

EDA WORKING PAPER

Executive Summary

More Ambition, Less Commitment? Stabilisation and Peacebuilding Efforts Since the 1990s

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- Stabilisation has increasingly become the central guiding rationale behind international interventions in situations of conflict and peacebuilding. It has also become a core policy discourse used to articulate and describe both the content and ambitions of such interventions.
- The purpose of this EDA Working Paper is to explore what has been the nature of stabilisation missions since the end of the Cold War. It compares three case studies (Uganda in the 1990s, Haiti in the 2000s and South Sudan since the mid-2000s) that have been on the recipient end of stabilisation practices.
- Throughout these years, stabilisation interventions have been based in a transformative agenda - which has moved from pursuing economic and structural reform to more fundamental socio-political transformation. In supporting ambitious 'end states', however, stabilisation operations have become increasingly contradictory vis-à-vis international actors' level of commitment. Indeed, international actors appear to have lost confidence in their ability to influence events on the ground. They have also become more reluctant to accept responsibility for perceived failures of transformative international stabilisation efforts.
- As such, if definitions of stabilisation often include a focus on (re)building representative and legitimate political systems, on human rights and rule of law, as well as on social and economic development, new practices have enabled actors to focus on more narrow objectives and to identify clear exit strategies enabling 'cut and run' policies when needed.
- One ramification of this general trend towards 'cut-and-run' international interventions is the opening up of space for regional actors to impose their own vision of stabilisation to neighbouring states. In the MENA region, this arguably places a burden upon – or offers an opportunity to – regional states to engage more fully and directly in stabilisation theatres.
- This is also evidenced in the growing international support provided to regional-led stabilisation initiatives. On the African continent, for instance, international stabilisation efforts are now largely focused around hybridised UN-regional organisation missions or support for purely regional missions.
- In the end, whether they aim at building a sustainable economy, a safe and secure environment, or stable governance, contemporary stabilisation missions remain inherently political and, as such, continue to play an integral part in the contested statebuilding processes of post-conflict states.