

THE WIDER WORLD

The Stabilization Dilemma

By Diane Chido

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In discussing the devastation in Gaza and across Ukraine, a friend asked me what will happen with all that wreckage? Tremblor, a firm that specializes in post-disaster cleanup, notes, “Timely cleaning and management of this debris and waste is crucial for post-disaster recovery and relief efforts. However, in most countries, disaster-induced waste management is often overlooked as a critical service during the recovery process.”^[i]

The U.S. military has entire white papers devoted to the problem of “rubble” in both conflict-caused and natural disaster-caused responses. Rubble can block roadways, overwhelm wastewater systems, and its disposal can be a Herculean task.

Dealing with this part of the aftermath of war or large-scale disasters is only the first part of the process of reconstruction and stabilization. If it is not done properly, it can cause future environmental catastrophes and immediate threats of widespread disease. If things do not progress to the population’s satisfaction, restoring basic services and generally getting life back to something predictable and “normal,” conflict can arise, causing new problems such as popular unrest. In already destabilized societies, it can lead to government overthrow or civil war, especially if most people feel as if only a select few are receiving the care and infrastructure development needed.

There are also “conflict entrepreneurs” who can intentionally foment trouble. They see an opportunity to use their ideology or other influence to create new conflicts and, in some cases, criminal groups may decide to support conflict as it

can be highly lucrative. In the case of criminal gangs emerging in the post-Soviet period, many had been black marketeers who realized there was “a killing” now to be made in more activities than selling counterfeit jeans and videotapes.

Some were paramilitary organizations formed by comrades in the Soviet Army who fought together in Afghanistan or Chechnya. Many others arose from ethnic groups banding together, such as the long-established Georgian mafia or other disenfranchised peoples in the ethnocentrically Russian Soviet sphere who were pushed into the fringes to make a living through illegal trade or other illicit means. In 2014, Russian investigators reported that at least 883 ethnic gangs had been identified around the country, many of whom, but not all, engaged only in muggings and low-level, nonviolent crimes.

In Czechoslovakia, when the government was one of the world’s largest arms dealers, there was relative stability in the market, but when it opened to free market competition across the region, small arms flooded into developing countries without consideration of the widespread violence they would enable.

Freewheeling capitalism in the style of the U.S. “Wild West” seized Eurasia, filling the pockets of these new entrepreneurs and the corrupt officials that enabled the goods and money to flow undeterred. Not only did the Soviet and East European “iron curtain” dissipate, but as official maps were redrawn with hundreds of new borders, actual border control all but disappeared.

As transnational crime became more “organized,” with sometimes unlikely partnerships developed to ensure shipments arrived at distant markets, it required a degree of trust achieved through threat or use of force, reputation, or shared kinship, and ethnic, religious, or other identity.

The traits exhibited by criminal leaders are common to all entrepreneurs, and it is possible to imagine the edges of the law occasionally skirted by young mavericks willing to get even legal enterprises off the ground. The difference is often the environment in which these young minds grow. Every successful criminal group needs crimes to commit and security forces to protect goods, leaders, activity locations, and routes, but it also needs capable accountants, logisticians, lawyers, planners, sales staff, facilitators, and networks of corruptible officials in to ensure their businesses run smoothly. Highly skilled staff are easy to hire in unstable climates when professional positions are scarce in the legitimate world, and often the criminal world pays much better.

The environment determines whether young people are taught the rule of law and the paramount importance of education as well as some connections to get a start. Otherwise, an unstable, lawless environment of violence and poverty can lead to a life of crime.

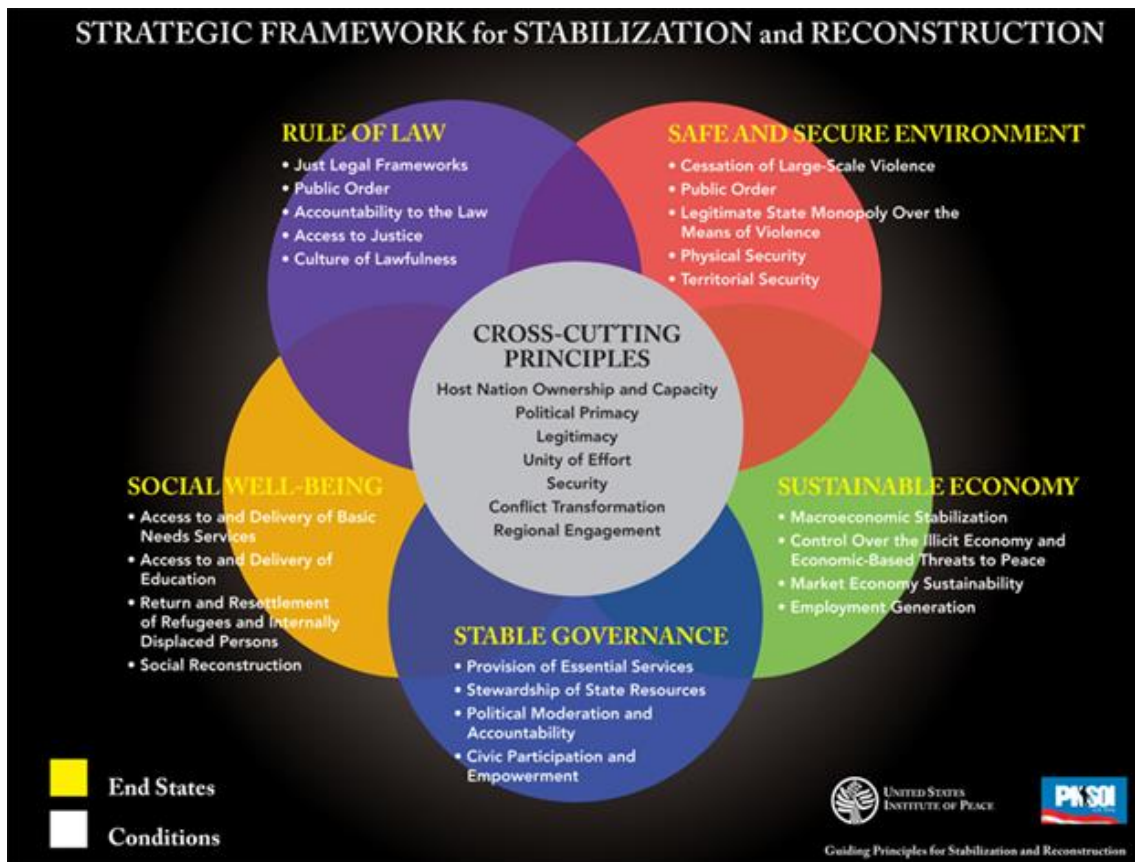
In 2014, the Islamic State managed to recruit young Tunisians with chemistry and physics backgrounds to go to Syria to work in a university laboratory, rather than drive a taxi or run a fruit stand, due to little licit economic opportunity. As a result, many promising young men made bombs instead of curing cancer.^[ii]

To manage the disarray that can take over after disaster or conflict, the U.S. government uses principles developed over decades of post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction, many of which were initially learned in the aftermath of World War II, when it took decades to rebuild Europe after years of bombing. In that case, however, the rebuilding of societies and social structures was perhaps even more important than rebuilding towns, as positive forces were needed to replace Nazi ideology. Some, like British spy Kim Philby, believed the answer was communism, so he worked with Moscow against his own government for decades to support the Soviet cause against fascism.

The Western powers led by the U.S. focused on a democratic and capitalistic approach with its imposition of military governance across Germany, Italy, and Japan. This model was not unlike the Union Army's military occupation of the southern United States after the Civil War, which lasted in various forms until 1877 when the last troops were pulled out as part of a corrupt bargain involving the election of Rutherford B. Hayes. Efforts there came long before the *Guiding Principles of Reconstruction and Stabilization* were developed in 2009 by the U.S. Army's Peace Keeping and Stabilization Institute and the U.S. Institute for Peace,^[iii] but followed the same basic recipe.

In 2018, I gave a series of lectures at the Jefferson Educational Society on these principles, looking at them through a lens of Erie County's loss of manufacturing starting in the 1970s due in part to the end of wartime production needs. In the new context of global conflict we are witnessing today, this is a useful guide to think about how to move forward when the killing stops.

The basic tenets of the *Principles* are illustrated in this "daisy" graphic and are composed of ensuring five "endstates:" a Safe and Secure Environment, Stable Governance, Rule of Law, Economic Development, and Social Well-Being.

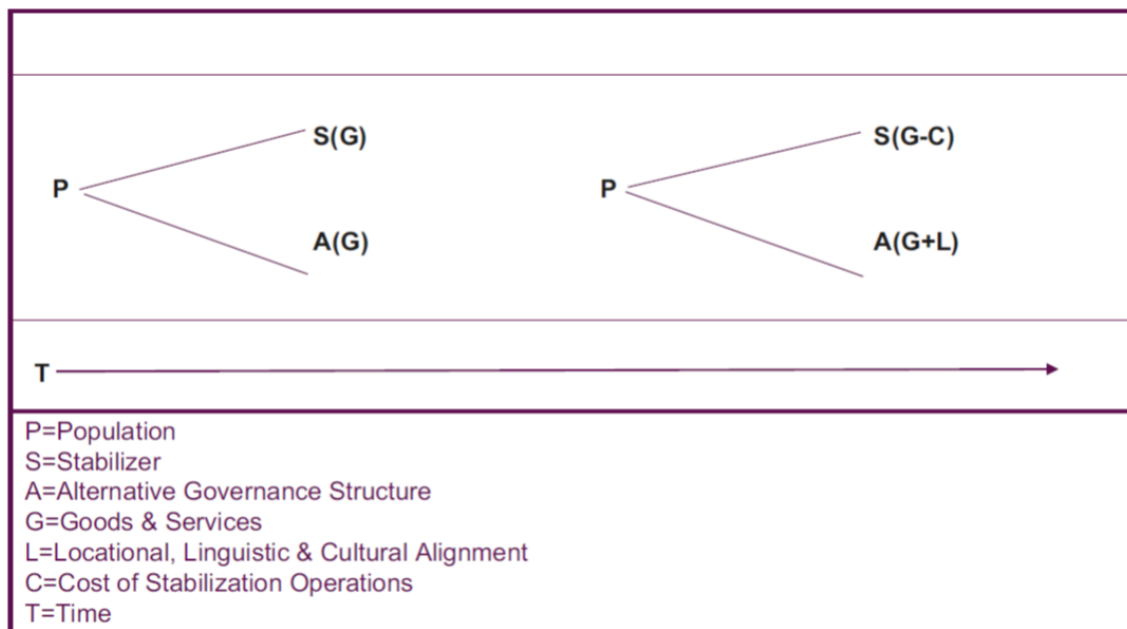


Strategic Framework for Reconstruction and Stabilization

The “conditions” needed to achieve these outcomes are also listed in the graphic. The problem with this tidy description of massive undertakings that can take decades to achieve is that they are not linear. You must have a safe and secure environment to achieve any of the other four, so clearly that comes first. However, that part of the process continues throughout the stabilization process and must be carefully managed. They may have powerful constituencies that must be brought into the process to ensure they do not just throw bombs from outside the tent.

This brings us to the center of the graphic, the “Cross-Cutting Principles” that must be central to all five lines of effort. Chief of these is referred to as “political primacy,” meaning that it all comes down to politics at the federal, regional, and local levels and even in terms of the geographic neighborhood and what other national actors may want to see emerge on their borders. The process is complex and dynamic. People’s expectations must be carefully managed because, as Emma Sky, political adviser to General Odierno in Iraq noted, “Once people feel safe enough to come out of their homes, they will expect the schools to be open, the shops to be functioning and full of goods, and they will need jobs.”^[iv]

This is a tenuous moment when things can go horribly wrong if the people's expectations are not fulfilled and the Stabilization Trap can emerge as shown in the diagram.^[v] As “the Pottery Barn” argument frequently attributed to Colin Powell (then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) about Iraq during the First Gulf War goes, “You break it, you own it.”^[vi] Once you engage on this path of trying to stabilize another country, you become responsible for everything that happens and everyone involved. The graphic below illustrates this trap, with time (T) being on the side of those spoilers.



Stabilization Trap

The spoilers are considered to be an Alternative Governance Structure (A), or how they want the country organized as opposed to the way the domestic government and the Stabilizer want it. The Population (P) is central to peaceful outcomes. This is the alternative's territory, their region, or their country, they are not going anywhere, and they have the attributes that can make them more effective than we are: Locational, Linguistic, and Cultural Alignment (L) with the local population to push the Stabilizer out of the environment. Domestic constituencies in the Stabilizer's home country will not stand for unending operations.

The Stabilizer and the Alternative both offer Goods & Services (G), all of the elements included in the Stabilization graphic, such as security, laws, food, infrastructure, economic support. The Stabilizer's Resources (R), however, like time, are finite and diminishing from the moment the stabilization operations

begin. Thus, the Population receives G from both the Stabilizer and the Alternative, but as costs and time increase, the locational attributes of the Alternative become the more valuable asset.

The document governing U.S. involvement in any post-conflict stabilization effort is the 2018 *Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR)*^[vii] signed by both then-Secretaries of Defense and State. It essentially states that State and the U.S. Agency for International Development are the lead actors in these operations, but due to the security needs, the Department of Defense will take the initial active lead in consultation with these other two agencies. This is called a “whole of government” or “interagency” approach. The real issue that is unspoken in the document is that the Defense Department budget is ten times that of State Department, thus only it has the resources and manpower to get things done, but State will have an active advisory role.

This all means that before the U.S. and Europe embark upon a plan to rebuild Ukraine, all of these factors must be considered. Support is already waning among some Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives to support Ukraine’s war effort. Will these same members of Congress be willing to devote billions of new dollars to the massive reconstruction effort required to achieve peace and security in this fractured land?

Also, support for Ukraine may be more complicated for those in the U.S. State Department who want to begin planning stabilization operations because the military has to have a presence in-country for anything to work. Even as NATO countries support Ukraine’s military efforts, if any of them place active-duty military “boots on the ground,” we will have direct war with Russia. Thus, only rudimentary planning can take place until the shooting stops and the war is declared over.

In Gaza, where the humanitarian crisis has already reached famine proportions, will the Arab states be willing to work together with Israel to reach a mutually acceptable plan forward and be willing to relocate traumatized refugees to their own countries from which many may never leave? Will they, especially the wealthy Gulf states, be willing to invest the billions of dollars needed to rebuild Gaza and work with Israel to ensure a “safe and secure environment” with “social well-being” for the Palestinians who will remain there?

The traps are already laid for any entities seeking to stabilize these two lands in the form of Russia in Europe and Iran in the Middle East. These well-resourced and interested spoilers are already positioned geographically and with highly effective networks and partners to enforce the alternative governance structures they want to see as the outcome of the current conflicts.

Thus, rubble is a huge challenge, but once it is cleared, the real work begins.

References

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