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PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES

JANUARY 2016

BRIEFING

A Ugandan soldier serving with AMISOM holds a rocket-propelled grenade at sunrise, on the frontline in Maslah Town, on the northern city limit of Mogadishu.
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A NEW WAR ON TERROR OR A NEW SEARCH FOR PEACE? LEARNING THE LESSONS OF AFGHANISTAN, SOMALIA AND YEMEN

From 2001, the global war on terror traumatised Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen, and helped foment turmoil across the Middle East and North Africa – all at huge military, financial and human cost. Yet it failed to reverse the growing global threat from Islamist militants.

In 2016, in the wake of spectacular terror attacks, some Western nations have moved fast to commit to war against Islamic State (IS). Echoing the reaction to 9/11, Western countries are now doubling down on a mix of airstrikes, targeted killings and support to regional and local forces to eliminate IS in Iraq and Syria. Nonetheless, militancy continues to intensify and spread: armed groups have pledged support for IS in 19 countries,¹ and the Taliban, al-Shabaab, and al-Qaeda all remain undefeated.

As refugees flee conflict in numbers not seen since World War II, a renewal of the global war on terror could turn crisis into catastrophe. The West cannot afford to ignore the lessons of the past 15 years – and needs a strategy that leads to peace. This brief draws on new Saferworld reports analysing Western counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding efforts in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen since 2001. The track record of these efforts is poor, but lessons from them could be the basis for more effective and constructive strategies to achieve peace in the face of terror and instability.

KEY LESSONS

Experience from Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen suggest a fresh response to terror and security threats is needed that is:

- **Less reliant on military approaches – and more strategic about peace**
- **Tougher on abuse, corruption and bad governance**
- **More discerning about partners and how to engage with them**
- **More focused on working with societies to achieve just and lasting peace**

FOCUSING STRATEGY ON ACHIEVING PEACE – AND RELYING LESS ON MILITARY APPROACHES

In Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen, counter-terror objectives and military approaches have predominated, crowding out a focus on effective conflict management, human security and peacebuilding. Direct use of force has sometimes pushed militants back, but failed to defeat them and secure peace. Violence – especially when indiscriminate and unaccountable – has also harmed civilians and created resentment. In the wake of military efforts to combat ‘terrorists’, crucial drivers of conflict have been neglected and proved difficult to address, and the public has become disillusioned.



A member of the Afghan National Police patrols through a poppy field in Mian Poshteh.
© KATE HOLT/IRIN

In **Afghanistan**, dominant military doctrines underpinned behaviours and tactics that created resentment and fuelled further conflict. Civilian casualties, night raids, house searches and culturally insensitive behaviour, drone strikes and the rendition of Afghans all created resentment among the population and contributed to support for the Taliban and associated groups. While NATO forces attempted to reduce civilian casualties, the Afghan people clearly observed international forces overlooking the accountability and human rights principles they preached.

Initially, the military objective was to defeat the Taliban quickly by killing their leaders and key fighters, leaving space for longer-term development and statebuilding to occur. Instead, the list of targets to kill or arrest kept expanding, and the need to address conflict drivers through non-military approaches was neglected.²

From 2009 a counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy beefed up the civilian component of the military-led campaign. But the tension between military and non-military objectives and the lack of a consistent strategy for a political solution to the conflict undermined the effort. The task of supporting Afghan institutions to grow could have benefitted from long-term,

sophisticated engagement by experienced civilians. However, at times, young, inexperienced soldiers on brief tours led activities on the ground, while senior military officers provided civilian leadership mentoring to Afghan civilian officials.³ Like the expensive generators bought for Kandahar that the authorities could not afford to keep going, COIN projects were often innovative but unsustainable.⁴

Combining military and non-military interventions under Provincial Reconstruction Teams often compromised the space for independent development and humanitarian work, potentially putting aid actors in the line of fire.⁵ It also had a negative impact on the Afghan people's views of the non-military aspects of the intervention.

With limited progress on key governance and corruption drivers of conflict, the military-led approach has failed to bring peace to Afghanistan. The Taliban was not defeated militarily, and in late 2015 – early 2016 achieved some notable military successes, alongside military operations by both IS and local militias. In response, the UK and US have deployed more advisers and special forces personnel to work alongside the Afghan security forces.

In **Somalia**, international actors have failed to underpin their military assertiveness with a coherent long-term peace strategy. Despite international processes to set common objectives such as the New Deal, international actors lack a unified purpose beyond the military defeat of al-Shabaab, which is viewed as a source of global terror and the foremost threat to Somalia's long-term peace. The primary focus on combating al-Shabaab belies the reality that international actors have a range of competing security-related objectives that frequently work at cross-purposes.

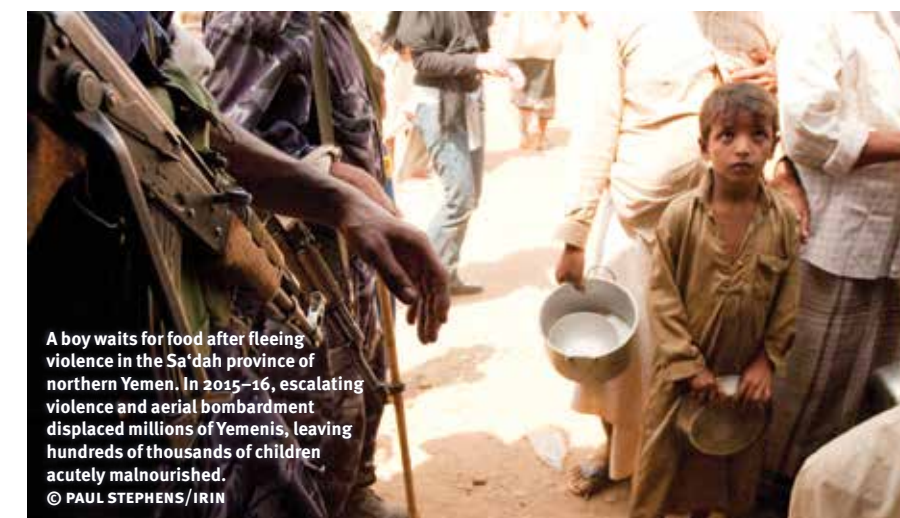
In support of their own national security interests both Kenya and Ethiopia have sought to back sub-national actors that are more loyal to them than to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). In contrast, the US, UK and EU have backed sub-national actors that are more closely tied to the FGS, but have struggled to coordinate their military efforts. Looking further afield, Turkey and Arab actors have tried to gain influence with the FGS by providing military assistance and training, but again coordination with

“It was assumed... that a grab bag of ‘doctrinally sound’ military actions would somehow add up to a strategic win.”

General Karl Eikenberry, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan⁶

“When you drop a bomb from a drone... you are going to cause more damage than you are going to cause good.”

US Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, former head of the Pentagon's Defence Intelligence Agency⁷



A boy waits for food after fleeing violence in the Sa'dah province of northern Yemen. In 2015–16, escalating violence and aerial bombardment displaced millions of Yemenis, leaving hundreds of thousands of children acutely malnourished.
© PAUL STEPHENS/IRIN

other actors has been lacking.⁸ The lack of unity amongst international actors has decreased their focus on other – more important – drivers of conflict.

Alongside these other agendas, the security needs of the Somali people have often taken a back seat. For instance, while the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army (SNA) have recovered territory from al-Shabaab, political strategy to address governance deficits and establish a sustainable peace in these areas has lagged behind. Such governance gaps have allowed other forms of conflict to re-emerge – and made civilians vulnerable to renewed al-Shabaab attacks.

Efforts to recover territory from al-Shabaab have been accompanied by international airstrikes and targeted killings. However, the successful targeting of al-Shabaab's leadership has not diminished its capacity to carry out high-profile attacks. In addition, targeted killings have led to civilian casualties and hardened the resolve of al-Shabaab's leadership, arguably undermining efforts to resolve the conflict.



AMISOM soldiers stand atop a tank in an area outside the Somali port of Kismayo. AMISOM and the SNA continue to face challenges in newly recovered areas and lost control of several towns in southern and central Somalia in 2015.
© UN PHOTO/STUART PRICE

Despite extensive Western counter-terror and stabilisation engagement in **Yemen** – including drone strikes, years of military and intelligence collaboration and backing for offensives by the Yemeni Government – Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), its domestic wing Ansar al Sharia (AAS) and other militant groups have grown in strength.

The US programme of targeted killings in Yemen has eliminated some violent individuals. However, it has also been criticised for targeting the wrong people through questionable methods, causing at least 87 civilian deaths and perhaps significantly more. Such killings have enflamed anti-US sentiment and appear to have increased recruitment by militant groups – as evidenced by the trebling in size of AQAP between 2009 and 2013. The secrecy surrounding targeted killings in Yemen has made it harder to mitigate resultant grievances, creating an absence of accountability for civilian deaths and injuries.

Security assistance to a repressive, corrupt state has occasionally met limited security objectives, but has also fuelled injustice and conflict. For well over a decade, the Yemeni establishment has demonstrated a lax commitment to its counter-terror partnership with the West: harbouring and making use of Islamist fighters, and failing to prevent prison breaks *en masse* by significant al-Qaeda members.

As early as 2002, there was advance warning about the excessive risks that military aid to Yemen for fighting terrorism would be misused by the regime. Nonetheless, the US supported Yemen to develop capable and well-trained counter-terror forces. However, President Saleh's family controlled these forces, which were not primarily used to tackle terrorism, but rather to protect

the capital and the presidential palace.⁹ Much military equipment supplied by the US to Yemen's forces is “unaccounted for”¹⁰ – and some has reportedly been used by Houthis in recent assaults on Aden and Taiz.¹¹

In 2015, military approaches remained to the fore, as a regional coalition led by Saudi Arabia and backed by the US and UK intervened against Houthi rebels – whom the Saudis view as Iranian proxies. A naval blockade, indiscriminate bombing, and the deployment of troops and mercenaries by the regional coalition have plunged Yemen into new depths of turmoil. By November 2015, at least 5,700 people had been killed, with 2.3 million people displaced and 21.2 million people requiring humanitarian aid.

Yemenis are unlikely to welcome the violent reinstatement of the Hadi regime by foreign armies. External investment in violence without a coherent vision for promoting peace in Yemen may have fomented a long and bitter war.

“The West focused on Western priorities – short-term aims and short-term stability – without enough thought about the long-term impacts.”

Nadwa al-Dawsari, Senior Non-Resident Fellow, Project on Middle East Democracy

BEING TOUGHER ON ABUSE, CORRUPTION AND BAD GOVERNANCE

As Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen became battlegrounds in the war on terror, the West kept partners on board by compromising its opposition to abuse, corruption and bad governance. Yet the evidence is clear that these are the primary drivers of conflict and rebel/terrorist violence around the world.¹² By aiding and abetting abuse, corruption and bad governance in Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan, Western actors fell into the ‘stabilisation trap’: trading away a long-term focus on rights and governance for short-term stability – but ultimately guaranteeing abusive governance, chronic instability and deep public resentment.

In **Afghanistan**, the international community supported a warlord-dominated government under a victor’s peace agreement in an effort to accommodate those able to continue the conflict. But the entrenchment of corruption, warlord and militia networks and criminal activities ultimately undermined everything international actors sought to achieve and tarnished them by association.

To retain buy-in from actors with the power to break the peace, the Ministries of Interior, Defence and Foreign Affairs and the National Directorate of Security were all given to known warlords in the first two post-Taliban administrations.¹³ They staffed the ministries with their followers, institutionalising patronage networks and corruption.¹⁴ Continuing to back these leaders while the political process remained exclusive and unaccountable only fuelled grievances and conflict.

Despite enormous investments in the security sector, systemic corruption, human rights abuses and factionalism blighted the Afghan army and police, undermining stability and the effective reach of the state.¹⁵ Police support was neglected in the early years, but then scaled up too fast, enabling the diversion



Afghan National Police officers guard the office of the Governor of Bamyán Province.
© UN PHOTO/ERIC KANALSTEIN

of funds by powerful individuals within the police and government.¹⁶ Equipment provided to the police has also allegedly been sold for private gain.¹⁷ The return of the warlords meant an upsurge in local-level violence and criminality. Inefficiency and corruption have also presented serious challenges within the state judicial service.¹⁸

International support at times accounted for 90 per cent of Afghan public expenditures.¹⁹ Such aid volumes overwhelmed local absorptive capacity and sustained a rentier state, further aggravated by proceeds of the illegal drugs economy.²⁰ The huge transfers of funds were not perceived to benefit ordinary Afghans,²¹ but rather unaccountable elites at the centre, whose alliances within ethnic groups, armed militias or sections of the security forces upheld impunity, corruption and human rights abuses.²² The intervention also came to be seen by some Afghans as biased towards Tajik warlords and their (often criminal) networks, thus feeding ethnic divisions.²³

While there were efforts to balance ethnic representation, tackle corruption, combat the drugs trade, control aid funds more carefully and reform predatory elites, these could not prevent the legitimacy of the political elites from crumbling. The US and its allies were increasingly seen as propping up an unaccountable and predatory regime, whom they feared to remove lest this removal undermine security.²⁴ Despite various anti-corruption efforts, many Afghans now see corruption as among the greatest threats the country faces, and in some areas the Taliban is seen as being more accountable in local governance and thus preferable to the regime.²⁵



An SNA soldier travels through the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia. The US, UK and the EU have provided significant resources to the SNA in recent years. Despite this investment, SNA forces trained by AMISOM continue to suffer defections with estimates ranging from ten to 80 per cent.
© ZOE FLOOD/IRIN

In **Somalia**, the global counter-terror agenda has excused a range of counter-productive behaviours by national, regional and Western actors that have undermined efforts to build lasting peace.

The focus on terrorism – and the blanket labelling of al-Shabaab as ‘terrorist’ – has oversimplified Somalia’s conflict, and obscured the complex reasons why individuals choose to affiliate with or join the group. These reasons include political dynamics, particularly at the local level, and the absence of economic alternatives.

By presenting themselves as the alternative to al-Shabaab, successive Somali governments have secured considerable military, security and aid resources from Western actors, despite extensive corruption and the diversion of weapons and other supplies. The FGS has been accused of diverting 70–80 per cent of the funds it has received: according to the United Nations Somalia/Eritrea Monitoring Group, these were used to advance

“the Afghan people were ready for a strong international role that would do away with both warlord and Taliban rule... But... the process would be led not by genuine representatives of the Afghan people, but by a group of mostly rapacious individuals.”

Frances Vendrell, Former UN Envoy for Afghanistan

“Over 15 years the West has believed that trading justice for security, and human rights for counter-terrorism was possible – but every time human rights have been ignored, this has created more terrorists.”

Farea Al-Muslimi, Visiting Scholar, Carnegie Middle East



Opposition protests in Sana’a, Yemen in 2011. Elite-level corruption has been one of the major drivers of conflict in Yemen. For instance, under the Saleh regime the nation’s primary institution for tackling corruption – the Central Organisation for Control and Auditing – was used by Saleh to control political opponents rather than to tackle Yemen’s deep-seated corruption problems.
© OBINNA ANYADIKE/IRIN

After years of degradation by kleptocratic elites, large swathes of **Yemen** now lack electricity, water, gas, healthcare and education. Precious few actors within Yemen are prepared to address key drivers of conflict in the public interest. The state has long failed to play a constructive role in addressing the drivers of its instability and poverty, and is crumbling in the face of multiple armed rebellions as a consequence.

Since serious terror threats emerged in Yemen in 2000, the West has invested significantly in counter-terror and stabilisation. Alongside direct military action, Western actors backed the Yemeni state’s efforts to fight, prosecute or punish terrorists, and gave capacity-building support to institutions, hoping to address the weakness of a fragile but willing state. But Yemen’s corrupt and authoritarian ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh was uninterested in effective governing institutions and cemented international backing by allowing al-Qaeda to regroup from 2006. In response, foreign backers led by the UK pledged US\$8 billion in aid to help maintain stability. The US alone spent over \$600 million on security assistance to the regime. Playing host to anti-Western militants had thus become a lucrative endeavour, and external pressure to reform melted away.

By providing material support and training to security actors implicated in grand corruption, torture, violence against civilians, and repression of political protests and free speech, the West abandoned its core principles in Yemen. Although prior to 2011 security institutions supported to achieve counter-terror objectives were rarely deployed outside Sana’a, they were used by former President Saleh to bolster and retain his family’s grip on power during the 2011 uprising. At that time both the Republican

Guard and Central Security Forces committed serious human rights violations. Such abuses deepened grievances against both the state and its foreign backers, and predictably fuelled rebellions. Meanwhile, development and statebuilding efforts foundered because donors lacked a strategy to build political will among the shadowy, elite figures who actually wielded the power to improve governance.

The West did support Saleh’s removal and pushed for greater political inclusion from 2011. However, deals made in the post-Saleh transition ultimately entrenched the same kleptocratic elite whose behaviour was driving Yemen into the ground – and Saleh was allowed to remain in Yemen with impunity to wreak further havoc.²⁷ Mounting public grievances fed into rebellions by Houthis, Southern secessionists, tribes, AQAP/AAS and IS. The short-term instinct to reinforce state-led stability ultimately multiplied the instability it was intended to suppress – while Yemen’s institutions decayed to the point where peaceful transition has proved impossible.

While the West has supported injustice and gravely harmed Yemen’s people to combat al-Qaeda, AQAP positioned itself as a “lightning rod for entrenched grievances” by criticising the abusive and corrupt Yemeni state and providing services to the public in some locations.²⁸ However the West approaches al-Qaeda, sustainable peace in Yemen cannot be achieved without much greater attention to addressing the people’s grievances.

“partisan agendas that constitute threats to peace and security”.²⁶ Al-Shabaab poses a real threat to the FGS and sub-national administrations, but these counterproductive behaviours are gravely endangering long-term stability. Western actors have continuously failed to adequately address such allegations of corruption effectively.

“While [al-Shabaab are on the Foreign Terrorist Organisation] lists, the [Somali] federal government benefits because they have a huge wildcard that they can play at will. No one recognises that al-Shabaab represent genuine concerns of people.”

Somali civil society representative – Saferworld interview, Mogadishu, 10 November 2014.

RETHINKING PARTNER RELATIONS

‘Terrorists’ are seldom the only problem in conflict contexts. Lasting peace in contexts like Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen will prove elusive as long as regional ‘partners’ continue to play cynical or abusive roles. The West needs to find effective ways of challenging damaging behaviour and encouraging constructive contributions.

In **Afghanistan**, the US ‘partnership’ with Pakistan has been problematic. Pakistan receives significant US military and other assistance, but due to a range of political and strategic reasons, elements within the Pakistan government (including its intelligence directorate and the military) have at times supported the Taliban and failed to act against al-Qaeda. At the same time, the Pakistan government has also supported peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The US-Pakistan alliance has therefore been contradictory in terms of achieving stability in Afghanistan. Finding logistical partners for the Afghan intervention also sometimes led the US to work with authoritarian governments in Central Asia, risking negative impacts on governance dynamics and conflict throughout the Afghan neighbourhood.

In **Yemen** and the wider region, short-term energy, security and economic interests have locked the West into support for Saudi Arabia. In 2015–2016, the US and UK gave arms, advice, logistical and political support to the regional military intervention to repel the Houthis and reinstate the Hadi regime. However, backing Saudi Arabia to play out its rivalry with Iran in Yemen has been an unmitigated disaster – failing militarily while causing tremendous human suffering and escalating the conflict for the long term. As Yemenis grow angrier about external violence, they become more likely to reject the violent reinstatement of a repressive and corrupt political order – including through further transnational militancy. Yemen exemplifies how Saudi foreign policy, including the export of fundamentalist ideologies and reinforcement of authoritarian and illegitimate governance, has not served to contain terror and instability – but rather to exacerbate them.

WESTERN ENGAGEMENT IN THE GULF

SHARED OBJECTIVES?

THE RATIONALE

“To shift the military balance ... in favor of our Gulf partners... DOD has approved more than \$75 billion in U.S. arms sales to GCC states since 2007. These sales [...] are worth nearly as much as those made... totally in the previous 15 years.... These are the most advanced capabilities we have ever provided [...] to this region. [...] our partners in the region, are staring down the same threats [...].”

Then-US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, December 2013²⁹

THE COST

“Our biggest problem was our allies... the Saudis, the Emirates, etc ... They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands of tonnes of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad.”

US Vice President Joe Biden, October 2014³⁰

“It has been an ongoing challenge to persuade Saudi officials to treat terrorist financing ... as a strategic priority [...] donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide.”

Then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, December 2010³¹

ARMS SALES: PROFIT AND LOSS

“We should be at the forefront of this market, supporting British jobs and British allies, and that’s why last week, in the Gulf, I was pushing for new contracts for Typhoon jets worth billions of pounds and thousands of jobs. That’s vital new business for Britain. And I make no apology for going out there and trying to help win it.”

UK Prime Minister David Cameron, November 2012³²

“the UK has... knowledge that weapons or related items exported to Saudi Arabia would be used in future attacks directed against civilian objects or civilians [...], or in the commission of war crimes in Yemen [...] it should halt with immediate effect all authorisations and transfers of relevant weapons and items to Saudi Arabia, capable of being used in the conflict in Yemen.”

Legal Opinion by Prof Philip Sands (Queen’s Counsel) et al, December 2015³³

“our estimate is roughly two thirds of the civilian casualties – around 2800 killed civilians... were reportedly killed by coalition airstrikes.”

Rupert Coleville, Spokesman, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, discussing the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, January 2016³⁴

COUNTER-TERROR VS HUMAN RIGHTS

“Sometimes we have to balance our need to speak to them about human rights issues with immediate concerns that we have in terms of countering terrorism or dealing with regional stability.”

President Obama, January 2015³⁵

“... we continue to believe that the UK’s ability to influence reform and best practice will be most effective if we are cooperating on counter-terrorism.”

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, November 2012³⁶

“the mass execution of 47 people in a single day, including Shia Muslim cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, sent shockwaves across the region.[...] the authorities have used the 2014 counter-terror law and the Kingdom’s notorious “counter-terror” court, [...] to systematically clamp down on all forms of activism... This is at a time when Saudi Arabia has stepped up its horrendous execution spree with at least 151 people executed between January and November 2015.”

Amnesty International, January 2016³⁷

“Have we become an aircraft carrier?... This huge military presence hasn’t translated into something positive on issues like democracy.”

Fara Abdillahi Miguil, Chairman of the Djibouti Human Rights League⁴⁷

“Everything is getting militarized all in the name of fighting terrorism.”

Kenyan civil society representative



Aerial View of Kismayo, South Somalia, just after it fell to the SNA, AMISOM and Ras Kimboni forces in 2012. Since then the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia/Eritrea has alleged that Kenyan actors and the Ras Kamboni militia have exported charcoal worth millions of dollars in violation of a UN export ban. © UN PHOTO/STUART PRICE

In **Somalia**, regional actors such as Kenya and Uganda have leveraged Western reliance upon them for the execution of counter-terror and stabilisation objectives to support their own interests. Despite the UN imposing an export ban on charcoal, Kenyans have allegedly profited from the charcoal trade, thereby boosting the finances of al-Shabaab, who control key transport routes into the port city of Kismayo.³⁸ More recently, a report alleged that the Kenyan Defence Forces, the Interim Juba Administration and al-Shabaab were all profiting from facilitating and taxing the Somali sugar trade, valued at \$200–\$400 million annually.³⁹ Western diplomats’ protests against such behaviour to the Kenyan government have had little impetus because Western forces need access to military facilities both in Kenya and Kismayo. Needless to say, tolerating Somalia’s war economy for the sake of security priorities could prove counterproductive.⁴⁰

In 2012, Uganda threatened to withdraw from “all regional peace efforts” including AMISOM in response to a leaked United Nations Security Council (UNSC) report accusing the Ugandan government of providing support to armed rebel groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁴¹ The report was subsequently quashed and the President

of the UNSC praised Uganda’s “significant role in the maintenance of peace and security in several countries, particularly in Somalia”.⁴²

Such trade-offs are also evident in other countries – such as Djibouti, where the US has been accused of failing to champion human rights in order to maintain military bases for counter-terror operations in Somalia and Yemen.⁴³

Another problematic aspect of regional partnerships focused on tackling al-Shabaab is the way the counter-terror agenda has been adopted and used by regional actors such as Kenya, leading to outcomes that are counterproductive to the goal of ending conflict in Somalia. While the regional counter-terror agenda has to some extent emerged organically in response to attacks by al-Shabaab, Western actors have strongly encouraged these efforts by providing significant funds. In Kenya, Western support has come despite considerable evidence of abuses perpetrated by Kenyan security forces in the name of fighting terrorism.⁴⁴ Such abuses have been described as a ‘decisive’ factor in pushing Kenyans to join organisations like (or linked to) al-Shabaab⁴⁵ and has in turn enabled al-Shabaab to pursue an agenda that transcends the Somali conflict more easily.⁴⁶

WORKING WITH SOCIETIES TO ACHIEVE JUST AND LASTING PEACE

In all three contexts, the pursuit of quick wins via questionable partners and top-down technical efforts to build institutions has undermined much-needed, long-term engagement with wider society. Support for the public and civil society is needed to break cycles of violence, redress injustice and fix corrupt, weak institutions. Engaging with society to achieve constructive change is a long-term, challenging endeavour upon which external actors desperately need to improve their record.

Before the 2001 invasion, **Afghan** society had suffered from decades of war. Amid deep divisions, it had struggled to establish representative governance structures capable of delivering services. In such contexts, the emergence of a peaceful state inevitably takes time, and the ability of international actors to influence change can be limited. Quick results were unlikely, and the focus should have been placed more strongly on long-term support for development, peacebuilding and governance, led by a broad and inclusive constituency of Afghan players.

Supporting more accountable leaders who are genuinely interested in peace is a difficult task. In complex conflict environments like Afghanistan, democratic, peaceful actors are often in short supply, are difficult to identify and may take time to emerge. The empowerment of warlords and their militias for security purposes has undermined the potential for peaceful actors to emerge as well as the central state's ability to bring sub-national actors under control.⁴⁸

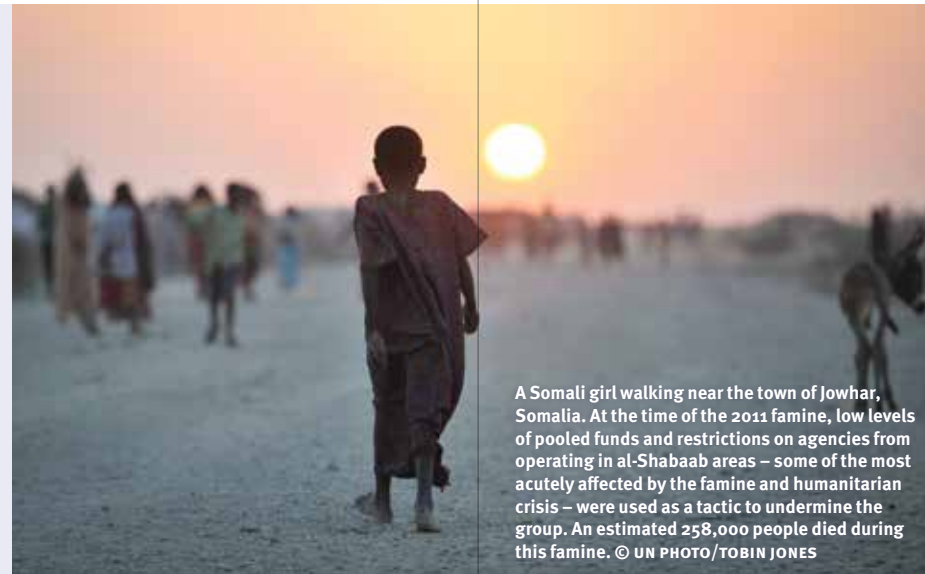
In Helmand, the UK deployment initially worked with a governor who was close to President Karzai, and fairly adept at maintaining alliances and accommodations with different tribes. However, he also had links with the poppy industry and was implicated in the drugs trade and broader corruption. Yet when the governor was removed, this led to a weaker provincial government which in turn gave the Taliban the space to reposition itself.⁴⁹ This example suggests that compromises can sometimes be necessary to move beyond violence. If so, the utmost effort must still be made to support gradual, constructive change, not only through tackling narco-networks, but also by offering people viable economic alternatives, and supporting society to apply pressure for justice and accountability.

While there were attempts to engage with alternative local power holders,

these were *ad hoc* and faced many challenges: long years of war had changed local structures, and many traditional leaders were replaced by unaccountable and illegitimate warlords.⁵⁰ Yet some would say that the structures created by the National Solidarity Programme showed promise in terms of creating locally legitimate and accountable governance arrangements.

A *jirga* is a traditional Pashtun assembly for making decisions by consensus. The international community supported two important *Loya Jirgas* (for making national decisions) at the time of the Bonn negotiations in 2001 and again ten years later. This was one way of getting input from a broader representation of society. Yet truly inclusive peace processes need to reach beyond tribal leaders into marginalised constituencies, especially in rural areas, and including women, young people, the diaspora and religious leaders. Past efforts have often been tokenistic and short-term. Negotiating with and resourcing corrupt elites in effect excludes other social forces from emerging and asserting a voice and vision for the future. Engaging local *shura/jirgas* at the start of the international intervention may have generated quick impacts on local conflict and justice issues and opened up space for conversations about the future. At the same time, early interventions to strengthen the rural economy and agriculture may have helped to improve people's livelihoods and give them a stake in peace.

Future engagement needs to focus on initiatives that bring society into the government-led peace process, for instance building on initiatives by the Afghanistan Civil Society Organisations Network for Peace (ACSONP), the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other civil society actors to discuss and agree on local and national peace priorities (see *box on p.11*).⁵¹



A Somali girl walking near the town of Jowhar, Somalia. At the time of the 2011 famine, low levels of pooled funds and restrictions on agencies from operating in al-Shabaab areas – some of the most acutely affected by the famine and humanitarian crisis – were used as a tactic to undermine the group. An estimated 258,000 people died during this famine. © UN PHOTO/TOBIN JONES

Alongside the focus on terrorism and the military-first approach in **Somalia**, statebuilding and stabilisation efforts have been procedural and top-down – supporting the establishment of institutions (particularly Somali security actors and interim administrations) while neglecting the concerns of Somali citizens.

Pressure to complete critical peacebuilding and statebuilding processes in haste has resulted in tensions and conflict. Most recently this has led to several rounds of violence in Galkayo between the Puntland administration and the Interim Galmudug Administration. Similar violence has been seen in Guri'el, Baido and Kismayo over the establishment of all three current interim administrations in southern and central Somalia. In all these cases, the external drive to establish authorities has fuelled instability.

Processes of political accommodation or negotiation have been in and of themselves insufficient to address a legacy of violence and mistrust among many communities. Absent from most of these processes of political reconciliation is a wider focus on social reconciliation in

“The transition overlooked local grievances, which drove most conflict in Yemen. No solution can be achieved without taking into account the views and needs of local people.”

Nadwa al-Dawsari, Senior Non-Resident Fellow, Project on Middle East Democracy



An Afghan community group set free white doves to celebrate the International Day of Peace in Khost, Afghanistan, 2007. © UN PHOTO/KHOST OFFICE

In **Yemen**, the failure of narrow objectives (combating terrorists and 'Iran-backed' rebels) illustrates the need for a broader, longer-term strategy to get to a lasting and just peace accepted and upheld by the people of Yemen. Only through a broader focus on addressing what drives conflict in Yemen can the terror problem be resolved.

Approaching Yemen with a predetermined view that AQAP/AAS and the Houthis are spoilers to be defeated or marginalised at all costs has obscured the need for elites, political parties and state structures to respond to public anger and reform the state. Belligerent approaches have left little room for creative experimentation with alternatives that could help end violence.

Because the US backed the regime, the Houthis became explicitly anti-American, and the ranks of both the Houthis and AQAP/AAS swelled with support from aggrieved Yemenis. Those currently choosing violence to pursue their

interests in Yemen must have options to renounce violence and pursue their interests through political channels. Yemen's youth, women and rural population must also have a stake in shaping a more just and inclusive future. To help a constituency for peace to emerge in the country, external actors must engage with a wider group of actors – outside Sana'a and across Yemeni society, including in the South.

Allowing transformation to occur on Yemenis' terms will require much more support to human rights defenders, moderate political, religious and tribal actors, civil society groups, community voices and local development initiatives – both within any future peace talks and over the long term. If Western actors explain that this is what they want and back this with their deeds, it could attract popular backing from moderate Yemenis – or at least reduce wholesale resentment of the West in Yemen.



Anti-government protesters demand change in Sana'a, Yemen in 2011. © OBINNA ANYADIKE/IRIN

“Reconciliation doesn't happen in Somalia – it happens in Arta, Cairo, London.”

Saferworld interview, Mogadishu, 8 November 2014.

THE WAY FORWARD

Counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding efforts have had significant drawbacks in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. However, the lessons from these contexts suggest a constructive way forward to sustainable peace and security.

FOCUSING STRATEGY ON ACHIEVING PEACE – AND RELYING LESS ON MILITARY APPROACHES

- Western engagement with conflict contexts needs to explore alternatives to the use of force wherever possible.
- Because 'outsourcing' the use of force to partners can cause suffering, resentment and conflict, partners must also explore all possible alternatives to violence.
- Military intervention should only be undertaken as part of an overall political strategy for achieving peace by addressing conflict drivers and avoiding violence where possible.
- If force is used, it is important to adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law, in particular by doing the utmost to avoid civilian casualties.
- Accountability for the use of force is critical, and any wrongdoing must be openly acknowledged, investigated and prosecuted.
- Using the police, courts and prisons to interdict violent behaviour, in line with human rights principles, is an important alternative to the use of military force and rendition.
- Military action and security engagement should prioritise people's security needs ahead of national, regional and international security goals. The West must do more to demonstrate to the public in conflict contexts that their security and rights matter.
- Arms, equipment and capacity support should not be given to security actors unless the provider has a high and explicit level of confidence that the assistance will be used by the stated end-user for a pre-agreed purpose. When support is provided, more robust arrangements must be made to monitor and prevent its diversion for unintended purposes.

BEING TOUGHER ON ABUSE, CORRUPTION AND BAD GOVERNANCE

- Because anti-Western militants feed on public experiences of abuse, injustice and corruption, it is critical for the West to demonstrate its unambiguous commitment to justice and human rights to the public in countries experiencing conflict.
- To avoid fuelling conflict, all forms of external support for corrupt or abusive actors need to be more carefully thought through in order to avoid reinforcing negative dynamics and to provide meaningful incentives to improve governance.
- In contexts where partner governments fail to demonstrate commitment to make progress on inclusion, rights, corruption and public wellbeing, donors should avoid reinforcing damaging behaviours by exploring alternatives to channelling funds through state institutions.
- In such contexts, assistance can be provided directly to people through non-governmental actors or other actors and institutions that are opposed to political violence and committed to public goods. These can include NGOs and tribal, informal or subnational entities, such as local health and education ministries. As with other partners, the agenda and legitimacy of such actors should also be carefully examined.
- Security strategies need to be consistent with a long-term peace strategy – enabling rather than undermining transformation in state-society relations. Providing security and justice to conflict-affected people should take precedence over other national, regional and international security objectives. Supporting *society* to reshape security institutions can be as important as supporting security institutions themselves – and checks and balances are vital across the system to address abuse and corruption.
- Reform priorities such as anti-corruption and effective service delivery are long-term endeavours. Beyond use of force or the provision of capacity assistance, careful application of sanctions and penalties on those profiting from grand corruption or using violence for political ends can incentivise reform and strengthen those pressing for peaceful change.



Peace doves fly over the grounds of the historic Hazrat-i-Ali mosque, in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. The doves were part of a campaign launched by UNAMA in observance of the International Day of Peace. © UN PHOTO/HELENA MÜLKERNS

RETHINKING PARTNER RELATIONS

- Rather than assuming that groups designated as 'terrorists' are always the biggest threat to peace, Western actors need to understand how all actors' motives and behaviours are impacting on conflicts, and factor this into their strategies for achieving peace.
- As part of these strategies, Western actors must do more to discourage violence, repression and injustice and to incentivise respect for human rights and democratisation by regional actors.
- Considering the strong economic and military ties between the West and its regional partners, greater influence is available to Western actors than is typically exerted. Given the strategic importance of stemming the tide of global conflict, Western actors should abandon or significantly cool alliances with regional actors that are unjust and fuel terror, and abstain from irresponsible supply of arms and military expertise in support of regional actors who violate international law or fuel conflict.

The **Afghan People's Dialogue for Peace's 10-point plan for sustainable peace** provides a useful example of the priorities that people identify when asked for their perspective on conflict.

- 1 Promote responsive state institutions and tackle corruption
- 2 Strengthen security institutions and curb violations by them
- 3 Disarm and disempower illegal armed groups and other pro-government militias
- 4 Promote human rights, rule of law and tackle impunity
- 5 Promote women's rights and their role in peacebuilding
- 6 Enable youth through fostering job creation and strengthening the education system
- 7 Realise equitable social and economic development
- 8 Ensure inclusivity in the peace process
- 9 Strengthen community-based dispute resolution mechanisms
- 10 Neutralise spoilers of peace (including neighbouring states)

These priorities strongly echo the lessons from all three case studies and underline the need to work with societies in new ways to take the agenda forward.

WORKING WITH SOCIETIES TO ACHIEVE JUST AND LASTING PEACE

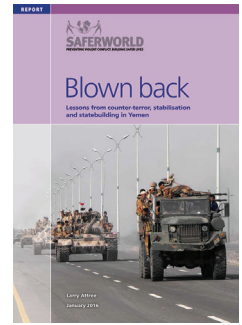
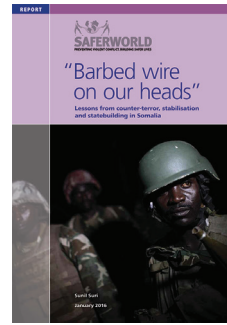
- Peaceful states can only be crafted by strong societies. In addition to challenging abuse and repression, external actors must deepen their analysis of all actors, maintain openness to dialogue and engage consistently in support of human rights defenders, moderate political, religious and tribal actors, civil society groups, community voices and local development initiatives.
- Justice and reconciliation initiatives are crucial priorities for overcoming divisions and conflict. They can help improve community-level relationships and link local progress to national peacemaking processes.
- Collective efforts to discuss, understand and address the drivers of conflict at all levels should underpin the forward agenda. Rather than being imposed, authorities and institutions should emerge from dialogue in which society is supported to have a stake.
- Inclusive locally led processes are thus a priority. They are unlikely to conform to external templates or timetables. They should include all sections of society and provide the foundation for a common peace agenda. This requires carefully supporting progressive initiatives that emerge from the context, being patient about the time required to agree a way ahead, and supporting initiatives with experimentation and creativity.
- Political settlements need to be inclusive. Dialogue between all actors – even with apparent 'spoilers' – is always worthwhile. Careful sanctions and incentives should be developed to encourage all actors to engage in peace processes and to work in support of people's rights and interests. Compromises are sometimes necessary to end violence, but they should not sacrifice the rights and prospects of the wider population.
- Before and beyond peace negotiations, consistent support for people's voices – promoting incremental improvements in inclusion and justice – is crucial for the long term. Even when they question counter-terror and stabilisation agendas, it is crucial that international actors assiduously ensure that people's voices are heard by all conflict actors – including their national and regional allies.

CONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVES: SAFERWORLD'S WORK

In recent years Western actors including the US, UK, and the EU have put responses to terrorism, violent extremism and instability among their foremost priorities. Yet, despite the investment of huge resources – primarily military, but also financial, human and political – the results of this action have been mixed at best.

There has not been sufficiently full and frank public debate about the lessons of past engagement in countries where there a global terror threat has been identified, nor about how future engagement could be improved in the interests of building lasting peace founded on the fulfilment of human rights. However, failure to recognise and pursue effective peacebuilding alternatives to these approaches could condemn Western

actors and their partners to a vicious circle that they can ill afford: multiplying instability wherever they attempt to reduce it, and in response becoming ever more belligerent in the face of renewed threats, while compromising their commitments to democracy, justice and human rights. In the discussion paper, *Dilemmas of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding* Saferworld provided a review of global evidence on the impacts of existing approaches, and suggested a number of constructive directions for improved policy.



This briefing introduces three in-depth reports on Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. Together, they explore the issues identified in the initial discussion paper through detailed examination of specific country contexts from a peacebuilding perspective – in order to stimulate further debate on the lessons learnt.

These reports can be found at www.saferworld.org.uk/resources

NOTES

- As of 15 December 2015, these countries include Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Yemen. Source: Intel Center (2015), 'Islamic State's 43 global affiliates: Interactive world map', 15 December (<http://intelcenter.com/maps/is-affiliates-map.html#gs.apzj4uc>).
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