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Stabilisation in the Contemporary Middle East and North Africa: Different Dimensions of an Elusive Concept

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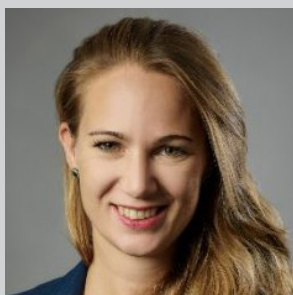
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1. Introduction

Politicians and commentators commonly talk of the need for 'stability' and 'stabilisation' when referring to the current situation in the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA). For the policy community concerned with Afghanistan and Iraq, 'stabilisation' has been the name of the game for more than a decade and a half. But more recently, international actors, regional players and local constituencies alike are similarly consumed with the question of how to put an end to the years of instability and uncertainty in several other countries in the region. They are in particular concerned with the instability sparked by the 2011 Arab uprisings, growing extremism and regional power meddling.

French President Emmanuel Macron, during an official visit of US President Donald Trump in summer 2017, stressed a 'common' determination in 'the fight against terrorism, the stability of the Near and Middle East'¹ and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has established a good number of 'stabilisation facilities' to channel multilateral funds, such as in Iraq and Libya. According to Dr Anwar Gargash, UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, regional stability is a key objective of UAE's foreign policy: 'everything we really do as the UAE is about a return to stability (...). The return to stability is not only important to us in the region, but it is also important to other parts of the world because of the fluid nature of the challenge of extremism and terrorism.'²

Indeed, stabilisation is what the broader MENA region seems to be in desperate need of, but a lack of consensus around what stability entails and how to get there, might keep fueling instability instead. Putting together international actors' ideas about the meaning of 'stability' and the process of 'stabilisation', the lowest common denominator seems to point to an agreement that stabilisation efforts blend military means with non-military tools of statecraft and foreign policy. As such, the concept brings together different overlapping and interacting policy dimensions, often in institutionalised settings referred to as 'whole of government' or 'comprehensive' approaches.

Stabilisation has progressively become the central guiding rationale behind international interventions, arguably starting with the international reaction to the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, there was a reduced threat of large interstate wars. Instead, powerful players started focusing on consolidating fragile and failed states, as the real threat was believed to derive from ungoverned spaces turned into safe havens for terrorism and transnational crime. Experiments with blending military, political, economic, humanitarian and developmental tools, as well as elements of (transitional) justice and reconciliation became the norm.

Unfortunately, for all the tryouts in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere, the stated ambitions of stabilisation operations and the realities on the ground have remained far apart. Success stories, such as in parts of Afghanistan and initially in Iraq's Anbar province, have

¹ "Donald Trump et Emmanuel Macron affichent leur entente à Paris", Le Monde, 13 July 2017. http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2017/07/13/le-president-americain-donald-trump-a-atteint-a-paris_5159885_3210.html#b6stqLkPS8t7W2ht.99

² Dr. Anwar Gargash, "Political and military responses to extremism in the Middle East", speech at IISS Manana Dialogue, 9 December 2017, <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/manama-dialogue-test/archive/manama-dialogue-2017-c364/plenary2-3454/dr-anwar-mohammad-gargash-ba8b>

remained short-lived. Nonetheless, there have been plenty of lessons from recent experiences in the MENA region. The key one might well be that simply removing an undesired regime, or throwing development money at an issue, does not miraculously create a more stable and secure political environment. Corruption, radicalisation and imperfect information play their respective roles and are difficult to tackle, with long-term root causes such as population growth, adverse effects of climate change and low oil prices compounding the precarious situation.

A new struggle at the global level, as well as increased competition between regional powers in the broader MENA region, exacerbate the challenges of regional stabilisation. Fears of interstate wars have revived, though without a reduction in the threats from non-state actors. Competition between permanent members of the UN Security Council, often leading to deadlock, illustrates this change. At the same time, many in the West are suffering from 'intervention fatigue' and suboptimal defense budgets, while regional powers including Turkey, Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are increasing their footprints, including in the realm of stabilisation operations.

The existing literature on stabilisation is rich and has provided many insights that helped policy-makers better conceptualise and execute stabilisation missions. However, this literature remains heavily focused on Western perceptions and practices, with solutions often framed in terms of increased democratisation and market liberalisation. As the dominant global discourse is generally reflecting global and regional power distributions, geopolitical changes are likely to influence debates around regional stability and stabilisation.

To fully understand, appreciate and make sound judgments with regard to current stabilisation efforts in the MENA region, emerging voices and ideas from non-Western actors will need to be heard, understood and taken into account. As the renowned pundit Dominique Moisi stated in a 2017 article: 'Mainly European, or Western, approaches to ensuring stability in the Middle East no longer work. As a top European diplomat told me recently, the Middle East crisis is in desperate need of fresh thinking and new leadership.'³

This paper, written as part of a 'Stabilisation Research Initiative' hosted by the Abu Dhabi-based Emirates Diplomatic Academy (EDA), offers an initial exploration of the different dimensions of stabilisation as can be found in the existing literature, thereby combining the current ideas, approaches and lessons identified by practitioners and academics alike. Along the way, it identifies common challenges and areas for further exploration within the EDA's research initiative. The key questions this paper tries to answer include therefore:

- What are the key dimensions of stabilisation?
- In what ways have policy approaches towards stability in the MENA region changed due to developments and experiences of the past decade and a half?
- What are common challenges and issues that deserve further research?

³ Dominique Moisi, "A China card for the Middle East", Project Syndicate, 28 July 2017. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-middle-east-diplomatic-leadership-by-dominique-moisi-2017-07>

2. 'Stabilisation': An Elusive Concept

Whether it pertains to political rhetoric from the United States, Europe or the Middle East, or to a programme focus from an international organisation, 'stability' or 'stabilisation' tend to mean different things to different audiences. As interventions and international engagements increasingly rely on coalitions that include Western, Gulf and other regional actors, this is not a simple discussion about semantics, but is actually likely to lead to non-alignment of views within the international community of both the process (stabilisation) and the end goals (stability).

There is indeed no common definition of the concept, nor clarity about what elements and policies should be included in stabilisation efforts in the region. Even within countries and across different policy communities, various definitions float around. President Trump, some weeks after his meeting with President Macron, gave a hint of his own views as he laid out his policy towards Afghanistan: an increase of the number of troops, but stressing that the US is not 'nation-building again', but 'killing terrorists'. This indicates he holds a much more one-sided view on stabilisation of the region than his predecessors.⁴ Cuts in development funding to the region further underline this new direction.

In general, 'stability' can be understood as a situation that is reasonably predictable and non-violent. For European states and the US - who have been dominating stabilisation efforts in the broader MENA region until a few years ago - the envisioned end state was one of increased democracy and market liberalisation. Initially, the ideas derived from democratic peace theories in vogue in the 1990s, with the first stabilisation operations launched ambitioning a country's full transformation following top-down regime change. Now, many years, experiences and debacles later, the stated objectives tend to be less ambitious, with end goals framed as the 'absence of acute crises' and 'resilience to political shocks.'⁵ Or 'killing terrorists', as per President Trump's recent line on Afghanistan.

The process of 'stabilisation' that leads to 'stability' refers in the broadest sense to an international approach to conflicts that combines 'hard' and 'soft' power, as it includes military and non-military instruments of statecraft and foreign policy. For example, the Stability Manual of the US Armed Forces defines stabilisation as 'the process by which military and non-military actors collectively apply various instruments of national power to address drivers of conflict, foster host-nation resiliencies, and create conditions that enable sustainable peace and security'.⁶ Ideas nonetheless differ regarding which non-military policy instruments should be part of the stabilisation tool box, which instrument should be leading, what the priorities are and whether a specific sequencing is appropriate.

⁴ President Trump's address to the nation on Afghanistan, 21 August 2017, Fort Myer, Virginia, for full video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWcDy0jHtNk>

⁵ J. Putzel and J. di John, "Meeting the Challenges of Crisis States", LSE Crisis States Research Centre, London, 2012.

⁶ Stability, Joint Publication US armed forces, p. ix.

At the minimalistic end (Trump's view), the focus is predominantly on security aspects, which often include counter-terrorism efforts, curbing migration and countering human and illicit goods trafficking. But in most governments, the concept has gradually become broader, instead of narrower: by the turn of the century, governments started to profess the '3D'-approach, focusing on development, diplomacy and defense. In the past decade, the term has been stretched further and has started to include aspects of politics, humanitarian aid and development assistance, economic assistance and support for transitional justice and reconciliation.

On the maximalist end of the spectrum, for the moment, the most quoted comprehensive framework might be that of the guiding principles for stabilisation and reconstruction as developed by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP). USIP groups these principles around five end states: safe and secure environment, rule of law, sustainable economy, social well-being and stable governance. With cross-cutting principles being the host nation's ownership and capacity, political primacy, legitimacy, unity of effort, security, conflict transformation and regional engagement.⁷

At the same time, the stabilisation agenda is often linked to ideas around state fragility or failed states, terms that governments started to use in the 2000s, in particular after the realisation that 'ungoverned spaces' could become 'safe-havens' for terrorists and transnational crime – and more importantly, with the proof that such groups had acquired the means to reach places as far away as New York's Twin Towers. Initially, fragile states remained also vaguely defined, but by now, the 'Fragile State Index' created by the Fund for Peace is widely used as a benchmark for what fragility entails, how it can be measured and which countries are the world's most fragile. As part of its methodology, the Fund for Peace designed a group of 12 indicators known as the CAST conflict assessment framework, divided into four categories: cohesion, economic, political and social (see *Figure 1*).⁸

Figure 1. Indicators of Fragility (source: Fund for Peace, Fragile State Index)

| | |
|------------------|---|
| COHESION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security Apparatus • Factionalized Elites • Group Grievances |
| ECONOMIC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Decline • Uneven Economic Development • Human Flight and Brain Drain |
| POLITICAL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Legitimacy • Public Services • Human Rights and Rule of Law |
| SOCIAL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic Pressures • Refugees and IDPs • External Intervention |

⁷ "Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction", United States Institute for Peace (USIP), 2009. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2009/11/guiding-principles-stabilization-and-reconstruction>.

⁸ "Fragile State Index", Fund for Peace, see: <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/>.

In addition, the stabilisation discourse is often linked to the literature around state resilience, which deals with the vulnerability of a country's key institutions to external and internal shocks. Bringing in 'resilience' adds a certain dynamism to the vision of stability. Instead of creating a contradiction in terms, it recasts state stability as a situation 'in which political structures are adaptable to shifting demands and changing distributions of power, capable of assuming a minimum level of responsibility in the international system'.⁹ This would mean, for example, that elections – classifiable as an internal shock – would not lead to the breakdown of state institutions, as happened in Libya after its June 2014 parliamentary elections.

Most of the leading definitions, guiding principles and related indexes are however crafted based on Western understandings of stability. With the international political context changing, in particular regarding external engagement in the broader MENA region, it is increasingly important to keep in mind that definitions of stabilisation are not value free and tend to reflect the political and strategic interests of those involved. As one author puts it, 'stabilisation is, in essence, about powerful states seeking to forge, secure or support a particular 'stable' political order, in line with their particular strategic objectives'.¹⁰ Local leaders also tend to play into the lexicon used by powerful outsiders, recasting their own policies as legitimate 'stabilisation' efforts or 'anti-terror' operations.

¹⁰ Susanne Collinson et al, "States of fragility: stabilization and its implications for humanitarian action", Overseas Development Institute, 2010, p.7. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/5978.pdf>

3. External Engagement in Different Dimensions of Stabilisation

When external powers decide to engage in stabilisation efforts, it is a given that these are to take place in volatile environments and must be considered as a high-risk investment, even if the objectives pursued are limited.¹¹ As mentioned, stabilisation operations often include military and non-military policy instruments. For this initial exploration, the following dimensions are distinguished (*see also Figure 2*):

- Political and Diplomatic Efforts;
- Military and Security Engagement;
- Economic Aid and Assistance;
- Humanitarian and Development Assistance; and
- Transitional Justice and Reconciliation.

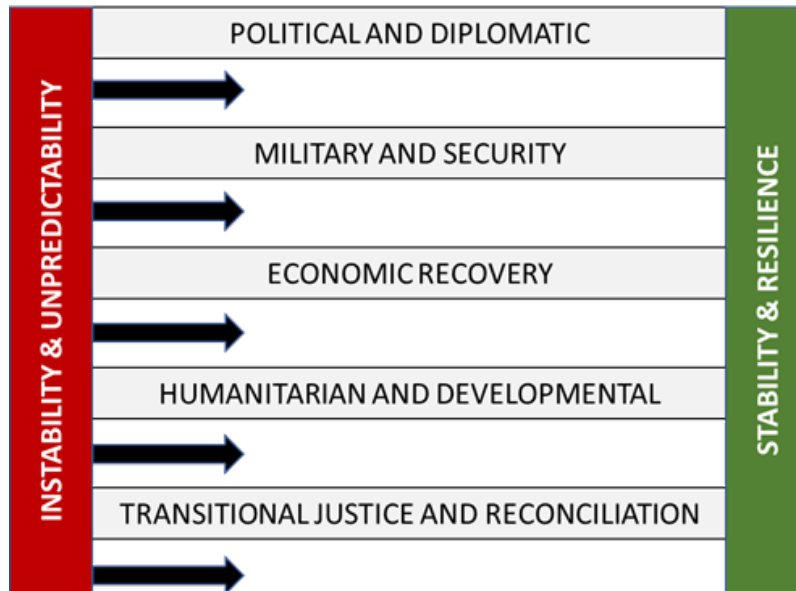
An overarching element that renders stabilisation particularly difficult from a policy perspective is the fact that the different tools are linked to different policy communities and organisations. These groups are endowed with unique professional cultures, world views, funding mechanisms and overall objectives. For stabilisation to be successful, coordination between these communities is key. In recent years, increasing cross-ministerial and other necessary cooperation has been a focus of organisational reform, with the UK's Stabilisation Unit, established in 2007, arguably the pioneer. Still, coordination and cooperation is easier on paper than in practice. Organisations are not necessarily incentivised to cooperate and some rather work to expand their own areas of influence and authority.

There is also an important set of questions around which dimensions drive the others and what combination and sequencing of the different dimensions will best enable the transformation of conflict into peace – with some analysts outlining a trajectory that goes from imposed stability, into a viable peace, and finally generates a self-sustaining peace.¹² In many cases, the assumption is that the military and security aspects are dominant and seen as a prerequisite, which often has led to complaints by the aid community about the securitisation of aid. At the same time, the military recognises political primacy, with the US Armed Forces Manual concluding that 'instability is the symptom of a political crisis rooted in how political power is distributed and wielded, and by whom. To help resolve the situation, stabilisation efforts seek to reshape the relationships within indigenous populations and institutions, the different communities that make up the host nations populace, and elites competing for power'.¹³

¹¹ Rotmann, 2016, p.5.

¹² Jock Covey, Michael Dziedzic and Leonard Hawley (eds.), "Quest for viable peace: International Intervention and Strategies for Conflict Transformation", USIP Press Books, 2005, p. 17.

¹³ US armed forces stability manual, p.x.

Figure 2. Dimensions of Stabilisation

3.1. Political and Diplomatic Efforts to Avoid (Relapse into) Conflict

International stabilisation efforts often kick off after the conclusion of a political agreement, or include working towards a political agreement. As such, the political dimension plays out both before a conflict (preventive diplomacy), during a conflict (mediation) as well as post-conflict (political transformation).

During a conflict, a lot of internal and external energy is put into crafting a viable political agreement. This is understandable, as only if a country's significant elites – those able to influence the cause of events – buy into a common political agreement, is there a prospect for lasting peace and stability. This means that these elites must be sufficiently satisfied with the arrangements of governance and the distribution of power, to the point that they will not try and challenge the prevailing or emerging system through violence.

External powers have at times been heavily involved in bringing about regime change, as in Iraq, or might have supported political change using a 'light footprint', as for example in Libya. In parallel with the removal of an old regime, they tend to be engaged with trying to craft political agreements to stop violent elite infighting. To succeed, international mediators or facilitators will need to fully grasp the societal dynamics of a conflict, its drivers and the tangible and less tangible resources, strategies and red lines of those involved. When a political agreement still needs to be crafted, an important and difficult question is who actually should be included in the process.

The contemporary track record of international mediation aimed at establishing political stability in the wider MENA region has been rather poor. The ongoing international diplomatic efforts in Libya, Yemen and Syria highlight the difficulties and limitations that traditional mediation efforts currently encounter. Within the international community there has often been a lack of consensus regarding which elites should be involved in a settlement or regarding what a deal should look like, as is clearly the case in Syria and Yemen. In Libya, the international community could largely agree on the UN-facilitated Libyan Political Agreement, but the implementation of the agreement is hampered as it excludes important players, while the new government lacks the bureaucratic efficiency that would enable the country-wide reach necessary for implementation (see Box 1).

Another factor that has arguably fed into the limited success rate of more recent political stabilisation efforts in the wider MENA region has been too strong a (Western) emphasis on democratisation. Per the prevailing theories in the West, this is a prerequisite for long-term stability and growth. But while potentially true in the long run, in the short run, political elections in conflict and transitional situations can often be seen to spark more violence and civil wars instead. The Iraqi and Libyan experiences can both serve to illustrate this point.¹⁴ Elite competition during elections can deepen and institutionalise divisions within populations based on ethnic, religious, regional or ideological lines, thereby undermining fragile nation-building efforts. As Jack Snyder, a key scholar on conflict and democratisation, has pointed out: 'naively pressuring ethnically divided authoritarian states to hold instant elections can lead to disastrous results'.¹⁵

Understanding the political settlement that governs a (post-)conflict environment is incredibly important for all policy communities involved in stabilisation, and a growing body of literature deals with the issue. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) defines political settlements as 'the expression of a common understanding, usually forged between elites, about how power is organised and exercised. They include formal institutions for managing political and economic relations, such as electoral processes, peace agreements, parliaments, constitutions and market regulations. But they also include informal, often unarticulated agreements that underpin a political system, such as deals between elites on the division of spoils'.¹⁶

Starting from this definition, several 'diagnostic tools' are currently being developed and tested to help those engaged in international stabilisation operations.¹⁷ One of those is framed as Political Settlement Analysis (PSA), which seeks to understand the 'formal and informal processes, agreements, and practices that help consolidate politics, rather than violence, as a means for dealing with disagreements about interests, ideas and the distribution and use of power'.¹⁸ According to the PSA method, one can already get a rough idea about where to focus efforts and money by answering three (on the face of it simple) questions:¹⁹

¹⁴ Jack Snyder, *From voting to violence: democratization and national conflict*, Norton, 2000.

¹⁵ Snyder, 2000.

¹⁶ "Building peaceful states and societies", DFID Practice Paper, London, 2010, p. 22.

¹⁷ Tim Kelsall, "Thinking and working with political settlements", Overseas Development Institute, January 2016.

¹⁸ Edward Laws and Adrian Leftwich, "Political Settlements", Developmental Leadership Programme, October 2014. <http://publications.dlprog.org/PolSet.pdf>

¹⁹ Kelsall, 2016, p. 5.

- How inclusive or exclusive is the political settlement?
- What motivates elites to accept the political settlement? Is it a common purpose or a share of the spoils?
- By what norms is the bureaucracy governed? Is it impersonal and meritocracy or patron-client relations and nepotism?

When looking at the countries of the MENA region that recently suffered conflict, it can be argued that the prevalent political settlements are predominantly exclusive, spoils-driven and implemented within a personalised bureaucracy. Under such agreements, elites are unlikely to work towards shared goals, while the arbitrary supply of public goods might keep moving the country towards conflict. In such a setting, international stabilisation efforts should aim at rendering a settlement more inclusive, while supporting 'islands of effectiveness' which can gradually contribute to a mindset change.²⁰

Within the political dimension, common challenges and issues that could be explored further as part of the 'stabilisation research initiative' include:

- **Dealing with domestic and international spoilers:** Post-conflict political transformation are still too often perceived as zero-sum confrontations, both by domestic parties to the conflict as well as external actors involved. Overcoming incentives for violence and moving towards competition through non-violent means, is a common challenge.²¹ The conflicts in the wider MENA region tend to include a sizable number of actors that seem uninterested in a political settlement, as they have a strong interest in continuing the process, with violence seen as an instrument to increase political leverage.²² With this in mind, there remain big questions around when it is strategically appropriate to (temporarily) include those skeptical about an agreement into peace negotiations. And when is it more appropriate to try and defeat specific rebels, warlords or other spoilers?
- **Decentralisation and localisation:** MENA countries that have experienced conflict often indicate the concentration of power, inequality and issues of distribution of wealth as root causes of conflict. Indeed, most political dialogues, including in Libya, Yemen and Iraq, have included strong calls and proposals for decentralisation and more autonomy for specific regions. International actors familiar with federal systems and the devolution of powers are potentially well-placed to provide technical assistance and policy advice in this regard. The difficulty is to find a balance between crafting too powerful a state that is resented and establishing too weak a system that can be dismissed and manipulated.
- **Political media wars:** Media, including its social variant, have become serious instruments of war and conflict. The power of messages and news manipulation has become evident in the past years and policy-makers are still trying to figure out how to control and manage this new and

²⁰ Kelsall, 2016, p. 5.

²¹ Covey, 2005.

²² See for the literature on spoilers in peace processes for example S. Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes", *International Security*, 1997, 22(2), pp. 5-53.

volatile element of conflict. Particularly in (post)conflict settings in the wider MENA region, state identities tend to be weak or weakened and leave a lot of room to be exploited by manipulated messages and subversive causes. At the same time, the ubiquitous term of branding something as 'fake news' is just as easily exploited politically.

Box 1. The Libyan Political Agreement and the Importance of Inclusiveness

The Libyan Political Agreement was adopted in December 2015 by those involved in the UN-facilitated Political Dialogue. The agreement aimed at mending the political divide that had plunged the country into renewed civil war after the June 2014 elections, which saw the national governance of the country split between an internationally-recognised House of Representatives (HoR) and a rump-parliament of the General National Congress (GNC). Both Houses aligned themselves with different governments, one based in the capital Tripoli, the other in the east of the country.

The agreement called into being a power-sharing arrangement between the two Houses as well as a Government of National Accord (GNA). The aim was inclusiveness, bringing together the two Houses in a bicameral system, thereby giving both a place in Libya's new governance infrastructure. But the outcome was one of exclusivity and duplication as one of the key elites of the country, General Khalifa Haftar, as well as the two existing Houses and their respective governments refused to give up their official and non-official positions.²³

On the other hand, a strong feature of the agreement was the backing it received from the international community, including from those that would have rather seen a different type of agreement. The agreement has been perceived as open-ended and international and local actors seem to be united around the need for amendments that would increase the inclusivity of the deal. The efforts of current UN envoy Ghassan Salamé attest to this, though the barriers to a new effective dialogue remain high.

²³ "The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset", International Crisis Group, report 170, 4 November 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/libyan-political-agreement-time-reset>

3.2. Military and Security Stabilisation

In addition to a viable political agreement, basic security is a second prerequisite for any of the other dimensions of stabilisation activities to take off. In many instances, military and security aspects are indeed the first elements that come to mind when thinking about stabilisation. The goal of this important dimension can be described as one in which the 'security environment will need to be transformed from a context dominated by armed groups that are willing and able to use violence and intimidation to destroy the peace, to a context in which armed groups are marginalised by being subordinated to legitimate governmental authority, reintegrated into society, or defeated'.²⁴

Countries tend to have idiosyncratic ideas (and strategies) regarding fostering security and stability abroad, and every specific situation has unique features. Of course, military engagements are based on particular mandates and can include peace-enforcement, peacekeeping, counterinsurgency or could be a response to natural disaster. The adversaries and threats for a foreign military force also differ from situation to situation, ranging from conventional to subversive and criminal. In fragile states marred with governance problems, the context often involves murky linkages between politicians, paramilitaries, intelligence and criminals.

But regardless of the type of security engagement, there is consensus on paper that at its core there needs to remain a focus on protecting and controlling civil populations, as well as territory, infrastructure and at times natural resources or vital industries. The military role in stabilisation operations is therefore first and foremost seen as to 'clear, hold and build' so as to enable civilian actors to carry out humanitarian and development operations in a relatively secured environment, and to win the hearts and minds of the population by bringing back basic security.²⁵

Beyond providing basic security, stabilisation efforts often include what is referred to as 'security sector reform (SSR)' initiatives. These can include training programmes and technical assistance to change the structure and behaviour of military, police, border control and the justice apparatus. SSR is usually on the more difficult end of the spectrum of stabilisation efforts, with high resistance to change due to vested interests. The UK's Stabilisation Unit emphasises that with regard to SSR, there is a 'need to accept the centrality of politics' and argues that (building and) changing the security sector has to be seen as part of the peace building process – where the potentially negative impact on the state of wayward security forces cannot be ignored and a purely technocratic approach is not enough'.²⁶ The success of SSR indeed depends heavily on the ability to depoliticise the security forces.²⁷

²⁴ Covey, 2005.

²⁵ The term 'clear, hold and build', to which sometimes 'shape' and 'transfer' are added, was often used in counterinsurgency operations with reference to Iraq and Afghanistan.

²⁶ UK Stabilisation Unit, "Security Sector Stabilisation", p.8.

²⁷ Omar Ashour, "Finishing the job: security sector reform after the Arab Spring", Brookings Institution, 28 May 2013. UK Stabilisation Unit, "Security Sector Stabilisation", p.8.

Even in multilateral forums such as the United Nations, SSR has become a hotly debated topic. In April 2014, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2151 as the first stand-alone resolution on SSR, following a 2013 report outlining the vision of the UN Secretary-General on the issue. The resolution stresses the centrality of national ownership, sets out SSR as having both technical and political aspects and underlines the necessity of integration and coherent support.²⁸ Within the UN Headquarters structures, the Security Sector Reform unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DKPO) serves as the focal point in this regard.

In addition to SSR, another acronym often features as part of security stabilisation activities in post-conflict and fragile environments: that of 'DDR' (demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration). The key objective here is to assist a host government with (re)gaining a monopoly over the use of force and help it deal with the myriad of militias that might have formed during a conflict, be it along ideological, tribal, local or religious lines. The challenges that this poses to peace is vividly illustrated in Libya, Syria and Yemen, where bringing self-sufficient militias under central command has proven extremely difficult. The DDR process is often hampered by political polarisation, a lack of trust, limited state capacity and the ability of militias to attract funding from external actors or diaspora communities.

Within the military and security dimension, common challenges and current issues that are of vital importance to external involvement in the MENA region include:

- **Stabilisation of areas recaptured from Daesh:** As Daesh is losing the territories it held in Iraq, Syria and Libya, a need arises to stabilise these areas. What comes next will depend greatly on the situation on the ground and the behaviour of those local forces involved with recapturing territory from Daesh. The Global Coalition to Counter Daesh established a Coalition Working Group on Stabilisation, co-chaired by Germany and the United Arab Emirates, while there is also a Baghdad-based stabilisation taskforce. A key activity is raising funds for the UNDP stabilisation facilities and providing technical advice to the government of Iraq.²⁹

With the defeat of Daesh in sight, the Global Coalition set up to counter it, is searching for a future purpose. On the sidelines of the February 2018 Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, new 'guiding principles' were adopted, potentially broadening the scope (to focus, for example, more on the Sahel region). At the same time, discussions have taken place about whether the coalition should continue. Shortly after the conference in Kuwait, it was suggested that the US was to scrap the position of special envoy for the anti-Daesh Coalition.³⁰

- **Cooperation with local partners:** International actors are more and more often outsourcing combat to local groups, with the international militaries providing critical support such as air power, training and intelligence. This is partly due to an understanding that stabilisation needs local ownership and partly due to cost-efficiency and the political desire to reduce the number

²⁸ UNSC Resolution 2151 (2014) on the maintenance of international peace and security: Security sector reform: challenges and opportunities.

²⁹ See website on stabilisation by the Global Coalition against Daesh: <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/category/stabilisation/>.

³⁰ Rhys Dubin and Dan De Luce, "Trump Administration Ready to Scrap Envoy to Anti-ISIS Coalition", Foreign Policy, 22 February 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/22/trump-administration-weighs-scrapping-envoy-to-counter-isis-coalition-iraq-syria-islamic-state-terrorism-terrorist-daesh/>

of returning body bags. For example, in Iraq's Operation Inherent Resolve, much of the fighting is done by the Iraqi Security Services, Kurdish forces and other groups (see Box 2). Local ownership is indeed believed of importance for legitimising a campaign, even though skills, interests and future ambitions may not fully align with those of the international sponsors, while corruption within local security services might be another element of concern for international backers.

- **Cooperation and coordination between coalition partners:** Cooperation and coordination at a national level, between different elements involved in stabilisation, is already a challenge. Military operations are almost always shared endeavors by the armed forces of different countries, sometimes under the UN or NATO umbrella, at other times as part of a 'coalition of the willing'. Countries tend to step in with different national mandates, with some of them heavily scrutinised by parliaments at home. Commanders might differ on whether it is necessary to engage with specific groups, while issues of interoperability of forces can hamper coordination.

Box 2. Iraq's Anbar Awakening

The past fifteen years have seen a trend towards the execution of military operations with the assistance of local and tribal forces. The experience in the Iraqi province of Anbar is an illustrative case, highlighting the advantages as well as the challenges that come with this strategy. Anbar remains an example of a rapid success story, but one that did not last.

The 'Anbar Awakening' is well-documented. Initially, the Sunni Arabs in the region accepted Al Qaeda forces as they shared a sectarian and an anti-occupation agenda. However, with Al Qaeda implementing its religious radicalism, the tribes of Anbar decided to partner with US forces instead. The cooperation went smoothly and contributed to the crackdown of Al Qaeda in the region. After Anbar, the Commander of Multinational Forces in Iraq, General David Petraeus, replicated the strategy in other parts, referring to those rising up against Al Qaeda as the 'sons of Iraq'.

The success story of Anbar was real, but also short-lived. Initially the US set up neighbourhood posts with Iraqis and Americans living together, instead of the large bases the US armed forces had erected elsewhere. But the Americans wrongly assumed that Anbar and the tribes could hold their own, even after a reduction of US troops. Instead, the tribes soon got divided and realigned as the sectarianist agenda re-emerged – fueled by the Shiite central government under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

3.3. Economic Stabilisation

Before 2011, analysts commented positively on the economic growth the MENA region was experiencing, with economic outlooks often relatively rosy. Still, in particular in Tunisia and Egypt, economic grievances caused by inequality, nepotism and corruption, were important drivers of the social unrest that struck these countries in 2011. In Libya, a country boasting the highest GDP per capita of North Africa, Qaddafi encouraged discord within society by politicising state wealth and ruling through redistribution policies.

The uprisings showed that aggregate numbers can be gravely misleading. While the Egyptian economy grew indeed at an impressive rate during the last years of Mubarak's rule, little of that growth trickled down to benefit the majority of the population. In Tunisia, growth for many translated into more walled hotel resorts, more privatised beaches and the erosion of the already small income of the urban poor due to inflationary pressure. While tertiary education rates grew, youth unemployment was rising as well, fueling frustration about the way the economy was being managed.

By now, most analysts and policymakers alike acknowledge that economic inequality and material deprivation constitute great challenges to and for MENA governments. As such, calls for economic stabilisation and economic reform are at the center of current policy debates. Unfortunately, no simple solutions exist. Corruption and privileged access is deeply institutionalised, suboptimal education systems are producing graduates that are not well-qualified for the labour market and wages are uncompetitive in global terms. The region is characterised by growing populations and only a strong and growing private sector would be able to absorb all the new job-seekers.

In addition to the already precarious economic outlook in the wider MENA region, conflicts and wars have exacerbated the situation as the economy is often one of the first elements to exhibit stress. Conflict tends to damage vital economic infrastructure – roads, airports, telecommunications and shops – and can lead to unsustainable macro-economic imbalances as foreign reserves dwindle. In several MENA countries, including Libya, Yemen and Egypt, this has led to extreme price inflation (as imports are hard to obtain) as well as liquidity problems for banks, causing a negative spiral and further fueling anti-government sentiments. With a conflict continuing, 'war economies' can take root, making conflict resolution even harder.

The range of areas to include as part of economic stabilisation efforts can be wide or narrow. USIP, in its guiding principles on stabilisation, lists four main economic objectives: macro-economic stabilisation; control over the illicit economy and economic-based threats to peace; employment generation; and market economy sustainability. Other international support tends to focus on reviving economic infrastructure and transportation, technical advice for reforming economic practices, job creation and private sector development, and in the early phases of stabilisation, cash injections to prop up international reserves.

Stabilisation efforts with an economic dimension have been initiated or led by individual states as well as international organisations. Egypt might be the most obvious case study where different external actors active in this area, ranging from the provision (and at times withdrawal) of economic assistance by the US and several Gulf States, ranging from a large economic transformation package by the UAE to strict conditional loans by international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank, that are often linked to the implementation of unpopular, but necessary, reforms.

Just as the redistribution of economic wealth can be used to increase inequality and hand out privileges to the few, it can also be used to prevent and manage potential conflict and grievances within society. As in particular those strands in the conflict analysis literature with a Marxist inclination stress: societal acquiescence can be obtained by offering 'bread and circus', meaning ensuring that the majority of the population is provided a decent standard of living and has the ability to enjoy entertainment in non-working hours (this strategy has ranged from offering gladiator fights, Olympic games, cricket or soccer matches – as long as not hidden behind a private cable network's paywall). But while economic stabilisation is of importance, to be effective, it will need to be matched by forms of good governance.

Within the economic dimension of stabilisation, common issues within the MENA region that can be explored further include:

- **Long-term (youth) unemployment:** The MENA region has the world's highest youth unemployment rate, with the smaller Gulf States forming a welcome exception. Prospects of a productive livelihood remain bleak and the risk of nurturing another unproductive and frustrated generation is high. The influx of large numbers of refugees has worsened the situation in several countries (see Box 3) and the return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) pose challenges to others. The scale of the issue is such that it is unlikely to be tackled with conventional job creation programmes or the cutting of red tape to attract foreign investors. Instead, policymakers will need to embrace innovative ways to develop remote work opportunities or think of other ways to generate large-scale employment, including in post-conflict reconstruction efforts.
- **Transforming war and illicit economies:** With the protracted nature of the conflicts and wars in Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Libya, a growing number of people relies on the conflict itself for a livelihood. The lawlessness in Libya has allowed for smuggling and trafficking of humans, but also of weapons and other illicit goods, to become the key economic drivers of several cities and tribal networks. In Afghanistan, the cultivation of poppy has become more lucrative than any other form of agriculture and important elites are profiting from war-related industries. Redirecting these economies towards peaceful and licit objectives, becomes harder the longer conflicts last.
- **Land and property rights:** Regime change in Tunisia, Libya, as well as Yemen and Iraq, has sparked a significant number of disputes related to land and property rights. In many cases, land and property was nationalised or expropriated on a discriminatory basis. The change in governance has led people to express the injustice done to them or their families in the past and act on their grievances.³¹

³¹ John D. Unruh, "Mass Claims in Land and Property Following the Arab Spring: Lessons from Yemen", *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2016, 5(1), p.6.

Box 3. Livelihoods for Syrian Refugees

The MENA region and Turkey host the largest percentage of displaced people worldwide (39% by the end of 2015), with most of them originating from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia.³² Whereas most refugees who want to work have been able to find underpaid jobs with no social protection in the region's vast informal markets, in the past years, several of the major host countries have started to warm to new policies that provide refugees with the opportunity to find work legally.

Large numbers of displaced and refugees are often seen as a (potential) source of instability and social unrest. This holds particularly true in areas where the unemployment rate of the native population is already high and where refugees further drive down (informal) wages.

Acknowledging the unsustainability of hosting large numbers of displaced and refugees for a long time, Jordan and Turkey have moved towards allowing refugees (restricted) access to the labour market. The drivers behind that policy decision include the protracted nature of regional crises, the risks of societal tensions and the continuing loss of state revenues.³³

International organisations and donors are encouraging this trend, partly as they are eager to 'find solutions within the region' as an alternative to resettlement and migration to Europe. In addition, they also understand the actual stabilising value of such policies. International engagement at the bilateral level has focused on job creation projects with the private sector and professional skills trainings.

At the same time, returning long-term refugees and IDPs are likely to impact stabilisation efforts in post-conflict situations. This can be either positive – if they come back with skills and financial means – or negative, if searching for a former livelihood that has been destroyed due to conflict.

3.4. Humanitarian and Developmental Efforts, Technical Assistance

Arguably the largest cooperation problems between the different dimensions of stabilisation can be found between the military and the communities dealing with humanitarian aid and development assistance. However, cooperation between these two communities has become more critical since the international community started to focus efforts on so-called fragile states in the 1990s. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Official Development Assistance (ODA) to fragile states from OECD DAC countries increased dramatically, from US\$5.8 billion in 2000, to US\$46.7

³² "Figures at a glance", UNHCR, 2016.

³³ Lorraine Charles and Saskia van Genugten, "Livelihoods for Syrian Refugees: Transitioning from a humanitarian to a developmental paradigm", Emirates Diplomatic Academy Working Paper Series, April 2017.

billion in 2009.³⁴ Aid indeed is ever more conceptualised as a critical building block to develop a state's legitimacy, and as an instrument to reduce fragility.³⁵ After 9/11, starting with programmes and projects in Afghanistan, many international development communities have perceived a securitisation and politicisation of their aid programmes.

The linking of security and development has sparked debates within the development community about what the actual objectives are of aid and development. Often, a specific country's goal depends on a strategic culture that has grown over time. Some see foreign aid as a tool to increase political influence, to combat or promote a certain ideology or world view. Others see aid as an independent tool, which should preoccupy itself with reducing poverty and economic development. A third way of using aid is to see it as complementary with the use of force, with both tools working towards shared political goals. Those advocating a strong link between security and development, as in stabilisation operations in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, often see antiterrorist policies and development assistance as inextricably linked.

The link between security and development is particularly clear when external actors engage in fragile states, as military mandates started to include non-military tasks. The underlying assumption is that aid and development will help 'win the hearts and minds' of the local population, raise its trust in the authorities distributing the aid and help enhance the legitimacy and the quality of political institutions.³⁶ As humanitarian and development workers are more often deployed in conflict settings, the two communities are mutually dependent, despite the often-quoted differences in world views.

Operating in fragile or post-conflict environments does come with a good number of challenges for international donors interested in providing humanitarian and development assistance. These include for example a lack of adequate infrastructure, corruption and suboptimal partner bureaucracy capacity. Also, many organisations use quick rotations on 'hardship' posts, which is detrimental for institutional memory, as well as for building up trust with counterparts. As the OECD notes, development programs in fragile states tend to bear considerable risk, both with regard to 'contextual risk', 'programmatic risk' and 'institutional risk'.³⁷ In concrete terms, this includes physical danger to personnel, high potential for aid funding or supplies being stolen or misdirected and a possibility that the aid will not achieve its desired effects.

In the past fifteen years, academics and practitioners have identified some general ideas about what works, and what does not when providing aid in fragile states. A potentially counterintuitive lesson includes that stabilisation programmes, if poorly designed, can become a cause of rent-seeking behaviour and, in turn, instability. Smaller, narrowly targeted projects seem the least likely to fuel instability, as they tend to rely more on in-depth knowledge of local settings and dynamics. Their effectiveness also seems to increase when made conditional on information-sharing. As identified by both USIP and the RAND Corporation, other success factors include:

³⁴ "Ensuring Fragile states are not left behind", OECD-DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility, March 2009.

³⁵ Collinson, 2010, p.13 ³⁶ Jan-Rasmus Boehnke and Christof Zuercher, "Aid, mind and hearts: the impact of aid in conflict zones", Conflict Management and Peace Science, 2013, 30 (5).

³⁷ "Managing risks in fragile and transitional contexts: the price of success?", OECD, 2012, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/managing%20risks.pdf>

Box 4. Aid, Stabilisation and Corruption in Afghanistan

The war in Afghanistan that was started in 2001, has provided the international community with the longest experiment in stabilisation in the region so far. The country also constitutes the most extensive case study in the way security and aid interact as part of a stabilisation operation. In the case of Afghanistan, the blending of military operations, aid distribution and development initiatives, seems to have had a limited or only temporary impact.³⁹

The international engagement in Afghanistan has been organised through Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which were among other things tasked with identifying and managing projects that could lead to 'quick wins'. Generally, the objectives of aid programmes in Afghanistan included not only increasing the well-being of the population, but also reducing violence, increasing support for the government and undermining insurgency. This effort translated into projects that attempted to improve local governments service delivery, small infrastructure projects, youth training and agricultural development (not in the least to provide alternatives to poppy cultivation).⁴⁰

Unfortunately, while measuring the impact of aid is hard, there is a common recognition that in Afghanistan, there is a sense that billions of dollars of aid have led to limited progress. International aid poured in in large quantities, but time, efforts and financial resources went to waste on a massive scale due to mismatching agendas and timelines, poor coordination, lack of ownership, the absence of regional strategies and the ignorance of local needs.⁴¹

Chronic insecurity, corruption and an Afghan lack of capacity and willingness to reform at all levels, has made Afghanistan a difficult place to operate. Corruption in particular has been cited as a key challenge to international donors. As the fundamental conflict drivers in the country are inherently political and include ethnic grievances, inter- and intra-tribal disputes, true stabilisation can only be constructed on increased social cohesion.

host-nation coordination and commitment, limiting the extent of corrosive corruption, ensuring baseline levels of security to facilitate basic implementation and oversight, ensuring appropriate staffing in terms of skills and longevity of deployment.³⁸

Within the humanitarian and development dimension, areas that still need to be understood better include:

- **The value of 'quick wins':** It is believed that to gain in legitimacy and support, international engagement should partly focus on generating so-called 'quick wins' for the domestic authorities. These are often short-term projects that rapidly bring about visible change for the population and can include the repair of communications infrastructure, the (re)opening of health and

³⁸ Radha Iyengar, "Lessons learned from stabilization initiatives" in Afghanistan, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/working_papers/WR1100/WR1191/RAND_WR1191.pdf

education facilities and easily established cash-for-work programmes. At the same time, it is hotly debated whether there is real long-term value of such quick impact gains, with arguments against them including that without ongoing international support they will not last, thereby creating dependency or, when terminated, resentment.

- **Rotation and lack of institutional memory:** Fragile and conflict settings that are subject to external stabilisation missions witness a coming and going of international staff. Often, these hardship posts, in particular when part of international organisations or diplomatic missions, tend to be part of quick rotation schemes. While understandable from a personal perspective, the downside of the system is a lack of institutional memory and difficulties in maintaining trust relationships with the local population, which has proven of great importance for the success of many projects.
- **Reducing risks for (larger) programmes:** While it has been identified that small-scale, targeted projects are most likely to be successful in stabilisation operations, they are also the least impactful. Scale is needed, but ways need to be found to cope with unrealistic expectations, widespread corruption (including through subcontracting), and potentially ongoing violence.

3.5. Transitional Justice and Reconciliation

In the current wider MENA region, a competition of ideas is taking place regarding governance and state identities, thereby pitching against each other different elites, factions and world views. Recent conflicts have exposed these struggles between elites and their respective supporters and in many instances, these fundamental disagreements about the preferred governance of society are at the heart of the protracted nature of these conflicts. Therefore, even though not a standard item in a country's stabilisation toolbox, activities related to transitional justice and reconciliation can be of importance for the longevity of any political or other settlement.

As with all the other dimensions of stabilisation, transitional justice and reconciliation can refer to a broad range of activities that can (and should) be tailored to a given international, national or regional setting. The United Nations defines transitional justice as 'the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation.'⁴² The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) adds that transitional justice often takes place outside the normal justice system: 'Transitional justice refers to the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression address large scale or systematic human rights violations so numerous and so serious that the normal justice system will not be able to provide an adequate response.'⁴³

³⁹ Ethan B. Kapstein, "Aid and stabilization in Afghanistan: What do the data say?", USIP Special Report 405, June 2017.

⁴⁰ Kapstein, USIP, 2017.

⁴¹ Ellwood, stabilizing Afghanistan

⁴² "Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: United Nations approach to transitional justice", United Nations, March 2010, p.2.

⁴³ See website of International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ): <https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>.

Indeed, transitional justice combines (quasi)-judicial tools with non-judicial measures considered necessary to deal with the negative legacy of a former political regime.⁴⁴ This can include prosecution and trials, reparations, fact-finding and truth commissions, national consultations or even constitutional reforms. At the same time, it can include revising school curricula, uttering public apologies, the establishment or scrapping of national days, memorials and museums. In addition, it can include the vetting of security personnel and public officials, as for example was the case in Libya with the passing of a 2013 Political Isolation Law, as well as in Iraq with the de-Baathification process following the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Transitional justice and reconciliation is a delicate matter and can be a double-edged sword. A good number of historical cases shows the ability to positively contribute to stabilisation, but there are also plenty of cases indicating that it can instead prolong or intensify divisions as only a fine line separates transitional justice from revenge. Given the sensitivities, transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives need to be designed carefully, including the role of international actors - who might not grasp local subtleties. A robust process requires not only neutrality, but also technical prerequisites such as a robust and objective archival system, something often lacking in fragile or post-conflict countries.

It is therefore not surprising that external donors are hesitant to engage in transitional justice and reconciliation efforts. Not only is it expensive and rather difficult to measure success, involvement also comes with very high political risks and fears that it can stoke political discord which will undermine other stabilisation activities in the country.⁴⁵ At the same time, local ownership can create concerns with international actors about the protection of the rights of defendants and victims, and amplify risks of getting embroiled with conflicting international and national standards.

Those donors willing to engage, often frame support in this area as technical assistance aimed at building national capacity, for example by helping with forensic analysis, investigations, the preservation of evidence or the training of court personnel. Programmes are presented as forward-looking, instead of dealing with the past. At times, solutions are found in which partnering states are bypassed through the creation of international and hybrid tribunals outside of the framework of the transitioning government.

Within the dimension of justice and reconciliation, common challenges and issues include:

- **Politicisation of transitional justice:** In the current political climate of the wider MENA region, there is little room for reconciliation between different views on how society should be governed. Deadly conflicts are still fresh in mind, and the atrocities committed might be too severe for reconciliation programmes, while no single group has the national authority to establish a transitional justice programme that is fair and objective. With Tunisia arguably the positive exception (see Box 5), the flavour is one of exclusive politics based on group identity.

⁴⁴ Jon Elster, *Closing the Books: Transitional justice in historical perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁴⁵ Elena A. Baylis, "Transitional justice and development aid to fragile and conflict-affected states: risks and reforms", in Roger Duthie and Paul Seils (eds.), *Justice Mosaics: How context shapes transitional justice in fractured societies*, New York, ICTJ, 2017, pp. 371-402.

Box 5. Transitional Justice in Post-Ben Ali Tunisia

Tunisia is often cited as an example of transitional justice and reconciliation efforts in the region. In 2015, its National Dialogue Quartet received the Nobel Peace Prize for its 'decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011'. Tunisia's transitional justice and reconciliation experience is unique in the MENA region, and constitutes a crucial historical and political experiment.

The process started as a grass-root civil society initiative as organisations raised awareness of the importance of transitional justice, organised conferences and engaged in advocacy. In 2011, this led to the establishment of the National Commission to Investigate Human Rights Violations and the National Commission to Investigate Corruption and Embezzlement. That same year an Independent National Coordinator for Transitional Justice was appointed.

As a global first, in December 2013, Tunisia passed a Transitional Justice Law, aimed at addressing violations committed throughout the reigns of Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987) and Zine el Abedine Ben Ali (1987-2011), and in the years immediately following the 2011 revolution. A new Constitution imposed an obligation to 'apply the transitional justice system in all its domains and according to the deadlines prescribed by the relevant legislation. In this context, the invocation of the non-retroactivity of laws, the existence of previous amnesties, the force of *res judicata*, and the prescription of a crime or a punishment are considered inadmissible'.⁴⁶

The new law created a Truth and Dignity Commission, known by its French acronym, IVD. UNDP has heavily supported the commission's operations. It began its work in May 2014, tasked with processing around 62,000 cases, several of which were broadcast live on television. A unique feature is that cases include not only political and human rights related offenses, but also financial corruption and abuse of public funds. These economic crimes have long been a major issue in the country and have contributed to the marginalisation of certain Tunisian regions.

But despite the international praise, obstacles to the success of the IVD in Tunisia are on the rise.⁴⁷ The Commission, led by Sihem Bensedrine, stands accused of discriminating between different groups and of being positively biased towards the Islamist party of Ennahda and those with similar worldviews. Political support has waned and current President Beji Caid Essebsi and his Nidaa Tounes party, linked to the old regime, have shown little interest in the process. Instead, Essebsi has proposed a mechanism that would grant amnesty to corrupt former officials. In his view, this is necessary to revive Tunisia's economy and to 'turn the page on the past'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See 2014 Constitution of Tunisia, article 148:9, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf

⁴⁷ Fatim-Zohra El Malki, "Tunisia's partisan path to transitional justice", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 March 2017. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/68206>

⁴⁸ Elissa Miller and Katharine Wolff, "Will Tunisia's Economic Reconciliation Law 'Turn the Page'?", Atlantic Council, 29 September 2015. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/will-tunisia-s-economic-reconciliation-law-turn-the-page>

- **Measuring impact and success:** While risks for international actors engaged in transitional justice and reconciliation efforts are predominantly political in nature, another caveat is that success of these type of programmes is hard to assess. The results of reconciliation might only be visible after many years, and the number of trials in a transitional justice case is hardly a good indicator of its success rate. Indeed, the area has few quantifiable measures of success and as such, might be of little attractiveness for development organisations.
- **Collective memory:** Transitional justice and reconciliation tends to include (re)writing parts of national history and the related collective memory. This often manifests itself through changes in curricula, the erection of monuments and museums. The way events and periods of times are commemorated nationally, will impact the conscience of next generations. A positive example of this is Europe in the decades following the second world war and the transformation of post-Nazi Germany in particular. At the same time, negative examples also exist, for example with regard to history writing related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the lack of actual transitional justice following Lebanon's 1989 Taif agreement.

4. Conclusion

Political and security developments in the broader MENA region have led to more differentiation between states and sub-regions at many levels, including their political systems, economic well-being and levels of social unrest. Following the Arab uprisings, some states lapsed into conflict, others have kept an uncomfortable status quo, whereas still others took the opportunity to reform their legal systems and accommodate social grievances better. At the same time, however, the past two decades have brought an increased overlap of security complexes, between most notably the Levant, North Africa, the Gulf, Europe and the Sahel. This has resulted, for example, in that developments in the Levant have a greater impact in Europe and Gulf States have a greater stake in stability in the Sahel and North Africa.

Analysts and policymakers alike still do not comprehend entirely how to reshape regional analysis to capture the variation in political systems, economic performance and future outlooks. Domestic and international reactions have been varied as well, however a majority has put the concepts of 'stability' and 'stabilisation' at the core of stated objectives. But stabilisation and stability remain in many ways elusive concepts, which have generated dissimilar definitions and international practices. Most of the leading definitions, guiding principles and related indexes are still crafted based on Western understandings of stability.

With many more actors playing a significant role in the wider MENA region, including those located around the Arabian Gulf, but also Russia, Turkey and Israel, the dominance of the Western approach to stabilisation might be waning. The fact that the current US administration is rigorously cutting the non-military budget of stabilisation is likely to accelerate this trend.

The changing global and regional power constellations are impacting both the understanding of the concepts of stability and stabilisation, as well as the implications for practitioners. It is increasingly important to keep in mind the views of external actors that have a growing profile in the region. Their own version of stability and stabilisation will reflect their political and strategic interests. This differentiation has already caused deadlock at the level of the UN Security Council over many files in the wider MENA region and the current mismatch in objectives of global and regional leaders might indeed be fueling further regional instability.

At the more micro-level, stabilisation efforts are rendered difficult due to the fact that different instruments of stabilisation are linked to different policy communities and organisations. Such tools can include political and military efforts, economic, humanitarian and developmental assistance, as well as support for justice and reconciliation. But all these tools tend to be linked to communities of practitioners endowed with unique professional cultures, world views, funding mechanisms and overall objectives. For stabilisation to be successful, coordination between these communities is key. Dissecting the different dimensions and making policy communities aware of the drivers and objectives of others involved in stabilisation, can help construct better bridges.

International stabilisation efforts in the region tend to be costly, risky and in many regards, thankless. Especially in the wider MENA region, few success stories can be cited so far. Partly this is because many of the conflicts are fueled by root causes that are difficult to tackle and include a mix of political, socio-economic, demographic, religious-cultural factors. The diversification in the region means that every single time there needs to be a search for the magic stabilising formula, as unfortunately, there is no universal template for stabilisation.

However, the past decade has generated a large number of case studies, insights and lessons learned to draw from with regard to stabilisation. It is imperative that academics and policy-makers alike document and analyse these recent experiments in stabilisation, both those undertaken by traditional Western actors, but also those undertaken by actors that more recently started to increase their regional profile and regardless of whether such efforts were successful or disastrous. Only in that way, by critically scrutinising what has been done and to what effect, a common understanding can be crafted of how the wider MENA region could move towards a form of 'stability' that is sustainable.

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