establish order, security and the rule of law will greatly influence the extent of popular support for stabilization and longer term reform. USAID experience in conflict-affected environments suggests that three areas are paramount for immediate engagement: access to justice, particularly for marginalized populations; mechanisms that promote peaceful, fair, and transparent

management of disputes; and transitional justice.

Justice sector programming in conflict-affected areas often focuses heavily on promoting formal national and criminal justice-focused institutions based on Western domestic experiences, missing opportunities to advance local and civil solutions in more fluid environments. It is critical to build the legitimacy of formal institutions over time, but in many conflict-affected areas, much of the population looks to local, tribal, religious, or other non-government justice institutions to resolve disputes and assert legal rights. We should work with international partners to deepen our understanding of local needs in these environments and consider local precedent regarding administration of justice, particularly with respect to reconciliation

and accountability. Likewise, we should take a balanced approach in our reaction to and willingness to work with informal and formal systems. The U.S. Government should expand and strengthen its institutional capabilities to undertake this critical local rule of law programming where needed and ensure longer term rule of law and justice programming is coordinated and aligned with stabilization efforts.

Institutionalize Learning, Evaluation, and Accountability in Our Approach

Finally, to be successful, stabilization requires a regular feedback loop that involves experimentation, learning, adaptation, and accountability. This approach is critical at both the program and strategic levels. We should identify indicators to measure changes in

the conflict environment and track them consistently over time, while also allowing for flexibility to adjust indicators based on what we are learning. This process can facilitate more rigorous reviews by policy-makers to determine whether adjustments are needed in our political strategy and objectives. As part of this effort, we should use evidence and analytics to rigorously assess our political strategy and the political interests of our national and local partners. If they are not living up to their commitments, we should be prepared to change course. If our political objectives are infeasible due to misalignment with local political interests, we must be willing to adjust political objectives. Accordingly, stabilization will ultimately not be successful if our partners are not fully invested in a collective undertaking.

CONCLUSION

Advancing the United States' top foreign policy priorities requires a revitalized approach to how we work to stabilize conflict-affected areas. We cannot continue to take the same approach and expect different results. We need a disciplined approach to how we set our strategic goals, maintain priorities, engage with local, national,

and international partners to achieve a fair division of labor and burden-sharing, and promote conditions to maximize our assistance resources and promote long-term self-sufficiency. This approach is not easy to get right, but our Review has affirmed that there is tremendous talent, expertise and willingness to succeed across the U.S. Government in this

area. The challenge today is to apply that experience, talent, and learning in a systematic fashion. With sustained leadership and dedicated, efficient organizational structures and frameworks, we can achieve that and thereby avoid costly mistakes, increase our likely dividends, and do right by our taxpaying public.

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