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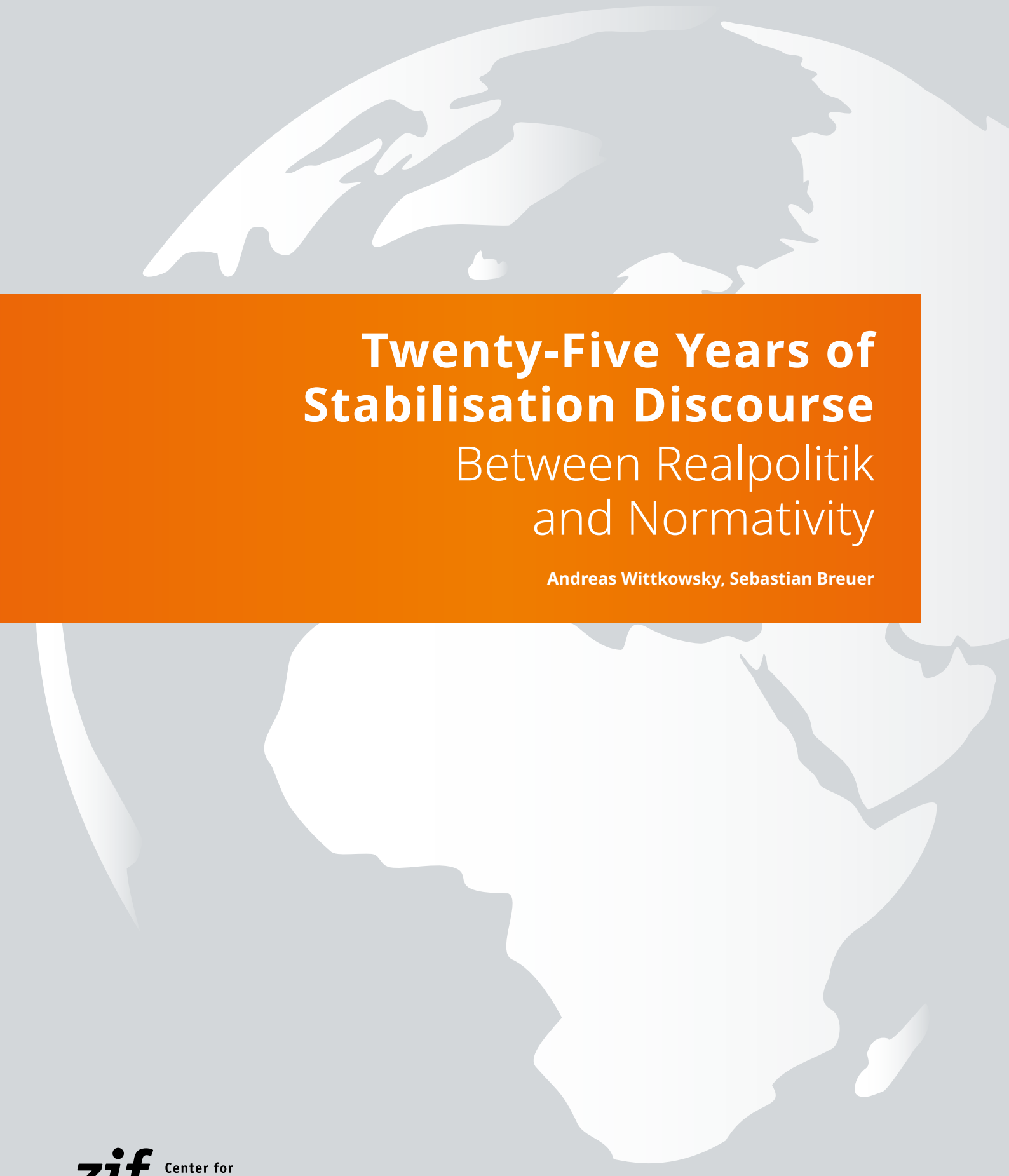

Twenty-Five Years of Stabilisation Discourse

Between Realpolitik and Normativity

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Summary

Since the beginning of the millennium, stabilisation has become a prominent paradigm of international conflict management. The United Nations, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the European Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany have all recently held strategic debates on stabilisation interventions based on the experience of the last 25 years. Some of them have made surprisingly **self-critical assessments** and have defined their objectives more precisely than before. Their focus lies on the political dimension of stabilisation and the civilian components that support it.

Stabilisation pursues an intermediate goal that increases the chances of being achieved at all: a political arrangement that permits more extensive and non-violent conflict management.

Overall, the latest discourse on stabilisation reflects a **renaissance of realpolitik** in international conflict management. Since the results of the extensive state- and nation-building programmes under the so-called liberal peace agenda have been sobering, stabilisation now pursues an **intermediate goal,** which may be less ambitious but promises better chances of being achieved at all: a **political arrangement** that permits non-violent conflict management.

The Conceptualisation of an Old Term

The already older concept of stabilisation experienced something of a rebirth as a result of the violent break-up of Yugoslavia, the September 11 attacks of 2001 and the subsequent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. In particular, **fragile states** now form the focus of international security threats.

The interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq were initially planned as short, surgical military operations. However, their limited success soon made a broader approach to stabilisation appear necessary. In line with a comprehensive **liberal peacebuilding agenda**, civilian local and international players need to lay the broad foundations for reconstruction, good governance, development and the rule of law.

Security was seen as an essential prerequisite for successful stabilisation. The establishment of a secure environment was therefore the main military task in stabilisation operations. Apart from that, stabilisation was to be an activity **mainly carried out by civilian actors**.

Both in terms of doctrine and in practice, **stabilisation was blended with other concepts** in (post-)conflict contexts. First, it was part of a broader understanding of reconstruction. Some actors, including NATO, grouped corresponding activities together under a common concept of "**stabilisation and reconstruction**". Moreover, no clear delineation to the more military-dominated **counterinsurgency** (COIN) existed. Because of similar goals and activities, as well as their near-simultaneous emergence in Afghanistan and Iraq, stabilisation has increasingly been viewed as a military activity, and sometimes used synonymously with COIN.

Common Features of Current Stabilisation Approaches

Despite all the realpolitik, the current stabilisation concepts remain **normative**. This is particularly evident in the insistence that the desired political arrangements have to enjoy **legitimacy** among the population in order to be sustainable. This normativity follows functional considerations rather than value-based principles: because without legitimacy, any desired political arrangement is hardly sustainable. In addition, strengthening state actors deeply entangled in the conflict is likely to create more problems than it solves in the long run.

At least rhetorically, military activities take a back seat. The greatest challenge for stabilisation concepts is receiving civilian support.

The focus has shifted in the latest strategies compared to previous debates. At least rhetorically, military activities take a back seat. Because even though stabilisation concepts emerged in the context of military operations, their **greatest challenge is their civilian component**. The more recent strategies define objectives and means more narrowly and emphasise the need to set clear priorities. Although they are still not congruent to this day, a set of similarities has emerged.

1. **An intermediate peacebuilding objective in immediate or post-conflict situations**: Stabilisation is understood as that aspect of peacebuilding which is intended to work close to a hot phase of a violent conflict. At the core is the question of which priorities are most relevant in the short run, in order to overcome the violent phase of conflict. At the same time, some of these priorities are sufficiently vague to open the door for a wider range of measures, especially when it comes to satisfying the needs of the population. Stabilisation actors are confronted with the dilemma of how to reconcile the political limits of their own influence with the continuing normative demands.

2. **Political arrangements for the transformation of violent conflicts**: The most important strategic goal of stabilisation is the transformation of acute or imminent violent conflict into a political arrangement that permits non-violent conflict management. It is now stressed that stabilisation is above all a political undertaking that supports conflict management by local actors. This requires a comprehensive (or integrated) approach, in which civil and military instruments are aligned with this strategic goal.

3. **Security as a prerequisite and objective**: Stabilisation must provide a minimum of the public good security in order to achieve its strategic goal. This is a prerequisite for the political process and for protecting the population that is impacted by conflict. Without a minimum of security, no success can be achieved in other areas of sustainable peace and development either. This also justifies the importance of a potential military component that can intervene in the local balance of power and create the space needed for political processes.

4. **A comprehensive approach**: Depending on the conflict context, stabilisation calls for a combination of diplomatic, developmental and security policy instruments. Agreement exists that impact can only be achieved through a consistently applied comprehensive approach under civilian leadership. No clear demarcation lines can be drawn between stabilisation activities and longer-term development support, nor can there be any clear boundaries with the conventional peacebuilding tasks. Because of these fluid boundaries, it is in the best interest of all actors involved not to work against each other and to shape transitions between them together – if they wish to have impact.

5. **A quick start, risk taking, and rapid impact:** If development activities are to make an effective contribution (and thus become stabilisation measures), they must focus on the strategic goal, be feasible at an early stage and produce tangible results as quickly as possible. At the same time, absorption capacities are limited in fragile environments, where partner institutions are lacking or weak. For this reason, it is often sensible to start with small-scale measures, to closely monitor their implementation, and then to flexibly adapt or develop them further.

Putting these conceptual requirements **into practice** remains the big challenge. The lack of clear boundaries between activities and the greater risk of failure require a clear description of objectives and the development of a theory of change for stabilisation measures. While the readiness to accept higher risks of success is important, **regular critical reviews of the impact assumptions** must not be omitted. That is why stabilisation activities need a particular culture of self-critical discussion and error management.

What is noticeable is that many of the definitions lack precision and resemble a hodge-podge of words around the general areas of peacebuilding, security and development. [...]

The danger is that the terminological imprecision surrounding 'stabilization' creates a meta-category; full of buzzwords but empty of meaning. Moreover, there is the danger that peace becomes subsumed by a range of other terms more closely associated with security.

Mac Ginty: Against Stabilization, S. 24.[2]

Introduction

Since the beginning of the millennium, stabilisation has become a prominent, if not dominant paradigm of international conflict management. Traditional peacebuilding continues to view this with **suspicion** and sometimes doubts the analytical and practical added value vis-à-vis the established terms as laid down, for example, in the so-called *Capstone Doctrine* of the United Nations (conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace enforcement, peacekeeping and peacebuilding) as being perfectly adequate.[1]

In the meantime, many international players have drawn up strategy documents on stabilisation interventions and spent several billion euros on stabilisation activities. That is why the normative power of the factual applies: Debating first principles will not get rid of the term. However, critics still complain that many **definitions are unclear.**[2]

On the one hand, different actors define stabilisation in different ways and do not clearly distinguish it from other **peacebuilding** concepts. Multilateral actors such as the United Nations (see Chapter 2) or bilateral actors such as Denmark pursue stabilisation activities and also reflect on them programmatically, but have so far completely done without a definition, whether for reasons of political expedience or because the approach is considered self-explanatory.[3] All this contributes to the fact that stabilisation is associated and pursued with varying objectives and approaches.

International assessments are surprisingly self-critical. Stabilisation, its objectives and priorities are being defined more precisely than before.

A second criticism is sparked by the importance of security, which is considered a central aspect of stabilisation. It is therefore feared that stabilisation would lead to the **securitisation** of international conflict management. Conflicts, their origins and the approaches for dealing with them would primarily be seen, understood and addressed as security problems. Overall, this perspective would become more and more dominant in peacebuilding and development activities, in particular under the **security development nexus**. These fears have been fuelled by the fact that the first stabilisation concepts evolved in the context of military interventions.

Meanwhile, after two and a half decades of stabilisation interventions, some of the key international players have taken stock – sometimes in a surprisingly self-critical way – and have refined their strategies in search for a more promising approach. In the process, stabilisation, its objectives and priorities have been defined more precisely than before. The focus is now firmly on the **political dimension and the civilian components supporting stabilisation**.

This paper examines the latest strategy discussions and documents from six bilateral and multilateral actors. It compares their motivation, definitions and experiences and summarises their adjustments of goals and priorities. The paper concludes with an assessment of how the meaning of stabilisation has changed and what the core components of current approaches are.

1 United Nations, Department for Peacekeeping Operations /Department of Field Support, 2008: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations – Principles and Guidelines.

2 Roger Mac Ginty, 2012: Against Stabilization. In: Stability: International Journal of Security & Development, Vol. 1(1) S. 20-30.

3 Denmark's Integrated Stabilisation Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-affected Areas of the World, 2013.

1. Genesis of the Stabilisation Approach

> *The perceived novelty of contemporary post-crisis stabilization operations is in many respects rooted in a 'tradition of forgetting'.*
>
> Barakat et al: 'A tradition of forgetting', p. 297.[4]

Stabilisation became a prominent paradigm of international conflict management following the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Its foundations, however, rest on **older concepts** that were based on the assumption that security can be achieved through accompanying humanitarian, reconstruction and developmental activities – in part by military players, in part by civilian ones.

The NATO-led *Stabilization Force* (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996 – 2004) was the first international peace operation to feature the word "stabilisation" in its name. Then in 1999, the *Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe* was founded.

The NATO-led *Stabilization Force* (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996 – 2004) was the **first international peace operation** to feature the word "stabilisation" in its name (see below, section on NATO). However, there was not yet a proper conceptual underpinning.

In the civilian sector, stabilisation was taken up as a result of the Kosovo conflict, when the ***Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe*** was founded in 1999 on the initiative of the EU and in particular the German government. The pact united more than 40 states and organisations, which were the main players in international conflict management, with the aim to ensure a lasting peace in the entire region, guarantee political and economic stability and integrate the countries of South Eastern Europe into the international community. They were offered the prospect of EU accession and integration into the transatlantic community in order to support democratic and economic reforms, as well as the expansion of regional cooperation.

The goal behind that was to pursue a **long-term**, **comprehensive policy** combatting the causes of conflict, which bundled the activities of the various partners. The Stability Pact's work was divided into three Working Tables for (i) democratisation and human rights, (ii) economic reconstruction, development and cooperation and (iii) security issues. In 2008, the pact was replaced by the *Regional Cooperation Council for South Eastern Europe*.

USA: Fragile States, Unconventional Conflicts and a Liberal Peace Agenda

In the US, stabilisation had been discussed much earlier. In the US military, the design and implementation of **"stability operations"** was already an issue in the 1960s. However, the term quickly disappeared from the scene since specific stability operations were not viewed as a genuine military task during the Cold War, but rather as an unwanted burden that tied up resources.

Critics of this position were told that no special preparations were needed for stability operations, since a well-trained conventional army also had the necessary skills and could quickly adapt to changed circumstances.[5]

After the Cold War, the focus shifted to the increasing number of **intrastate conflicts** where governmental security forces and non-state actors (rebel groups, terrorist networks or ethnic militias) faced off against each other.

4 Sultan Barakat, Seán Deely und Steven A. Zyck, 2010: 'A Tradition of Forgetting': Stabilisation and Humanitarian Action in Historical Perspective. In: Disasters, Vol. 34(S3), S. 297-319.

5 Lawrence A. Yates, 2006: The US Military's Experience in Stability Operations, 1789-2005. Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper 15. Combat Studies Institute Press, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

At the same time, the Clinton administration was pursuing a **liberal peacebuilding agenda**, which pursued comprehensive *state-building* or *nation-building* with considerable development policy contributions. This was intended to create the structural conditions needed for a sustainable peace in fragile states: by supporting liberal democracies, free-market economies and functioning state institutions.

When President George W. Bush took office in 2001, his administration wanted to abandon this liberal agenda. The military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq that followed the September 11 attacks had initially been conceived as a dedicated counter-concept to the Clinton policy. With a new, network-centred and high-tech type of warfare employing light units and only a few troops, the aim was to quickly overpower the opponent militarily with **surgical interventions**. Public security and reconstruction were to be left to local and multinational players. Consequently, there were hardly any plans for guaranteeing or (re-) establishing public security, an effective state apparatus and a functioning infrastructure following the combat operations.

However, this approach resulted in a **local power vacuum**, which allowed armed resistance to increase. In response, the US military made a radical U-turn and – by detour through the counterinsurgency approach – rediscovered the broader concepts of stabilisation and reconstruction from the Clinton era.

It was only then that the conceptual work on stabilisation approaches intensified, with a focus on "fragile" or "failed" states, which were defined as countries whose governments were either unwilling or unable to effectively control their territory. According to the threat analysis, this would provide terrorist groups with **safe havens** they could use to plan and carry out attacks. Moreover, fragility would threaten to spill over into neighbouring countries. The aim of stabilisation was to counter these threats. Its emergence is thus closely linked to the experience in Afghanistan and Iraq and the perception of "failed" or "failing" states as threats to security.

Stabilisation was intended to counter the threats posed by "fragile" or "failed" states.

In the beginning, **institutional reforms** were initiated in the civilian sector to be able to respond better to the new challenges. The US Department of State established the *Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization* in 2004. It established fundamental concepts, mechanisms, and capabilities for carrying out stability operations until 2011, when it became part of the *Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations*. In addition, a *Civilian Reserve Corps* of civilian specialists was established that could be mobilised quickly for deployment abroad in the event of a conflict.

In 2005 the Pentagon issued a directive that, for the first time, made stability operations a core military task that was to be treated on an equal footing with combat operations and be mainstreamed across all the departments' activities.

This directive defined stabilisation missions as "**military and civilian activities** conducted across the spectrum from peace to conflict to establish or maintain order in states and regions".[6]

That very same year, the White House followed suit with a *National Security Presidential Directive* to improve the coordination, planning and implementation of measures for **stabilisation and reconstruction**.[7] It envisaged close cooperation with other countries and organisations to prevent government failures and to permit quick reactions. The directive assigned the lead role for stability operations to the State Department.

In 2008, the *US Army* produced a **field manual on stability operations** for the first time. It described its objective as "various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential government services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief."[8]

6 United States, Department of Defense, 2005: Directive 3000.05 – Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations. Hervorhebung durch die Autoren.

7 United States, The White House, 2005: National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-44.

8 United States, Department of the Army, 2008: Field Manual 3-07 – Stability Operations.

The military task was, above all, **to create a safe environment** in which "other instruments of national or international power" could work, which provided the basis for the long-term elimination of the causes of instability. This could also mean military action against armed groups that had risen up against their governments.

Above all, the institutions on the ground needed to be empowered to take responsibility for peace and security.

The aim of the civil-military efforts was to establish the conditions under which a **local government that was considered legitimate** could exercise **control over the territory of the country**. Quite in the spirit of liberal peacebuilding there was a broad spectrum of goals:

- strengthening good governance,
- (re-)establishing the rule of law,
- supporting the development of the economy and the infrastructure,
- promoting a sense of nationhood, and
- fostering civil society and sustainable market economies.

Above all, local institutions needed to be empowered **to take responsibility for peace and security by themselves**. If there was no functioning government or if the security situation was too precarious for a civil administration, the military also needed to be able to restore basic state functions and, if necessary, take them over temporarily.

In this context, the field manual also reinterpreted the genesis of stability operations. Contrary to the predominant view, the manual held that **the military history of the USA should be viewed as a sequence of stability operations** that was only interrupted by major individual conflicts such as the two World Wars. Thus, the US Army's operations since the end of the Cold War, including in Haiti, Liberia, Somalia and in the Balkans, were all, in essence, stability operations – without being described as such at the time.

A **whole-of-government approach** and the close cooperation with civil organisations in a **comprehensive approach** were seen as being crucial for successful stability operations.

United Kingdom: Violence Prevention and Political Processes

As in the USA, the development of the British approach to stabilisation has been shaped by experience gained in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. This experience served as a catalyst for the establishment of a *Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit* in 2004, which was renamed the ***Stabilisation Unit*** in 2007. It is an inter-agency unit of the Ministries of Defence, Development and the Foreign Office with the mandate to develop civil-military strategies and to ensure the planning, implementation and management of the UK's contributions to stabilisation.

Right from the start, the British approach was somewhat narrower than the one of the US. **Three dimensions of effective state-building** became the central priority:

- political agreements involving key social and political forces,
- guaranteeing the survival functions of the state, i.e. security, a functioning tax system and the rule of law,
- meeting the expectations of the citizens of a country, at least to a certain extent.

In 2009, the British Army published a doctrine dedicated to what it calls **"stabilisation operations" or "stabilisation missions"**. It described stabilisation as a "process that supports states which are entering, enduring or emerging from conflict in order to prevent or reduce violence, protect the population and key infrastructure, promote political processes and governance structures, which lead to a political settlement that institutionalises non-violent contests for power, and prepares for sustainable social and economic development."[9]

9 United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, 2009: Joint Doctrine Publication 3.40 – Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution, S. 14.

Like the US Army, the British Army located the source of insecurity in **fragile and failed states**. These needed to be addressed through a comprehensive civilian-military approach combining economic, governance and security measures. The aim was to strengthen or reform a political order in order to increase its acceptance by the local population and to bring it more in line with the strategic interests of the United Kingdom.

The goal was defined even more broadly: to support legitimate political systems that resolve conflicts peacefully, ensure the rule of law and give their citizens equal opportunities.

Security was seen as the "non-discretionary" precondition for success, which is why the main military task was defined as providing a secure environment. This could also include the offensive use of force against violent actors.

Ultimately, however, it was the work of civilian actors that was supposed to enable a long-term and sustainable solution of the conflict. An **integrated approach** of the national actors, united around a common goal ("unity of effort"), was considered critical for success.

Both the *Stabilisation Unit* and the army defined the goal of stabilisation as a clearly political undertaking: at its **centre was a "political settlement"**. This included support for a government that was legitimate in the eyes of the civilian population and arrangements for peaceful political competition.

The *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*, jointly published in 2011 by the UK's foreign, defence and development ministries, defined the goal still broader. As the first inter-ministerial strategy specifically addressing conflict and instability, it viewed the objective of stabilisation as **supporting representative and legitimate political systems** that were capable of managing conflict and social change peacefully, respected human rights and the rule of law, satisfied basic needs and provided equal opportunities for social and economic development for all citizens.[10]

NATO: Military Contribution to Stabilisation and Reconstruction

As mentioned above, the NATO-led *Stabilization Force* (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996 – 2004) was the first international peace operation to feature the word "stabilisation" in its name. However, there was not yet a proper conceptual underpinning.

In its Strategic Concept of 1999, NATO first mentioned the possibility of ***Peace Support Operations,*** in other words non-Article 5 missions outside of the alliance's own area.[11] This was described in more detail in *Allied Joint Publication on Peace Support Operations* in 2001.[12] Through a combination of military, diplomatic and humanitarian contributions, these operations were to address crisis situations in failed or failing states, thereby achieving a long-term political solution or another, more precisely defined status. The spectrum of envisaged activities included, among others, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding, as well as humanitarian aid.

Stabilisation and reconstruction activities were normally to be carried out by civilian – and ideally domestic – actors.

For a long time, NATO had no specific stabilisation policy, as there was disagreement among NATO members as to whether and, if so, which role the organisation, as a defensive military alliance, should play in this field.

In 2011, NATO published political **guidelines** to bolster its contribution to stabilisation operations.[13] On this basis, the *Allied Joint Doctrine* on the *Military Contribution to Stabilization and Reconstruction* was drawn up in 2015. In this document, NATO described stabilisation and reconstruction as interlocking goals:

10 United Kingdom, Department for International Development, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, 2011: Building Stability Overseas Strategy.

11 NATO, 1999: The Alliance's Strategic Concept.

12 NATO, 2001: Allied Joint Publication 3.4.1 – Peace Support Operations.

13 NATO, 2010: Political Guidance on Ways to Improve NATO's Involvement in Stabilisation and Reconstruction.

"Stabilization is an approach used to mitigate crisis, promote legitimate political authority, and set the conditions for long-term stability by using **comprehensive civilian and military actions** to reduce violence, re-establish security, and end social, economic, and political turmoil. Reconstruction is the process of rebuilding physical infrastructure and re-establishing governmental or societal institutions which were damaged during the crisis. These activities should be focused on mitigating the sources of instability which fostered the crisis in the first place, and should help establish the foundation for long-term stability."[14]

Stabilisation and reconstruction aim to address the root causes of instability and establish capable local institutions during or after a crisis. The long-term goal was a situation which the local population considered **legitimate and acceptable**, including a 'normal' level of violence, functioning political, economic and social institutions as well as general compliance with the rule of law.

Stabilisation and reconstruction activities were normally to be carried out by **civilian – and ideally domestic – actors.** Here too, the main military task was the establishment of a secure environment, where civilian actors could carry out their work. In the event of a particularly tense security situation, military actors were expected to take on more extensive tasks temporarily.

The primacy of politics was regarded as the most important principle in stabilisation and reconstruction. The main aim was a **political agreement** between the government, competing elites and the broader population in the conflict country.

Stabilisation and COIN – a Contested Relationship

Contrary to the growing conceptualisation of stabilisation as a primarily civilian activity, it has often been viewed by both its supporters and its critics as a military activity similar to **counterinsurgency** (COIN), sometimes even used synonymously.

This perception was also based on the fact that both COIN and stabilisation were pre-existing concepts, which were then further refined and shaped by the conflicts that arose in response to the uprisings in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US Army's field manual 3 – 24, which presented the newly developed counterinsurgency strategy in 2006, described COIN as the military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civilian activities that a government undertakes to combat insurgencies.[15]

Stabilisation and COIN pursued similar goals and reinforced each other.

Stabilisation and COIN thus pursued **similar goals** and, when successful, mutually reinforced each other: on the one hand, combating insurgency as the goal of COIN; on the other hand, supporting political arrangements that strengthen legitimate governments as the goal of stabilisation. Due to tense security situations and ongoing fighting, it was often the security forces that took on the stabilisation tasks supposedly reserved for civilian players. For this reason, stabilisation appeared to be a strongly militarised activity, closely linked to COIN.

The US field manual viewed stabilisation operations as one of three sub-components of COIN, alongside defensive and offensive operations. Therefore, stabilisation was considered **part of COIN**.

The doctrine of the British Army, on the other hand, was not as clear.[16] It often viewed COIN as a central activity of a stabilisation operation, but admitted a situation was not necessarily stabilised even after an insurgency had come to an end. Stabilisation operations were also possible without a COIN component. The *Stabilisation Unit* also often viewed

14 NATO, 2015: Allied Joint Publication 3.4.5 – Allied Joint Doctrine for the Military Contribution to Stabilization and Reconstruction, S. 1-1. Hervorhebung durch die Autoren.

15 United States, Department of the Army, 2006: Field Manual 3-24 – Counterinsurgency.

16 United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence 2009: Joint Doctrine Publication 3.40–Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution.

COIN as the central activity of stabilisation operations, though stabilisation could also be something **broader than COIN**. COIN therefore was considered a **part of stabilisation**.

Conclusion: Genesis and Perception of the Stabilisation Approach

To sum up, the following can be said about the genesis of the stabilisation approach:

1. **An old concept rediscovered**: Neither the term stabilisation operation nor the underlying concept of an interlocking application of security and development measures to stabilise a conflict zone were new concepts emerging with the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US Army originally used the term stability operation in the 1960s, though it remained reserved about the underlying concept. Hence, it did not catch on and was shelved. It made a comeback after the violent break-up of Yugoslavia and the attacks of 11 September 2001, which triggered a profound change in the way international security threats were perceived, as well as the military interventions that followed these events, whose limited success made a broader stabilisation approach seem necessary.

2. **Focus on fragile statehood**: From that point on, interest was focused on fragile states whose governments were too weak or unwilling to effectively control their territory. This was seen as a new threat mainly because they were able to provide terrorist groups with a safe haven for planning and carrying out attacks. Besides that, instability threatened to spill over into neighbouring countries or regions. Stabilisation operations were explicitly designed to proactively counter the threat posed by fragile states and to eliminate the political causes of instability.

3. **Civilian leadership in a liberal stabilisation agenda**: Apart from the establishment of a secure environment, stabilisation was regarded as an activity mainly carried out by civilian actors with a focus on an overall political strategy. In keeping with the comprehensive agenda of so-called liberal peacebuilding, local and international civil actors were to lay the foundations for reconstruction, good governance, development and the rule of law. However, the most important objective was an arrangement under which political competition was peaceful.

4. **Security and the use of military force**: Stabilisation was conceived in parallel with military interventions and security was regarded as an essential precondition for successful stabilisation. The establishment of a safe environment was the main military task in stabilisation operations, which also envisaged the use of military force against violent actors if necessary. Only when the security situation made other activities impossible were military actors to carry out activities that were actually of a civilian nature. Responsibilities were to be handed back to civilian institutions as soon as conditions permitted.

5. **Stabilisation and reconstruction**: Both in terms of doctrine and in practice, stabilisation was difficult to separate from other concepts that were also used in (post-)conflict contexts. Initially, stabilisation combined a broad understanding of reconstruction, relating to the physical as well as the political, economic and social reconstruction of a country after the end of hostilities. For example, following initial pacification, a viable economy, the rule of law and a functioning civil society, as well as infrastructure, basic services and political institutions needed to be (re-)built. Because of these close links, a number of players, including NATO, officially defined these activities as “stabilisation and reconstruction”.

1960 USA: first discussion on stability operations

1991 **Yugoslavia: Violent dissolution**

1993 USA: Clinton administration, liberal peacebuilding

1996 SFOR: NATO-led *Stabilization Force* in Bosnia and Herzegovina

1999 Yugoslavia/Kosovo: NATO *Operation Allied Force*

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

2001 **USA: 9/11 attacks**

US intervention in Afghanistan (*Operation Enduring Freedom*)

ISAF: Nato-led *International Security Assistance Force* Afghanistan

Milestones of the Genesis

6. **Stabilisation and counterinsurgency (COIN)**: In addition, the borderline to the dominantly military concept of COIN was fluid and characterised by an unclear demarcation. Depending on the various actors' perspectives, COIN was either defined as a part of stabilisation, or *vice versa*. Both pursued similar and mutually reinforcing goals – the suppression of an armed insurgency in the case of COIN, the strengthening of government and a political agreement on the part of stabilisation. It was particularly difficult to draw an exact dividing line in the context of the tense security situation in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the security forces had to take on far-reaching stabilisation duties. Because of these similar goals and activities, as well as their near-simultaneous emergence in Afghanistan and Iraq, stabilisation has increasingly been seen as a military activity, sometimes even used synonymously with COIN.

Only slowly the consensus grew that without security it would also not be possible to promote sustainable peace and development.

This was also a source of criticism that the stabilisation approach led to a **securitisation** of all civilian areas of conflict management. The claim was that the space for humanitarian and development actors was shrinking, partly because they are increasingly viewed as being elements of military activities.

Only slowly the thought gained acceptance that it would not be possible to promote sustainable peace and development without a **minimum level of security**.

2003 US intervention in Iraq

2004 USA: *Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization*

UK: *Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit*

2005 USA: *Directive* 3000.05 (*Stability Operations*)

2007 UK: *Stabilisation Unit*

2008 USA: *Army Field Manual* 3-07 (*Stability Operations*)

2009 UK: *Joint Doctrine* 3.40 (*Security and Stabilisation*)

2011 UK: *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*

USA: *Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations*

NATO: *Political Guidelines on Stabilization & Reconstruction*

2015 NATO: *Stabilization and Reconstruction Doctrine* (AJP 3.4.5)

2. Discourse and Practice of the United Nations

> *[In] the past decade, the Security Council and the Secretariat have used the term "stabilization" for a number of missions that support the extension or restoration of State authority, in at least one case during ongoing armed conflict. The term "stabilization" has a wide range of interpretations, and the Panel believes the usage of that term by the United Nations requires clarification.*
>
> Report of the Highlevel Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO Report), para. 114.[18]

Over the last 20 years, the United Nations has mandated a number of peace operations as stabilisation operations. However, until today the term has not been further defined or conceptualised. The so-called **Capstone Doctrine**, the key policy document on UN peacekeeping operations published in 2008, describes stabilisation as the first phase of conflict management, but does not deepen its understanding any further and does not specifically locate stabilisation within the overall range of activities.[17]

Despite a lack of conceptual clarification, the UN Security Council has so far mandated four peacekeeping operations that explicitly have the word "stabilisation" in their name.

Most recently, the **HIPPO Report**[18] of June 2015 on the reform of UN peacekeeping operations called for the term to be clarified. The fact that this has not happened to this day is not least the result of reservations of various UN member states, who fear a trend towards robust military peacekeeping operations and a possible encroachment on the sovereign rights of states.

Good Offices at the Core?

A discussion at the UN Secretariat in New York explored whether clarifying the term would be helpful for the organisation and the maintenance of its principles. One of the questions was whether or not the **good offices of UN peace operations** should be placed at the core of the organisation's stabilisation activities. Good offices are – often discrete – diplomatic efforts to support peace processes, especially through UN political missions. The other instruments of UN peacekeeping operations (in the areas of civil affairs, rule of law and human rights) would therefore be tailored to support these diplomatic activities. Such an approach, it was suggested, would be able to prevent the UN from focusing too much on security-centred solutions and anchor stabilisation activities firmly among the agreed principles of the UN.[19]

Mission Practice in the Event of Acute Violent Conflict

Despite the lack of clarification, the UN Security Council has so far mandated four peacekeeping operations that have the word **stabilisation** in their name. The first, in 2004, was the *United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti* (MINUSTAH), deployed as a reaction to the violent destruction of the country's internal order. Thirteen years later, in 2017, this mission was transformed into a follow-up mission whose focus is on the establishment of rule-of-law institutions. The three other UN stabilisation operations are still ongoing:

17 United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations/ Department of Field Support, 2008: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations – Principles and Guidelines.

18 United Nations, 2015: Report of the Highlevel Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnership and People, 16 June 2015, United Nations Document A/70/95–S/2015/446, para. 114.

19 Concept Note of the Workshop "Stabilization in UN Peace Operations Settings", hosted by the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training (DPET), Department of Peace Operations (DPO), and the Policy and Mediation Division (PMD), Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), 18-20 June 2019, New York.

- The *United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (MONUSCO, operational since 2010 as the successor mission to the *United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, MONUC, 1999 – 2010),
- The *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA, since 2013) and
- The *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic* (MINUSCA, since 2014).

The three African missions were deployed in response to violent uprisings in countries that had lost control of parts of their territory. They were mandated amid continuing conflict under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which also legitimises the use of military means to restore peace and security. The goal of all the missions is the **protection of civilians** (PoC) and the expansion of **state authority** of the host countries.

With the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), the Security Council authorised a peacekeeping operation to "neutralise" irregular armed groups for the first time.

All UN stabilisation operations have "**robust**" mandates. The MINUSCA and MINUSMA mandates provide for over 10,000 Blue Helmets while the MONUSCO mandate even exceeds 17,000. The ratio of military to civilian personnel is over ten to one in all three missions. In March 2013, for the first time in UN history, the Security Council authorised a *Force Intervention Brigade* (FIB) to give MONUSCO the capability to "neutralise" irregular armed groups.

Four fields of action can be identified – with different weightings – as joint **tasks** of these UN stabilisation operations. They support:

- a secure and stable environment that ensures the protection of the civilian population,
- political processes that strengthen state institutions, legitimise them and permit social reconciliation,
- an effective and accountable security sector, and
- the rule of law and human rights.

Special Programmes versus Cross-cutting Tasks

Stabilisation is a **cross-cutting task** in these missions, while two of them have also established internal structures to coordinate or implement specific stabilisation programmes.

MONUSCO's *Stabilization Support Unit* supports the **stabilisation and reconstruction programme** of the DR Congo. Together with the Congolese government, it runs the Technical Secretariat of the *International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy* (I4S), whose activities are aimed at preventing conflicts in selected regions of eastern Congo.

MINUSMA's *Stabilization and Recovery Section*, on the other hand, pursues three paths of activity. Firstly, it promotes **regional stabilisation strategies** for the north of Mali. This region had been temporarily in rebel hands and also been neglected by government infrastructure programmes in the past. In addition, the mission prepares conflict and needs analyses. Secondly, it manages **funds** for quick impact projects, the *Trust Fund for Peace and Security* and the *UN Peacebuilding Fund* with the goal of improving the security situation, strengthening social cohesion, reviving manufacturing industries and providing basic services. Thirdly, it contributes to **donor coordination**.

1991 **Yugoslavia: Violent dissolution**

1996 *Stabilization Force* (SFOR) Mandate in Bosnia and Herzegovina

1999 Yugoslavia/Kosovo: NATO *Operation Allied Force*

2001 **USA: 9/11 attacks**

2004 Haiti: MINUSTAH

United Nations Milestones

Conclusion: Robust Operations, Less Robust Conceptualisation

The discussion in the UN Secretariat on clarifying and sharpening the concept of stabilisation has so far been open-ended. In practice, stabilisation operations do have a number of common features, but it is **difficult to differentiate them from non-stabilisation operations**. The designation seems more likely to have followed political opportunities rather than conceptual considerations.

In practice, stabilisation operations do have some common features, but it is difficult to differentiate them from non-stabilisation operations.

All stabilisation missions have a **robust mandate** that goes beyond self-protection, as well as a correspondingly strong military component. In the civilian sector, the missions make efforts to design tailor-made activities: in the DR Congo they focus on the security sector, in Mali on regional development.

At the same time, the UN Security Council also deployed missions with similar mandates and profiles that were not called stabilisation operations. These included the joint mission with the African Union in Darfur in 2007 *(United Nations – African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur*, UNAMID) or the 2011 *United Nations Mission in South Sudan* (UNMISS).

2008 *Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines* (Capstone Doctrine)

2010 DR Kongo: MONUSCO

2013 DR Kongo: MONUSCO
Force Intervention Brigade (FIB)

Mali: MINUSMA

2014 Central African Republic: MINUSCA

2015 HIPPO Report

2019 Discussion on stabilisation

Comparison of Current

Actor	UN	UNDP	EU
Strategic goal	• No statement	• Support for a peace process which is internationally recognised (by decision of the UN Security Council) • Peace dividends for local communities and strengthened legitimacy of local governments as a basis for longer-term peacebuilding	• Swift support for processes that reduce or prevent imminent violence • Avoiding a breakdown of the state • Initial efforts to address the drivers of conflict and the consequences of crises
Timeframe	• Stabilisation missions of up to 13 years so far	• max. 5 years • Two phases: 1. immediate stabilisation (18 months) 2. extended stabilisation (2-3 years)	• Difficut to establish precise point where stabilisation efforts end • No premature disengagement • Need for political patience and stamina
Priorities	• Secure and stable environment, protection of the civilian population • Political processes that strengthen and legitimise state institutions and permit social reconciliation • Effective and accountable security sector • Rule of law and human rights	• Quick delivery of support at the local level in three pillars: 1. Rehabilitation of essential infrastructure and basic services 2. Physical security and access to justice 3. Revitalisation of the local economy	• Focus on the security dimension of conflict, establishment of security • Provision of basic services • Support for legitimate local authorities • Promoting the return of refugees
Conditions	• No statement	• Focus on the local level in areas “cleared and held through military action” • Small contracts, simple procurement procedures	• EU’s Integrated Approach: 1. Political dialogue (EU Delegations and Special Representatives) 2. CSDP missions 3. IcSP incl. CBSD 4. Trust Funds 5. Stabilisation Actions (Article 28) • Combining the instruments of the EU and its member states

Stabilisation Approaches

USA	Britain	Germany
• Empowerment of legitimate local actors to deal with conflicts peacefully	• Political solution for violent conflicts as a core task • Support to local partners in their efforts to reduce violence, ensure basic security and make peaceful political negotiations possible	• Support for political processes of conflict management • Incentives to end armed conflict
• 1 – 5 years	• Initial response to violence or the immediate threat thereof • No set period, ranging from months to years depending on progress	• No statement
• Citizen security, strengthening of “islands of security” • Access to conflict resolution mechanisms • Targeted basic services • Conditions for the return of refugees • Fundamentals of a longer-term development	• Rapid reduction of violence • Supporting the political process • Protecting the means of survival of the population • Promoting the foundations for long-term stability • Containment of state actors who exacerbate conflict • Restraint in providing public services, careful examination in each individual case	• Interministerial cooperation and a comprehensive approach internationally • Realism, flexibility and a willingness to compromise • Regular self-reflection • Transition planning to longer-term measures
• Integrated civilian-military process • Whole-of-government approach • Realism and selectivity • Small projects at local level • Flexible budget lines	• Integrated approach • Priorities, pragmatism and modesty • Awareness of dilemmas, conflicting goals and pitfalls • Focus on problems, not on institutions	• Interministerial cooperation and a comprehensive approach inter-nationally • Realism, flexibility and a willingness to compromise • Regular self-reflection • Transition planning to longer-term measures

3. UNDP's Stabilisation Approach (2017/2019)

> *UNDP conceives stabilisation as a time bound, integrated programme of activities in areas cleared and held through military action intended to create confidence in, and provide support to an ongoing peace process internationally recognised (including through a Security Council mandate) while laying the building blocks for longer-term peacebuilding and development by delivering a peace dividend to local communities and seeking to extend legitimate political authority.*
>
> UNDP's Stabilisation Approach, p. 1.[21]

The *United Nations Development Programme* (UNDP) has been implementing stabilisation programmes in conflict regions for several years now. With its *Funding Facility for Stabilization* in Iraq in particular, UNDP has positioned itself as a **multilateral pioneer in stabilisation measures**. In June 2017, an independent team was commissioned to compile a *Stock-Taking Report* on these activities. A total of eleven countries were investigated, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Somalia and the Central African Republic.[20]

A Wide Range of Programmes

The report confirmed that UNDP's stabilisation activities **differ** considerably **in terms of objectives and approaches**. Some activities targeted the underlying causes of conflict, e.g. by promoting institutional reforms and good governance. These are fields of action in which short-term results cannot be expected. Others, however, do focus on quick results, aiming at short-term peace dividends.

UNDP pursues stabilisation in conflict areas where military operations have already established a minimum level of security ("clear") and maintained it ("hold").

The report notes that UNDP and its staff use the term stabilisation as a synonym for peacebuilding, recovery or conflict prevention. The resulting "**constructive ambiguity**" does not permit the development of clear theories of change, a desired end state or monitoring indicators. A consistent and coherent approach is not possible without any clarifying definition. The report therefore provides an affirmative answer to the question of whether a definition of stabilisation is desirable for UNDP and puts forward a proposal in this regard.

Three Pillars of Stabilisation, Five-year Horizon

A UNDP background document[21] produced in 2019 took up many of the recommendations of the *Stock-Taking Report*. Accordingly, UNDP defines stabilisation as an **integrated programme of measures for conflict areas** in which military operations have already been able to establish and maintain ("clear and hold") a minimum of security.

The further design of the stabilisation approach also largely follows the recommendations of the *Stock-Taking Report*. For example, UNDP stabilisation programmes pursue the goal of boosting **confidence in legitimate local governments** and creating concrete **peace dividends** for the population.

20 Rajeev Pillay, Jan-Jilles van der Hoeven, 2017: Stabilisation: An Independent Stock-Taking and Possible Elements for a Corporate Approach for UNDP.

21 United Nations Development Programme, 2019: UNDP's Stabilization Approach. Background document.

2015 Iraq: Management of the *Iraq Funding Facility for Stabilization*

2001 **USA: 9/11 attacks**

2016 Libya: Implementation of the *Stabilisation Facility for Libya*

2019 *UNDP's Stabilisation Approach*

2017 *Stabilisation Stock-Taking Report*

1991 **Yugoslavia: Violent dissolution**

UNDP Milestones

A new generation of large stabilisation programmes, designed to rapidly provide **basic services** at the local level, also serves this purpose. The programmes are coordinated at a high level nationally. At the same time, participatory formats are established at the local level to ensure transparency and the participation of society in the planning processes.

UNDP's approach to stabilisation is based on three pillars:

1. **Rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and services |** Income-generating public works measures and the award of preferably labour-intensive contracts to local enterprises, NGOs and municipalities are primarily employed for this purpose.

2. **Physical security and access to justice |** Training and development, but also the limitation of the use of force by security forces, as well as the clearance of mines and explosive devices, are all aimed at supporting this. In addition, local conflict resolution mechanisms are to be promoted.

3. **Revitalising the local economy** | The short-term means of choice are advisory services and microcredits, for small and medium-sized companies in particular, but also cash-for-work programmes.

UNDP limits stabilisation measures to a **maximum of five years**. The "immediate stabilisation" in the first 18 months focuses on rapid physical results, especially the rehabilitation of infrastructure, rather than supporting institutional capacities. In the subsequent phase of "extended stabilisation", the focus lies on reinforcing the local legal system, private enterprises or municipal planning and implementation capabilities where necessary. In parallel, classic development programmes should be employed. The transition to them needs to be considered and planned at the earliest possible stage.

UNDP limits stabilisation measures to a maximum of five years. Fast and efficient implementation is crucial for success.

Fast and efficient implementation is crucial for success. In order to make this possible, the local country offices are granted a maximum of autonomy. UNDP contracts are split into relatively small slots, making procurement simple and the associated risks low.

Conclusion: Local Peace Dividends Following Military Operations

In recent years, UNDP has positioned itself as the **international lead agency of civil support measures for stabilisation**. By restricting measures to "areas cleared and held through military action" and the choice of this terminology, UNDP strongly refers to the counterinsurgency (COIN) approach.

The activities of UNDP are focused on **services and income-generating jobs** at the local level. These are intended to support a peace process whose political dimension is hardly reflected in the UNDP approach; here the development programme also lacks the respective diplomatic instruments. Great importance is attached to a **decentralised approach** in providing a high degree of autonomy to the local country offices and through social participation at the local level.

4. Parameters for a European Union Concept on Stabilisation (2016/2017)

> *Stabilisation could be defined as a set of swift actions aimed at creating conditions supportive of a political process, helping countries and/or communities to prevent or reduce violence, and initiating efforts to address the drivers of conflicts and the consequences of a crisis.*
>
> *Stabilisation activities are characterised by (1) the need to address complex and difficult political and security situations, (2) the relatively short window of opportunity for the deployment of resources, (3) the ability to contribute to inclusive political settlements and, (4), the need to set the conditions on which longer-term approaches can build on.*
>
> European External Action Service Issues Paper, p. 4.[23]

Immediately after the NATO operation against Yugoslavia in 1999 caused by the escalating situation in Kosovo, the EU member states and the European Commission took part in the newly created ***Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe***.

The Stabilisation and Association Process

A little later, the European Union launched the ***Stabilisation and Association Process*** for the countries of the Western Balkans. The core of this new format was the prospect of accession to the EU for all the countries in the region. The underlying theory of change assumed that this perspective and the EU assistance coming with it would make a decisive contribution to stabilisation and a lasting pacification of the region.

Stabilisation by CSDP Missions

A short time later, the UN Security Council – in accordance with recent United Nations practice – authorised some of the missions deployed under the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP) as "**stabilisation operations**". However, the European Union did not adopt this terminology in its *Council Joint Actions* mandating the missions. As in the United Nations, the EU only engaged later in fundamental conceptual considerations of the term stabilisation .

The UN Security Council authorised some CSDP missions as "stabilisation missions", but the EU did not adopt this terminology.

- In June 2003, the EU deployed a "temporary stabilisation force", **ARTEMIS**, to the Congolese province of Ituri, which helped to stabilise the security situation there until September 2003. ARTEMIS had been authorised by the UN Security Council.
- In December 2004, **EUFOR ALTHEA** replaced the NATO-led *Stabilization Force* (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose mandate had expired at the same time. The underlying UN Security Council Resolution mandated EUFOR ALTHEA as a multinational "stabilisation force"; however, the EU did not employ this term.
- In 2014, the EU mandated its **EUTM Mali** training mission and the **EUFOR RCA in Central Africa** military mission to work on "stability" and "stabilisation" in their countries of deployment; again, neither mission was explicitly designated or mandated as a stabilisation operation.

23 European External Action Service, 2017: EEAS/Commission Services' Issues Paper Suggesting Parameters for a Concept on Stabilisation as Part of the EU Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises. Working document EEAS (2017) 1554.

2001 **USA: 9/11 attacks**

1999 Yugoslavia/Kosovo: NATO *Operation Allied Force*

Participation in the *Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe*

Stabilisation and Association process (SAp)

1991 **Yugoslavia: Violent dissolution**

EU Milestones

In June 2016, the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy presented the Union's first *Global Strategy.*[22] It defines five **priorities for the Common Foreign and Security Policy**: the security of the European Union, state and societal resilience to the EU's East and South, an Integrated Approach to conflict and crises, cooperative regional orders, and global governance for the 21st century.

The *Global Strategy* describes "stabilisation and security", alongside prevention and conflict resolution, as fields of action of an "**integrated conflict management**". Stabilisation is intended to protect political processes that allow peace agreements to be concluded and transitional governments to be formed. This aims to prevent a relapse into violent conflict and to permit refugees to return.

The Global Strategy calls for a stronger focus on the security dimension of conflicts. To this end, the EU needs to build up appropriate capacities.

In particular, the strategy calls for a **stronger focus on the security dimension** of conflicts. To this end, the EU needs to build up capacities that enable it to provide security. Concrete stabilisation measures should enable the provision of basic services, strengthen security and support legitimate local authorities.

Parameters for Stabilisation Situations

One year later, the European External Action Service (EEAS) submitted an *Issues Paper* **proposing parameters for a stabilisation concept**.[23] It defines "stabilisation situations" as circumstances in which there has been recent violence and insecurity, where there is a risk of violence escalating and where state authority is generally weak, controversial or illegitimate.

22 European Union, 2016: Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy.

23 European External Action Service, 2017: EEAS/Commission Services' Issues Paper Suggesting Parameters for a Concept on Stabilisation as Part of the EU Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises. Working document EEAS (2017) 1554.

2003 DR Congo:
ARTEMIS Stabilisation Force

2004 Bosnia and Herzegovina:
EUFOR ALTHEA
Stabilisation Force

2014 Central African Republic:
EUFOR RCA Stabilisation Force

2016 *Global Strategy*

2017 EEAS *Issues Paper Stabilisation*

Mali: EUSTAMS (Art. 28)

In situations like these, stabilisation aims to prevent or end the outbreak of violence and the collapse of state structures. A package of rapid measures aims at creating the conditions for appropriate **political processes** and to overcome not just the consequences but also the causes of the crisis.

Stabilisation describes a "**transitory or bridging period**", although one which is not linear. It is therefore difficult to determine the exact point in time when a stabilisation phase ends. This makes it all the more important not to prematurely end the EU's commitment, but to maintain sufficient political support that is backed up with the appropriate resources. A hasty disengagement must be avoided.

The Integrated Approach

Within the EU, stabilisation requires the consistent implementation of the **Integrated Approach**, in which the EU and its member states combine their instruments and coordinate them with the relevant international players. Thorough conflict-sensitive analyses, coherent strategies, careful planning and the flexibility to react to changing circumstances are the keys to success.

Importantly, it should be borne in mind that externally imposed approaches are unsustainable. Instead, it is necessary to involve the actors on the ground so that they can develop **ownership** and become responsible for the political process. This must also include those actors who were not taken into account in the pre-conflict political arrangements and power structures.

The *Issues Paper* identifies the following as the EU's **key instruments for stabilisation:**

- political dialogue, including dialogues through EU Delegations and EU Special Representatives,
- CSDP missions and operations, usually with training and advisory functions, less often with executive ones,
- the European Commission's *Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace* (IcSP), which is able to implement conflict-related measures quickly and, most recently, under very special and strictly defined circumstances, can also support military actors in the context of the *Capacity Building in support of Development and of Security for Development* (CBSD) initiative,
- dedicated trust funds such as the *Emergency Trust Fund for Africa*,
- short-term stabilisation actions under Article 28 of the EU Treaty.

The *Issues Paper* also stresses that the IcSP in particular takes into consideration the Global Strategy's goal of focusing more strongly on the **security dimension of conflicts**.

Conclusion: A Bridging Period and a Greater Focus on Security

The EU's *Global Strategy* identifies prevention, conflict resolution and stabilisation as the three fields of action for "integrated conflict transformation". The stabilisation process is understood as a bridging period in which violence is prevented, state collapse is counteracted and peace processes are secured. A package of rapid measures should help to create the conditions for the corresponding political process and to overcome not only the consequences but also the causes of the crisis. In particular, it is a question of making the **EU more capable of providing security**. The *Issues Paper* also warns against bringing stabilisation commitments prematurely to an end. They need to have stamina and appropriate resources.

Stabilisation is understood as a non-linear bridging phase, during which violence is prevented, a state collapse is counteracted and peace processes are secured.

The relative weight and **further development of these instruments** remain unclear. CSDP missions have tended to become smaller in the last few years and now focus on advice and training. A stabilisation action under Article 28 has so far only been used once – from August 2017 to February 2019 as the *EU Stabilisation Action in Mopti and Ségou* (EUSTAMS) in Mali, but the added value of this instrument has remained controversial. The great challenge of the large number of EU instruments and actors remains **coherence**, because a bundle of instruments does not yet result in an Integrated Approach.

5. The US Stabilization Assistance Review (2018)

> *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 Assistance Review, p. 4.[24]

In January 2018, the US government launched the *Stabilization Assistance Review*, jointly conducted by the State Department, the USAID development agency, and the Department of Defense.[24] It notes that international conflicts are as complex and intractable as ever, but also **more violent, protracted and difficult to resolve**. The conflict parties are increasingly non-state and extremist groups.

The US government's appetite for large-scale reconstruction programmes has waned. Stabilisation should pursue more realistic and also much more selective objectives.

The review stresses that the US government's appetite for broad-based reconstruction programmes, such as in Iraq, has declined. It therefore advocates that stabilisation pursues **more realistic and also much more selective goals**. At the same time, it self-critically assesses the fact that the principles of successful stabilisation have already been comprehensively analysed though not yet systematically applied.

Safeguarding Political Stability

The review defines stabilisation as a **political undertaking,** which, through an integrated civil-military process, creates the conditions for legitimate local authorities to deal with conflicts peacefully and to prevent violence from escalating again. Stabilisation needs to be limited to a transition period of one to five years.

Appropriate activities could include strengthening citizen security, access to conflict resolution mechanisms, targeted basic services, promoting the conditions for the return of refugees and laying the foundations for longer-term development. However, without achieving political stability that finds legitimacy on the ground, longer-term development processes will not be able to gain a foothold.

In this context, security is a key success factor. The aim is to strengthen "**islands of security**" and to involve local security actors. In the past, security sector reform (SSR) and justice sector programmes focused too much on the national level. It is often more important to promote a simple access to justice, dispute settlement mechanisms and transitional justice measures at the local level.

Undesired side-effects have to be considered – and avoided – right from the outset. The report stresses that especially counter-terrorism measures may have destabilising effects. In particular, SSR programmes in support of anti-terrorism measures were often decoupled from the overall political stabilisation strategy.

24 Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Defense, 2018: Stabilization Assistance Review. A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas.

1960 First discussion on stability operations

1991 **Yugoslavia: Violent dissolution**

1993 Clinton administration focuses on liberal peacebuilding

1996 Bosnia and Herzegovina: Participation in the *Stabilization Force* (SFOR)

1999 NATO *Operation Allied Force* (Yugoslavia/Kosovo)

Participation in the *Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe*

2001 **9/11 attacks**

Intervention in Afghanistan (*Operation Enduring Freedom*)

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan

US Milestones

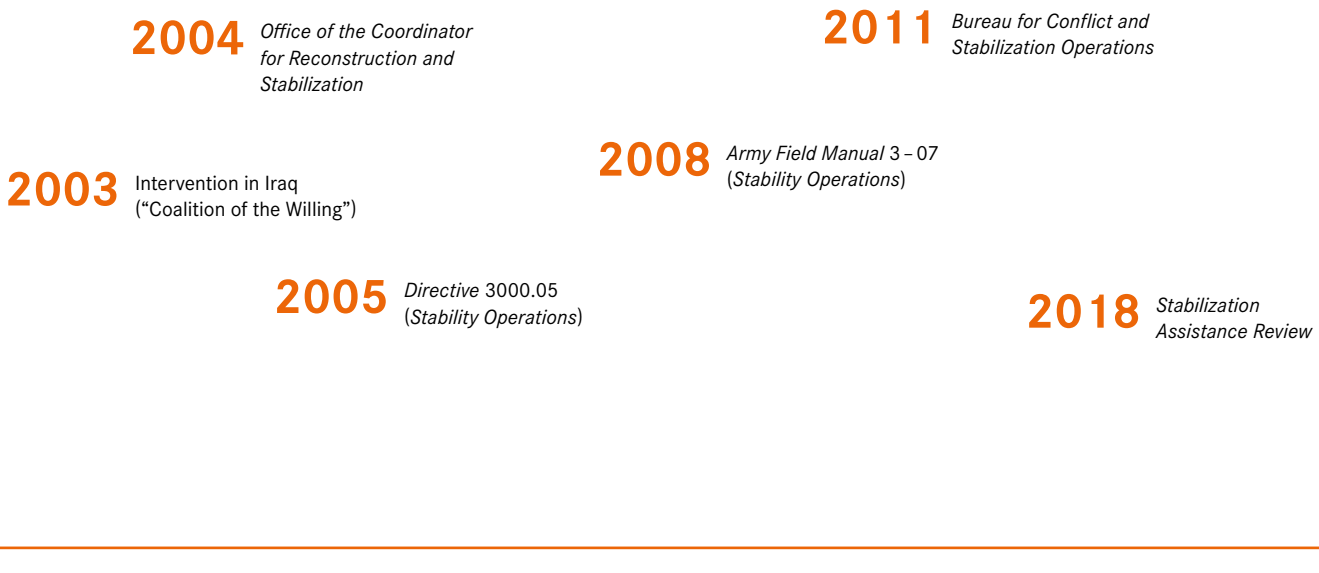
Too Big Fails, Too

Following conflict, the **absorption capacity of local institutions** is mostly limited. That is why smaller projects run by local governments and partners are best suited to achieve short-term stabilisation goals. Large-scale projects also bear the risk of harming the local economy and attracting corruption.

Smaller projects are best suited to achieving short-term stabilisation goals. Large-scale projects bear the risk of harming the local economy and attracting corruption.

Extensive programmes should therefore be put on hold or sequenced if it is foreseeable that they cannot be implemented in a responsible way. Hence, there is no need for extremely high budgets but rather **consistent, flexible budget lines** that permit agile, targeted and sequenced action.

The **link to longer-term development measures** must also be considered and planned, so that a transition from stabilisation measures to sustainable growth and good governance becomes possible. The role of the private sector in stabilisation also needs to be clarified more precisely.



More Strategy, Coordination and Civilian Capacities

Stabilisation activities need to be guided by strategies that formulate the desired end state. A realistic **assessment of one's own political will to act** is also important, as is **stamina**. On the one hand, this concerns the scope and duration of one's own involvement, on the other hand, the risks one is prepared to take. To that end, a thorough analysis is essential.

Systematic feedback loops and a qualitative, data-based evaluation of results ought to enable a **timely change of course** if the original approach does not lead to the desired effects. Planning in iterative steps is also advisable.

This all does not depend so much on sheer funding, but rather on all actors involved **jointly agreeing and supporting the strategy** and clarifying the division of labour within and between them. In this respect, it falls to the State Department to coordinate analysis, policy formulation, strategic planning and diplomatic engagement.

Overall, the **civilian sector needs to be strengthened**. In cooperation with the armed forces, it needs to respond better to stabilisation needs, to see programmes through and to enter into an exchange with civil society. The State Department, the Pentagon and USAID also need to jointly create a framework for civilian, rapidly deployable *Stabilization, Transition, and Response Teams* (STARTs).

Active multilateralism is to promote an appropriate division of labour with international partners, for example through joint resource pools. The partners should take on a fair share of the burden – dependency on US aid should be avoided. The UN organisations are to be encouraged to develop a common approach to stabilisation to be implemented both in peacekeeping and in political missions.

Conclusion: Civil-military Realism to Create Islands of Stability

The US *Stabilization Assistance Review* reaffirms the **departure from the broad reconstruction programmes** launched under the liberal peace agenda. It regards stabilisation as a political intervention that enables legitimate local actors to handle conflicts peacefully. This requires a **greater degree of realism** about what is actually feasible.

The aim is to strengthen "islands of security" and to involve local security actors in a targeted manner. Counter-terrorism measures may have destabilising effects.

Smaller activities at the local level are more important than large and costly programmes. In order to provide them with the necessary room for manoeuvre, "islands of security" have to be supported on the ground. All this requires a **coordinated division of labour**, including with international partners, the strengthening of civilian capacities as well as a strategic, self-reflective approach.

6. The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation (2018)

> *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.*
>
> The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation, p. 4.[25]

In late 2018, the *Stabilisation Unit*, jointly staffed by the Foreign Office and the ministries of Development and Defence, published a *Guide* on the UK's approach to stabilisation.[25] It notes a worrying trend: As many as 60% of the violent conflicts that had been pacified at the beginning of the millennium escalated again and have become increasingly difficult to manage by conventional means. At the same time, **international interventions** are subject to a high level of **expectations**, as their goal is not only to pacify the conflict, but also to promote a rules-based international order, respect for human rights, gender equality, good governance and much more.

Comprehensive Self-criticism, New Expectation Management

The *Guide* defines stabilisation as the **first response to violent conflict** in situations where local political structures and the processes that could regulate conflict have collapsed. The most important goal is to achieve a **rapid decline in violence**. Only later should more demanding reform projects be tackled on this basis, e.g. in the security sector. If stabilisation is overburdened with demands, the danger of failure increases.

The most important goal is a rapid decline in violence. Only later can more demanding reform projects be tackled. Sensible and achievable priorities are needed.

The *Guide* is considerably more self-critical than other governments' guidelines. In the past, expectations often turned out to be wishful thinking, for example in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq. Part of the disappointment is a result of intrinsic mistakes: a lack of understanding of the political economy of the conflict, exaggerated expectations, a lack of priorities, a technical (rather than political) approach and an attempt to transfer international best-practice on a one-to-one basis.

The *Guide* therefore emphasises the need for sensible and **achievable priorities**. This requires a sharper focus on complex problems and dilemmas. First and foremost, it is a question of

- ensuring the immediate survival of the population affected,
- supporting a political process that curbs violence, and
- laying the foundations for longer-term stability.

25 Stabilisation Unit, 2018: The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation: A Guide for Policy Makers and Practitioners.

2001 **USA: 9/11 attacks**

Involvement in the Intervention in Afghanistan (*Operation Enduring Freedom*)

1996 Participation in *the Stabilization Force* SFOR (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Participation in the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF) Afghanistan

1991 **Yugoslavia: Violent dissolution**

1999 NATO *Operation Allied Force* (Yugoslavia/Kosovo)

Participation in the *Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe*

British Milestones

Security and Justice, Containment of State Actors

Stabilisation efforts aim at a **basic level of security and justice** in the conflict area. This not only gives the population more security in everyday life, but also creates the space needed for political processes to take place. The use of military force can change the balance of power between the protagonists and safeguard the political process, but it also threatens to release local actors from their responsibility for security.

As a rule, **state actors** – the 'natural' partners of international governmental action – are deeply involved in the conflict. If they are a significant source of violence, they must be contained, as one big mistake of the past was to strengthen above all state capacities. In this context, **train and equip** programmes are given poor grades: too technical in approach and usually unsuccessful.

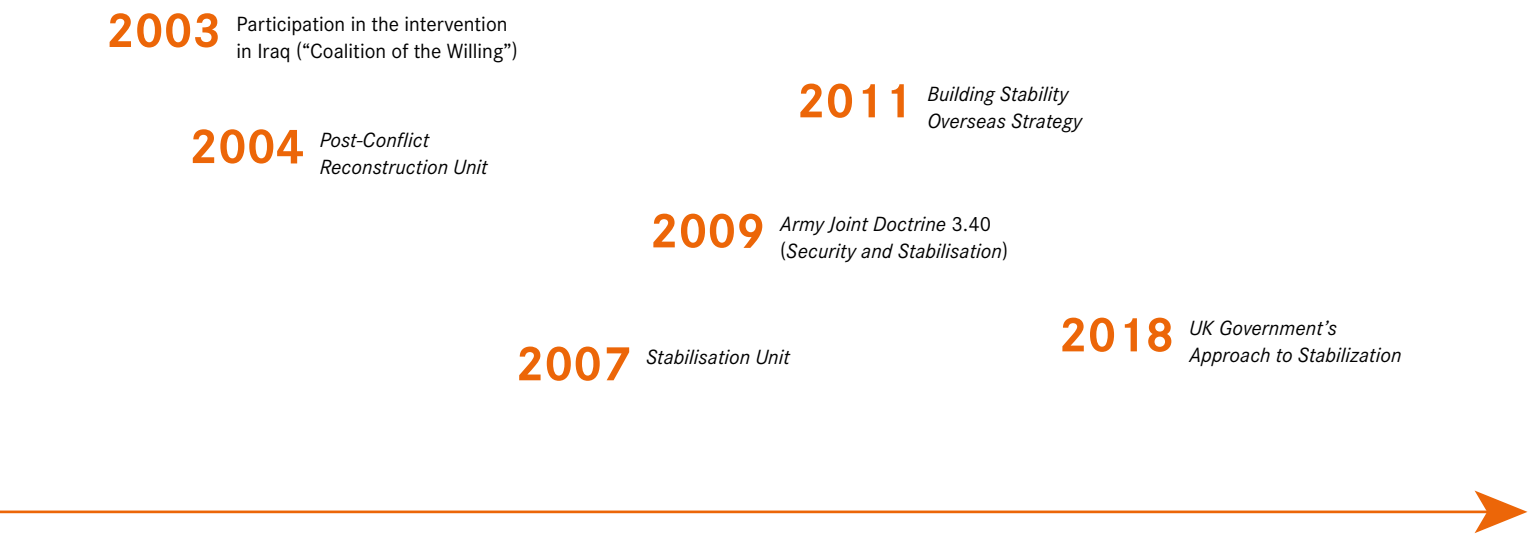
If state actors are a source of violence, they too must be contained. It is important to focus on problems, not on specific institutions.

Cooperation with the ruling actors, which seems to be without alternative in the short term, often creates more problems than it solves in the long term. It is therefore important to look beyond the circle of state partners and to focus **on the problems, not on specific institutions**.

Political Solutions as the Core Task

Political solutions are **decisive for the success of stabilisation**. To facilitate them, prevailing power relations have to be recognised and acknowledged. Political processes should be as inclusive as possible in order to minimise the number of possible spoilers. This is difficult, not least because it may require cooperation with conflict actors who have committed serious human rights violations.

Political bargaining between domestic elites deserves close attention. It is often informal and non-public. Confidence-building measures may sometimes help to set such processes in motion. Of particular importance is an **understanding of the political economy** and the interests involved, e.g. access to resources, patronage networks and rent-seeking opportunities.



External players may ease or hinder access to ressources, thereby providing economic incentives for cooperation. This is a double-edged sword, however, because it reinforces **dependencies** and makes it more difficult to phase out international support. In this context it is necessary to recognise that international activities against terrorism or organised crime can also counter stabilisation if they further undermine fragile political arrangements on the ground.

Setbacks always need to be expected. Agreements are not adhered to, fail or have to be renegotiated, sometimes entirely. This makes it all the more important to recognise changes in the power structures early on and react flexibly to them.

Basic Services – But Not at Any Price

The assumption that basic services contribute to stabilisation must be **thoroughly questioned in every single case**. Since aid measures strengthen or weaken particular actors, a thorough analysis of the political economy is necessary. An excessive use of financial resources can encourage **corruption** and thus undermine the goal of stabilisation. Just as important as the content is the form, namely the way in which services are provided.

It is important to thoroughly question whether basic services can contribute to stabilisation. The way in which these services are provided is also important.

No clear dividing line can be drawn between stabilisation activities and longer-term development support. In this respect, it must be in the interest of all actors involved to not work against each other and to **shape transitions together**. In the case of stabilisation measures, it is also important to make decisions quickly and to monitor them properly in order to be able to react to changing conditions promptly. To this end, activities must be conflict-sensitive, adaptable and iterative.

Conclusion: Realpolitik and a Thoughtful Pragmatism

The *Stabilisation Unit* emphasises that not all good intentions can be pursued at the same time. The crucial task of stabilisation is to put an end to violent conflict and to ensure the immediate survival of the population. **The focus lies on political solutions**.

The guide stresses the need to prioritise, to be pragmatic and to be modest – and to **recognise the limitations of one's own intervention**. Consequently, there is a need to cut back on an ambitious transformative agenda. Undesirable side effects and the risk of setbacks need to be identified, accepted and accompanied by conscious risk management.

In the short term, it is often impossible to do anything more than prevent the worst. Instead of complex best-practice models, **"sufficiently good" solutions** that are adapted to the circumstances are often most appropriate. This makes it all the more important to be well aware of the dilemmas, conflicting goals and pitfalls that prevail in each individual environment. It also calls for an **integrated approach** that cuts across ministerial boundaries.

7. The German Federal Government Guidelines (2017)

> *The stabilisation of countries and regions is one of the Federal Government's approaches to handling violent conflicts. With its stabilisation measures, the Federal Government supports political processes of conflict resolution, while providing an incentive for parties to cease engagement in armed conflict. [...]*
>
> *Stabilisation measures specifically serve to create a secure environment, to improve living conditions in the short term, and to offer alternatives to economies of war and violence. This requires a comprehensive approach: depending on the requirements in the individual case, this approach requires the flexible and coordinated use of diplomatic, development policy and security policy measures.*
>
> Federal Government of Germany Guidelines, p. 69.[26]

At the end of 2017, the German Federal Government adopted interministerial ***Guidelines* for dealing with crises and conflicts**.[26] They state that crisis has become the normal state of affairs in large parts of the world. Current conflicts do not only claim hundreds of thousands of lives, they have also given rise to the largest number of refugees since the Second World War: almost 66 million.

The *Guidelines* replace two previous documents, the *Action Plan for Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building* of 2004 and the interministerial *Guidelines for a Coherent Policy in Fragile States* of 2012. Both of them paved the way for establishing an efficient government infrastructure for peacebuilding. Special mention is made of the new "Department S" at the Federal Foreign Office, which was created in 2015 and unites previously dispersed responsibilities for "Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation, Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Aid".

Realistic Expectations and Flexibility

The *Guidelines* understand stabilisation as one element of an overarching concept aimed at "Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace". In this spectrum, the need for stabilisation arises when **a violent conflict is acute, i.e. when prevention is not (or no longer) effective**.

The aim of stabilisation is to contain violence, to support political processes of conflict resolution, to show possible **alternatives to economies of war and violence**, to ensure a minimum level of human security and to improve living conditions in the short term. This requires a combination of diplomatic, developmental and security measures, ranging from political support for the peace process to development-oriented transitional assistance.

Stabilisation requires diplomatic, developmental and security policy measures, depending on the context of the conflict.

In addition, the *Guidelines* stress that peacebuilding must incorporate **realistic expectations**. Peace processes are a task for generations and are regularly affected by setbacks. Realism, pragmatism and flexibility are needed. Progress can only be made gradually and a constant willingness to compromise is required.

26 Bundesregierung, 2017: Krisen verhindern, Konflikte bewältigen, Frieden fördern. Leitlinien der Bundesregierung, S. 52-53 und 68-69.

2001 **USA: 9/11 attacks**

Participation in the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF) Afghanistan

1996 Participation in the *Stabilization Force* SFOR (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

1991 **Yugoslavia: Violent dissolution**

1999 Participation in the NATO *Operation Allied Force* (Yugoslavia/Kosovo)

Participation in the *Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe*

German Milestones

Constructive Error Management, Voluntary Commitments by the Federal Government

The Federal German Government's document outlines a vision of why, how, where and with whom the government engages in peacebuilding. The five fields of action of the *Peace and Statebuilding Goals*, which were set out in the *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States* in 2011, serve as the guiding principles, namely the promotion of legitimate politics, security, justice, economic foundations as well as state revenues and services.

The *Guidelines* do not provide any critical assessment of past activities. However, they urge government to learn from experience and to close **capability gaps identified by regular self-reflection**. To this end, the *Guidelines* also call for an evaluation of the Federal Government's peacebuilding engagement to date.

The *Guidelines* call for learning from experience and for regular self-reflection to identify and close capacity and capability gaps.

At the same time, the Federal Government is making a number of voluntary commitments. The most concrete of these aim at **strengthening the interministerial approach**. Importantly, the joint capacities for early crisis warning, situational assessments and training are to be expanded further. In order to improve the steering capabilities for government activities, an interministerial operations manual on methods and procedures has been drawn up while systematic monitoring is promoted.

The *Guidelines* also stress the **importance of the international division of labour**. Activities need to be coordinated with multilateral, regional, bilateral and local partners. Cooperation with non-governmental institutions should also be strengthened.

2004 *Action Plan for Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building*

2012 *Guidelines for a Coherent Policy in Fragile States*

2015 Department S of the Federal Foreign Office

2017 *Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Managing Conflicts, Promoting Peace*

Conclusion: Interministerial Learning, Closing Capability Gaps

The guidelines reaffirm Germany's aspiration, enshrined in its Basic Law, to promote peace in the world. Stabilisation needs to contribute to this goal by restricting violence, supporting political processes, showing alternatives to economies of violence, guaranteeing a minimum level of security for people and improving living conditions in the short term. Beyond that, the guidelines refrain from any **specific statements on the design of the stabilisation approach**.

They stress, however, that stabilisation is a task in which every relevant ministry makes a contribution. It is therefore important to strengthen joint interministerial action. More systematic **self-reflection** through monitoring and evaluation as well as the **reduction of capacity shortfalls** in peacebuilding are to increase the effectiveness of activities. The *Guidelines* also call for greater realism.

8. Assessment

> *'Not all good things come together'. When working to address national security challenges and promote the conditions for long-term stability there will be a requirement for effective prioritisation and sequencing to manage competing demands. [...] The goal should therefore be to identify and minimise harm within a broader framework of understanding the potential trade-offs and dilemmas. [...]*
>
> *We must not be distracted by what we are expecting, prepared for or wish to see, or be misled by what we think we know: the context will not bend to suit us. Many challenges in stabilisation contexts have stemmed from a lack of realism about the context and about our capacity as external actors to quickly make substantial positive changes.*
>
> The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation, p. 2 and 22.[25]

Realpolitik and Normativity

Overall, the discourse on stabilisation reflects a **renaissance of realpolitik** in international conflict management. Since the results of the extensive state- and nation-building programmes under the so-called liberal peace agenda have been sobering, there is now greater emphasis that stabilisation pursues only an **intermediate goal** that is less ambitious, but promises greater chances of being achieved at all: The creation of a political arrangement that permits non-violent conflict management.

Despite all the realpolitik, the **stabilisation concepts remain normative**. This is particularly evident where they emphasise that the political arrangements for conflict management must gain **legitimacy among the population** in order to be sustainable. However, this normativity follows functional considerations rather than value-based principles: without legitimacy, any desired political arrangement is hardly sustainable.

Nevertheless, there is a danger that precisely this normative aspiration could fall by the wayside in complex conflicts. Stabilisation critics are rightly concerned that the focus on stability in combination with a new realpolitik might ultimately result in fading political attention once a post-conflict situation is superficially stable. It would be fatal to use the reference to political feasibility to accept the stabilising power of autocrats or warlords all too willingly – thus further promoting concepts of **an illiberal peace** that are currently fashionable worldwide. This danger, however, is no less present in the context of a broad liberal peace agenda. It was the sobering results of the latter which resulted in the modesty of the new stabilisation concepts in the first place.

Despite all the realpolitik, the stabilisation concepts are normative. They stress that political arrangements have to gain legitimacy among the population.

Compared to previous ones, the focus in the recent strategies has shifted. At least rhetorically, military activities take a back seat, while **political and civilian aspects are given a much higher priority**. This confirms the mantra that is often heard, but usually too simplistically understood: that conflicts cannot be resolved militarily, and that the political dimension is the greatest challenge of peacebuilding.

Common Features of the Current Stabilisation Approaches

Compared to the stabilisation approaches followed at the turn of the millennium, which still pursued a very broad agenda in the sense of liberal peacebuilding, the more recent strategies define objectives and means more narrowly and emphasise the need to set **clear priorities**.

Comparing the various actors' definitions of stabilisation, it is also noticeable that they combine two levels of reasoning. Firstly, they all describe a general understanding of stabilisation. Secondly, they reflect – to varying degrees – very specific roles that the respective institutions take on (or want to take on) in this field of action. As a result, **definitions are also shaped by perspectives, interests and positions** of the institution within the spectrum of all the actors.

The current stabilisation approaches define objectives and resources more narrowly and emphasise the need to set clear priorities.

This becomes very clear when looking at the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP. While it draws heavily on the terminology of COIN ("activities in areas cleared and held through military action", see definition prior to Chapter 3), it deals exclusively with civilian measures – as these are the only instruments available to UNDP. At the same time, UNDP emphasises that its stabilisation measures can only be put to good use once a minimally secure environment has been established.

Although the definitions and concepts of the various stabilisation actors are not congruent, it is possible to identify a **set of commonalities** that allows for a better general understanding of stabilisation and its place in the peacebuilding spectrum.

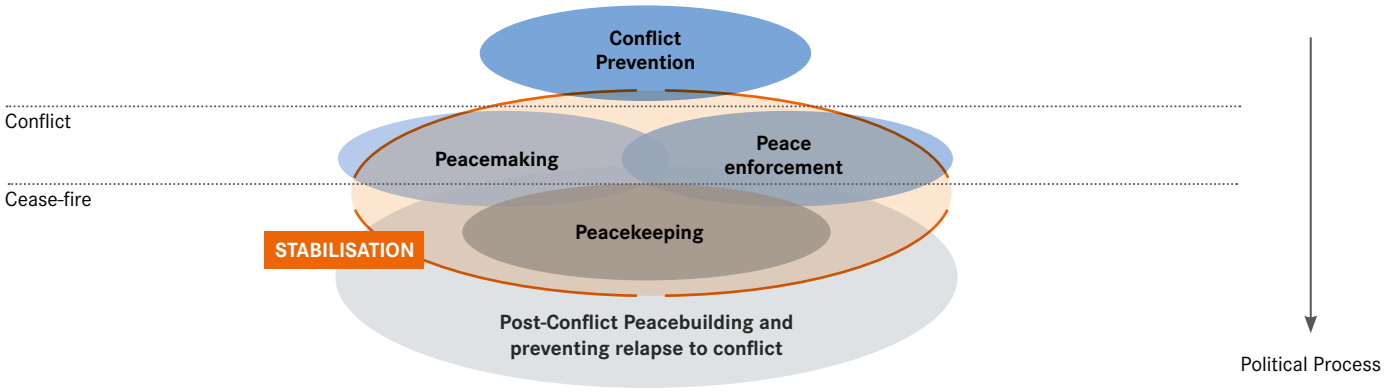
1. **An intermediate peacebuilding objective in immediate or post-conflict situations**: Stabilisation is understood as that aspect of peacebuilding which is intended to work close to a hot phase of a violent conflict. At the core is the question of which priorities are most relevant in the short run, in order to overcome the violent phase of conflict. At the same time, some of these priorities are indeed sufficiently vague to open the door for a wider range of measures, especially when it comes to satisfying the needs of the population. Stabilisation actors are confronted with the dilemma of how to reconcile the political limits of their own influence with the continuing normative demands.

2. **Political arrangements for the transformation of violent conflicts**: The most important strategic goal of stabilisation is the transformation of acute or imminent violent conflict into a political arrangement that permits non-violent conflict management. It is now stressed that stabilisation is above all a political undertaking that supports conflict management by local actors. This requires a comprehensive (or integrated) approach, in which civilian and military instruments are aligned with this strategic goal.

3. **Security as a prerequisite and objective**: Stabilisation must provide a minimum of the public good security in order to achieve its strategic goal. This is a prerequisite for the political process and for protecting the population that is impacted by conflict. In this respect, the accusation that stabilisation leads to the "securitisation" of international interventions is wide off the mark. Because without a minimum of security, no success can be achieved in other areas of sustainable peace and development either. This also justifies the importance of a potential military component that can intervene in the local balance of power and create the space needed for political processes.

4. **A comprehensive approach**: Depending on the conflict context, stabilisation calls for a combination of diplomatic, developmental and security policy instruments. Agreement exists that impact can only be achieved through a consistently applied comprehensive approach under civilian leadership. No clear boundaries can be drawn between stabilisation activities and the longer-term promotion of development, nor can they be drawn with regard to the conventional peacebuilding tasks as described in the "Capstone Doctrine" for UN peacekeeping operations (see Figure). Because of these fluid boundaries, it is in the best interest of all actors involved not to work against each other and to shape transitions between them together – if impact is to be achieved.

Stabilisation and Peacebuilding



Source: Categories of peacebuilding according to the UN Capstone Doctrine (see footnote 1); Stabilisation added by the authors.

5. **A quick start, risk taking, and rapid impact:** If development activities are to make an effective contribution (and thus become stabilisation measures), they must focus on the strategic goal, be feasible at an early stage and produce tangible results as quickly as possible. Simultaneously, in a fragile environment absorption capacity is limited, as partner institutions are lacking or weak. For this reason, it is prudent to start with small-scale measures, to closely monitor their implementation, and then to flexibly adapt or develop them further.

Some actors stipulate that stabilisation measures have a clear **time limit**. In practice, however, measures are **often** maintained for longer than originally planned, as effects are frequently showing much slower than initially hoped for. This makes it even more difficult to draw a precise line between stabilisation and other measures to promote peace and development.

Larger risks not only require a clear description of objectives and theories of change, but also regular critical reviews of them.

The big challenge remains putting these conceptual aspirations **into practice**. The fluid context and a greater risk of failure require a clear formulation of objectives and the theory of change of planned stabilisation activities. While the readiness to accept higher risks of success is important, **regular critical reviews of the impact assumptions** must not be omitted. That is why stabilisation activities need an especially open culture of self-critical discussion and error management.

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