STABILIZATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN A DISORDERED MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA:

Lessons from a joint Brookings-World Bank project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Brookings Institution and the World Bank engaged in a two-year partnership to study stabilization and post-conflict development approaches in the region. Political upheaval and conflict have engulfed much of the Middle East and North Africa, especially since the uprisings of 2011 and subsequent regime crackdowns, leaving an urgent need to outline priorities for donor states and international organizations working in the region.

This paper evaluates past approaches to stabilization and post-conflict development in the region, analyzing the conceptual and institutional obstacles that have sometimes hindered their effective formulation and implementation. It also highlights ongoing trends in these fields — such as the increasing understanding of the need for military and civilian actors to cooperate closely at all levels of these efforts, as the roles of each are interdependent — and encourages their continuation. It considers four innovative approaches to Middle Eastern and North African conflict contexts — aiming for "good-enough" governance, going "small, local, and slow," employing a venture capital model, and co-opting existing governance structures — exploring their relative strengths and weaknesses in various contexts. It then proposes two tools — conflict mapping and dialogue — that can effectively aid international efforts in most contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The challenges

Twin crises of security and governance have manifested in much of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), particularly in those countries engulfed by conflict. First, and most evident, a collapse has occurred of the security and order essential to citizens' livelihoods and their access to basic tools for human development. The inability of states to maintain a monopoly on the use of force has led to varying degrees of disorder. Non-state groups, many armed and some allied with state actors, dominate resource allocation and access to services in conflict environments, with severely negative impact on affected populations. Second, every Middle Eastern state has seen, to a degree, a breakdown in social trust, undermining the foundations for legitimate governance. This breakdown was spawned by unresolved grievances rooted in corruption, lack of opportunity, inequality, weak institutional capacities, and an absence of accountability. These factors drive perceptions of governmental partiality, inefficacy, and incompetence, thus further depriving the state of legitimacy. As fractured social trust has broken earlier social compacts, traditional social and political institutions may not be effective platforms for resolving either of these related crises.

Today, the levels of violence and displacement in Syria and Iraq are reduced from their peaks in 2014-2015, when the Islamic State group (IS) was at its territorial height. In a few countries, economies and politics have stabilized enough since the political upheaval of the 2011 uprisings to encourage the discussion of new initiatives to promote human development and economic flourishing. With the military defeat of IS, opportunities have emerged for greater peace and stability in Iraq. Morocco and Tunisia are embarking on reform programs for shared prosperity and greater accountability. Despite the prolonged stresses incurred receiving and caring for over one million refugees each, Lebanon and Jordan have avoided major violence and adroitly mobilized international assistance in their efforts to maintain human development for the displaced as well as their own national communities. Egypt has achieved a level of security and seeming political stability, but at the cost of severe repression, as noted by the Human Freedom Index.[1]

The overwhelmingly young demographics of the region's population remain a source of significant potential opportunity, which might be harnessed through visionary, ambitious projects — like a "moonshot" approach to the digital economy and educational reform programs — advocated in several states. Similarly, the United States recently launched a proposal for growth and development in the Palestinian territories and neighboring states that could proceed in an environment of negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace.[2]

Yet, without fundamental prerequisites — like property rights, equal justice, freedom of communication, essential regulatory frameworks, and government transparency — in place, advancing bold initiatives for private-sector growth, entrepreneurship, and digital economy will likely prove futile. While a number of regional states are taking some important steps to reform their macroeconomic situation, the launch pad for a moonshot is still lacking key foundations. Further, as the reaction from many quarters to the recent American proposals for Palestinian economic development demonstrated, ambitious plans for human and economic development in the context of conflict and unresolved political aspirations are unlikely to achieve their desired results. Under such conditions, these proposals may well risk reinforcing grievances, inequality, and exclusion, inciting yet further conflict.

Just as real constraints on human development and economic growth in the region demand attention, so does the danger that ill-informed or inadequate approaches to stabilization and development might recreate or reinforce drivers of conflict and fragility. The roots of the present regional crisis in a broken social contract between governments and citizens remind us that inequitable development and governance are themselves drivers of conflict.[3] It follows, and is reinforced by, two findings of this project.

First, efforts at stabilization, reconstruction, and development that do not assess the political, economic, and social power dynamics at every stage of planning and implementation may end up merely reconstructing the conditions of governance that helped to generate conflict in the first place. Incorporating this finding into peacebuilding and development efforts demands thorough analysis of the political economy, not only at the level of the conflict-affected state, but also at the regional and international levels. It also demands that both development and security actors understand and engage much more effectively with one another at each level.

Second, even presuming a comprehensive understanding of the context dynamics, a range of challenging circumstances have prevented the traditional tools of development and conflict resolution from finding purchase in the conflict countries. Such tools include "national dialogues," cease-fire negotiations, peacekeeping operations, international financial support for humanitarian needs, and ultimately reconstruction. The non-oil-producing governments hosting those displaced by conflict are at their fiscal limits. International support and coordination for resolving the conflicts, advancing security and governance for human development, and aiding the victims of displacement is wholly insufficient to the need. The global architecture forged after World War II to assist states in such circumstances has been unable to prevent, mitigate, or resolve the violence or enable a positive trajectory for human development in the region.

In such a time of turbulent regional transition, many questions remain. How can a state forge a durable social contract to build effective institutions for both stability and development? How can international approaches assist state institutions in managing competing demands produced by the twin crises of security and governance? How can state and international resources be mobilized, allocated, and best deployed to address these challenges? The Arab uprisings of 2011 and their aftermath underscore the urgent imperative to ask the right questions, recognize the underlying causes of instability of seemingly stable states, and forge new modalities to assist those that had not undertaken thorough revisions of their social contracts.

The joint Brookings-World Bank project

Prior to 2011, the World Bank Group's approach had been to do as much as possible to support inclusive growth, despite these aforementioned obstacles, using traditional instruments — investment projects, budget support, advisory services, and more systematic convening of development partners. Some of the interventions achieved results. But after the Arab uprisings revealed the extent to which developmental deficiencies themselves helped to generate political instability and violence, there was an urgent need to rethink the World Bank Group's strategic engagement in Middle East and North Africa. In response to regional events, in 2011 the World Bank Group introduced a strategy for the Middle East and North Africa based on four pillars: jobs, inclusion, governance, and private-sector growth.[4] In 2015, taking a cue from its 2011 World Development Report findings and recommendations on the security/development nexus, the World Bank Group devised an

expanded strategy to integrate into its work an understanding of the connections between governance, conflict, and development, and to orient its interventions to directly promote peace, social stability, opportunity, and shared prosperity in the MENA region.[5]

Launched in the summer of 2017, the World Bank and the Brookings Institution's two-year initiative continued the exploration of the challenges to stabilization and sustainable governance in today's Middle East and North Africa. To further promote insights and ideas for understanding the connections between security, development, governance, and stability in the region, we generated a set of discussion papers on various cases and issues, and convened three workshops with practitioners and scholars: on stabilization in Amman in July 2017, on governance in New York in September 2017, and on the security-development nexus in Washington in November 2018. A full list of the discussion papers and other publications associated with this project is appended to this report.

The period of this project witnessed dramatic events in the region, including: the military defeat of IS in Iraq and Syria at the hands of a U.S.-led coalition; the establishment of Assad government dominance over insurgents in Syria with the assistance of Russia and Iran; the intensification of the war in Yemen; the disappointing failure of efforts to end the conflict in Libya and coalesce domestic and international support around a central government; and the prolonged displacement of millions of refugees from Syria with attendant stress on their host communities. In the time after the workshops, long-serving presidents in Sudan and Algeria were removed from office, offering new possibilities for stability and inclusive development, but also growing concerns for human security and regional stability.

This paper offers findings based on discussions at these three workshops, analysis in the discussion papers, and findings from research reports generated out of our joint work. Our work focused on those states experiencing or recovering from conflict, but the lessons regarding the connections between security, governance, development, and conflict that we draw from these environments can also apply to states not currently undergoing major conflict, including those demonstrating evidence of fragility or instability that have not (or not yet) generated violence. We hope this paper can inform the work of international policymakers, development practitioners, security practitioners, and analysts as they continue to address the challenge of a deeply destabilized region.

This paper unfolds in four sections. The first explores the interests that drive actors' engagement in stabilization and reconstruction efforts in the conflict-ridden and post-conflict MENA states. Some of these actors are external to the region, and some internal; some are traditional donor or development actors struggling to adapt to a challenging environment, while others are new to such interventions. The mix of interests, relationships, and roles amongst these actors complicates the task of analysis and prescription. The second section provides an overview of the complex environment created by MENA states experiencing or emerging from conflict and then reviews two core components of analysis on which we focused in this project's workshops and papers: forging a new social contract, and the nexus between security and development. The third section reviews four alternative approaches that actors (such as donors and development institutions) who seek to promote security, governance, and development in the Middle East and North Africa might consider for their efforts, and weighs the relative strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. The fourth section lays out two additional components that our project suggests are important complements to any of these approaches to stabilization and development.

WHY ENGAGE: THE STAKES DRIVING INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE REGION

The Middle East and North Africa's twin crises of security and governance have contributed not only to immediate regional and international security threats, but more broadly to an undermining of the post-World War II order in which it was assumed that relative peace and more open global trade would be accompanied by steady economic, social, and political advances. As participants in our project expressed in papers and in discussions, the stakes in the MENA region's crises are high.

Two prominent characteristics define these twin MENA crises. First, while the legitimacy and function of state actors are diminishing, the role of non-state actors is rising. The September 11, 2001 attacks and their aftermath — especially the NATO mission in Afghanistan and counterterrorism military operations across the Middle East and North Africa — exposed a fragility and a high degree of unpredictability underlying the rule-based system of states. Security challenges emerged, not only from local and state actors and cross-border conflicts, but from transregional networks of non-state groups leveraging technological changes and peoples' grievances against states that were already bleeding legitimacy.

Second, the crises have formidable spillover effects beyond the region, which have induced negative reactions from Europe and the United States. Beyond the immediate human costs of violence and instability, the breakdown in the regional order is perceived as a clear and present danger by states outside the region. Global dependence on MENA energy resources mean that the region's crises threaten international markets and economic stability. States experience discomfiting economic, political, and social effects from large-scale migration out of the region by those seeking asylum and/or opportunity. Although the number of terrorist attacks have decreased in Europe and the U.S. over the last couple of years, terrorist attacks continue to take place in the region and expanded to other areas such as Sri Lanka or Bangladesh. The political ramifications of the Middle East's disorder have only become clearer as the power of populist, xenophobic movements in democratic states has grown. European states have slowed refugee admissions to a trickle and the United States has halted entry by those who hail from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, North Korea, and Venezuela.

The continuous crises drive engagement from the international community, but also discourages governments and international organizations from funding or carrying out responses. Although a diverse array of parochial and national interests — grounded in and tempered by shared values regarding humanitarian relief, stability, and development — still lead both governmental and multilateral actors to engage in peacebuilding and development efforts in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen, these engagements are smaller than those of a decade ago. The failures of reconstruction in Iraq contributed to this trend. The United States-led invasion and attempted reconstruction efforts in Iraq demonstrated the limits of regime change as a security strategy, as well as the limits of state-building achieved through external intervention. Participants in our workshops noted that this experience left many practitioners and policymakers disillusioned and frustrated regarding traditional modalities for state-building and reconstruction. There is therefore less willingness to fund and commit to such robust reconstruction efforts.

The price of such shrinking ambition and commitment is evident. The U.S. drawdown of military, economic, and diplomatic support from Iraq in 2011 left the fragile state's economic, political, and security institutions exposed to continued polarization, conditions that facilitated the rise of IS and the spread of a war economy across the Syria-Iraq border.[6] In the MENA context, the case for engagement is particularly compelling because the region's cross-border and civil wars have produced spillovers of violence, extremism, displacement, and often fierce competition for access to critical resources.

While agreement exists as to the high stakes of these MENA crises and the huge costs of international disengagement and inaction, important questions remain as to how engagements should be conducted given the many challenges present in MENA contexts. International actors (by which we mean major donor states like Japan and the United Kingdom, major strategic actors in the region like the United States and Russia, and multilateral institutions and agencies like the World Bank and IMF) are by no means uniform in their perceptions of the region, their commitment to intervening to promote stabilization, or their modalities in undertaking such interventions. The ways and means of engagement vary from direct military intervention to transfer of arms to funding international financial and humanitarian agencies to supporting local civil society efforts.

There is recognition of the need for new initiatives and modes of engagement that can effectively confront disorder and restore stability for more inclusive development. Discerning possibilities for such new modes of engagement was the primary objective of our joint project.

WHAT MAKES THIS SO HARD: THE COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT OF MENA STATES IN CONFLICT

Since the uprisings of 2011 and the civil wars that erupted in their wake, the Middle East has been undergoing a transformation of historic proportions. Conflicts in Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria have produced devastating human suffering, displacement, and humanitarian need. Tunisia's delicate democratic transition is threatened by economic stagnation and violent extremist attacks; Sudan's transition is in its very early stages. In Egypt and Algeria, military-backed regimes face sustained opposition pressure, with uncertain outcomes. Lebanon and Jordan struggle to cope with massive flows of refugees and the Palestinian plight shows no sign of abatement. Leadership in the Gulf states is passing to a new generation. While the obstacles to security and stability vary across context, much of the region faces unprecedented challenges to human development. Political, social, and economic changes, coupled with surges in violence and displacement, have amplified geopolitical competition across the region, fueled sub-national, national and transnational conflicts, and sparked the emergence of war economies in the conflict countries, further undermining already weakened state and societal institutions.

While international actors often state their policy views toward a conflict as grounded in a desire to build state legitimacy, to ameliorate conflict and human suffering, or to promote more inclusive post-conflict governance arrangements, they may in practice prioritize other interests such as counterterrorism more highly. In the course of a conflict, the actions of international actors around stabilization and reconstruction can often contradict the declared policy objectives. For example, clinging to traditional notions of sovereignty and thus relying on local government acquiescence for the provision of aid to local communities can be at odds with policies declaring the illegitimacy of a government that is killing and/or repressing its citizens.

Donor declarations and aspirations often further complicate efforts to build the confidence and trust necessary for the amelioration of violence. The involvement of some international actors, for example, can raise local populations' expectations about the degree to which such engagement might actually change citizens' lived reality, especially in terms of their relationships with their central government. Large donor meetings with much publicized pledges of large sums often lead to questions of "where is the money?" or "who stole the money?" when, in fact, much of the pledged money never materialized. Similarly, some international actors articulate goals for their engagement in a conflict context that they cannot or will not commit sufficient resources and time to realize.

Regional governments have become major players in the MENA region's stew of fragility and conflict. Some are investing tremendous resources in aid and other forms of support to their neighbors while also participating in efforts to weaken and combat extremist groups. Some are also embarking on changes to their own domestic economics and governance. Some have engaged, directly or through proxies, in military operations in other countries to advance perceived interests and head off perceived threats in a highly charged and dynamic environment. Regional states, like international actors, can thus be agents for stability and/or for conflict — sometimes both simultaneously.

The military, political, and economic efforts by various actors to shape outcomes to these conflicts lead some to argue that the "Pottery Barn rule" (you break it, you own it) should apply, and that those external actors who are fueling conflict (for example, Iran and Russia in Syria, or the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Egypt in Libya, or the Emirates and Saudi Arabia with U.S. support in Yemen) should be left to manage post-conflict reconstruction alone. In Syria, this question is further complicated by the fact that some Western donor governments also have provided support to armed opposition actors and to communities freed from control by either IS or the regime in Damascus.

External engagement is further complicated by coordination and commitment problems. In each case, influential actors (including state actors like Iran, Russia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia as well as non-state actors like Hezbollah and Khalifa Hifter's militia and their international supporters) are present who may not be interested in cooperating with adversaries to advance conflict resolution, stabilization, and reconstruction efforts, and may even view those efforts as contrary to their own interests. These actors become potential spoilers for work on the ground designed to stabilize communities and meet international objectives for counterterrorism, conflict resolution, and other aims.

Context for a new social contract

As happened in the MENA region's conflict-ridden states, in the absence of security and rule of law, war economies emerged with predatory practices placing the affected population in a state of insecurity which in turn drives violence, displacement, and entrenchment of non-state armed actors. In many cases, the lines between state and non-state security actors blur in a dynamic of fluid alliances, with the latter sometimes colluding with state benefactors to profit from disorder, insecurity and weak institutions. In some cases, non-state armed groups provide order and services to maintain control over systems of resource mobilization, distribution and social services provision, and act as an alternative partner for citizens to their fractured social contract with the state government. Every conflict country in the MENA region, and several of those undergoing transitions, manifest some of these dynamics.

Syria, perhaps the most extreme case, now suffers from a breakdown in social cohesion in what was, before 2011, one of the most diverse, cosmopolitan societies in the Middle East. The degree of death, destruction, and displacement, and the resultant fracturing of communities and governance, means that even if the conflict were to end tomorrow, the barriers to the reconstruction of a stable social and political order are tremendous. The challenges in Yemen, Iraq, and Libya each present a different, challenging environment. Neighboring states' underlying challenges are exacerbated by refugee flows and the potential for violent extremism to spread across borders. Other states face extremist insurgencies that tax the state even as fragile economies continue to falter. Even states that have begun to build more responsive and accountable governance and have not experienced large-scale violence, like Tunisia, are nonetheless grappling with terrorist acts and a sustained sense of insecurity alongside persistent inequalities and public frustration with government performance.

But the fracturing of the old MENA social contract was not the result of popular uprisings in 2011, nor the result only of civil conflicts that erupted in the wake of those uprisings. As one of us wrote in 2016:

> The forces that sustained the autocratic states of the old Middle East crumbled in the face of local and global socioeconomic trends that slowly eroded the social contract (the basic bargain between citizens and state) that had given governments the ability to maintain support from and control over their societies. The crumbling of that old social contract, and leaders' failed responses to this collapse, produced widespread discontent that burst into the open in late 2010, toppled four governments and shook several others, and opened the door to a historic upending of the Middle East. We must properly understand the how and why of this Middle East breakdown if we are to recognize and commit to the work that is truly necessary to build a new, secure, and durable regional order.[7]

In other words, the legacy of eroding social contracts in the decades prior to 2011, and the legacy of failed state attempts to revise those arrangements, also condition the environment for rebuilding new social contracts in MENA states today.[8] Without a framework for understanding the challenges to governance and order and how to address them, the return of conflict is far more likely than sustained peace. And the complex crises evident in conflict zones also highlight the imperative to address enduring, underlying vulnerabilities and sources of fragility even in seemingly functional states — challenged as they are by ill-performing economies, rising citizen expectations, and the added burdens of dealing with a region in turmoil.

The multilayered legacy of governance and development deficits mean that renewing the social contract is not a simple matter of reconstructing the states that existed prior to 2011 — indeed, that doing so might simply reawaken drivers of conflict.

The security-development nexus in the region

In a region characterized by profound insecurity and instability, actors driven by security interests and using security tools (primarily militaries but also non-state militias) play an increasingly prominent role in shaping countries' political, societal, and economic conditions. In MENA states where security actors are prominent in policymaking and/or in the economy, these security actors can heavily condition the opportunities for broader human development and for the establishment of a lasting social contract through responsive, transparent, and accountable governance. In states where sub-state armed

actors (militias) carry out some functions of governance, both the central government and external development actors must contend with sharp dilemmas regarding engagement in militia-dominated areas. And, although development actors and security actors increasingly interact in conflict zones and post-conflict contexts around the region, they come from divergent perspectives and operate according to different understandings and objectives in their shared environment. Helping development actors and security actors understand and engage more effectively with one another is critical to lasting success in the work of stabilization, conflict mitigation, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Since the September 11 attacks, various international actors have undertaken urgent interventions focused on defeating violent extremist organizations like IS, addressing the massive refugee crisis, or seeking to bolster fragile state structures with budgetary, technical, and development aid. These efforts have involved both security and development agencies, but the two have not always acted in coordination or served aligned objectives. For a long time, security and development efforts occurred in tandem, but were planned and overseen largely in silos, notwithstanding a broad understanding that their missions and activities are inextricably intertwined.

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The World Development Report of 2011 addressed the role of security as a necessary precondition for access to all other public goods and services.[9] Security enables overall development by providing the conditions necessary for orderly resource mobilization, allocation, and management for development. Without a minimum degree of security, there is inadequate predictability for productive, job-creating, tax-generating investment, and for employment. But security that enables development cannot simply be imposed: where security actors behave oppressively, rapaciously, or in a partial manner, they pose a threat to the population over which they have authority, and they tend to create a demand among that population for other security actors to provide them with protection from those who are causing them harm.

The 2011 World Development Report called for a shift in the development community's work on security, arguing that fragility and violence occur when countries experience economic, political, and social stresses that institutions cannot mediate or resolve.[10] The report and subsequent studies demonstrated the direct relationship between the lack of growth of investment, social and human capital, and public and civil society institutions, on the one hand, and an absence of security on the other. In the absence of security, disorganized markets and rent-seeking by non-state actors — armed or otherwise commanding authority — subject private economic actors to higher costs. Insecurity weakens the effectiveness and legitimacy of formal institutions, furthering opportunities for predatory behavior on the part of actors in the war economy. Insecurity can be both the cause and the consequence of the skewed distribution of resources, the exacerbation of which, in turn, weakens the overall security apparatus of the country.[11]

By 2011, driven largely by experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, many international actors engaged in stabilization and reconstruction had reached consensus on the inescapable connection between security and development, not just the national but

also at local and communal levels. Development actors came to understand that desired development outcomes would likely remain beyond reach if security issues were not addressed in contexts where these issues are intertwined with multiple, interrelated, and dynamic drivers of conflict. Security actors, for their part, were tasked with stabilization objectives that they came to realize could not be achieved through military tools alone.[12]

Many examples exist of new strategies showcasing the emerging consensus regarding the inseparability of the security and development efforts in conflict and post-conflict settings in the Middle East and elsewhere. Notably, the 2018 World Bank "Pathways for Peace" report offered an approach toward preventing violent conflict through greater inclusion of marginalized societal groups.[13] In March 2019, the U.K.'s Department for International Development released its guide for policy makers, titled "The UK Government's Approach to Stabilization."[14] A joint USAID and State Department report, published in 2019, discussed the role that foreign assistance plays in preventing violent conflict from emerging in fragile states.[15] The previously mentioned 2018 U.S. Stabilization Assistance Review, published jointly by the State Department, the Defense Department, and USAID, further drives home the idea that these efforts cannot be disentangled, nor should international actors attempt to do so.[16] Examining the issue of state fragility, the Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development — a joint project of the London School of Economics and Oxford University — also identified a connection between these two lines of effort as central to overall success.[17]

A legacy of obstacles still stands in the way of effective cooperation between security and development actors, but today both groups have come to understand their interdependence and the complex relationships of development, security, and state legitimacy and capacity. At the November 2018 workshop, participants with experience in complex conflict and post-conflict environments observed that the security community and the development community come at the issues of state fragility and violence from very different perspectives, with temporal, operational, and planning gaps between them.

Development practitioners tend to focus on core state institutions in the economic, financial, and social services spheres, generally avoiding political (distribution of power) and security issues. By contrast, security actors tend to direct their attention to security matters, engaging or establishing "political" institutions as needed to promote security objectives, but often without much attention to the institution-building aspects within those spheres.

Another divide exists regarding timelines, with development actors operating on a longer time horizon — often 10-15 years for major reforms or institution building. Military and political work, on the other hand, tends to be done in much more limited time frames, so that outcomes treated as "successful" stabilization may provide short-term security or basic services to local populations while leaving in place actors or circumstances that will generate new grievances or re-awaken old grievances and thus provoke conflict relapse. Moreover, without linking security force reform and accountability to development, successful stabilization can leave in place, strengthen, or introduce new security actors whose actions may undermine conflict abatement and sustainable peacekeeping and development.

Our discussions touched on the fact that, in many countries, a multiplicity of often-competing security institutions exist, some of which have, at times, acted as accomplices or active collaborators with non-state actors in illicit, informal economy activities for profit. This means that, in practice, international actors face complex challenges to integrate their understanding of the security-development nexus into their efforts in conflict or post-conflict countries. It also means that integrating security and development efforts at the national level may encounter major obstacles at the sub-national level where national approaches may not be appropriate or welcome.

According to research presented at the workshops, the fate of a conflict-affected state's military, our workshop participants noted, is perhaps the single most important factor in stabilization. The Iraqi and Lebanese cases, among others, demonstrate the importance of attention to the national military in the success or failure of stabilization and reconstruction.[18] Without a unified and cooperative military and/or constabulary providing predictable security that is accepted as legitimate by the population, many assistance or reconstruction organizations will not be able to operate in a conflict-affected zone, and refugees and internally displaced persons may not feel safe returning to their former homes. Reforming the army and security sector can also mitigate violence arising from sectarianism, adding urgency to its implementation. Conscription may contribute to national cohesion and inclusivity, while prioritizing military/security reform as a adjunct to demobilization/disarmament/reintegration (DDR) also helps overcome the danger that militias can pose for conflict relapse.

Recognizing the central role of security sector reform for development, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) sought to form a global consensus around security sector reform (SSR). This led to 2014's United Nations Security Council Resolution 2151 (UNSCR 2151), which called for nationally-owned peacekeeping forces with reforms that would strengthen rule of law, access to justice, and non-discriminatory but effective practices for maintaining law and order in a manner less likely to cause further grievances. In 2017, the African Union adapted a Policy Framework for SSR modeled on OECD norms and UNSCR 2151. While there is no universally accepted definition of SSR, the OECD has employed the term to refer to building a state's security forces with a focus on effectiveness, governance and accountability. Importantly the reforms would include training and accountability measures through oversight, enforced not only by courts but critically through transparent budgetary controls by the state. They would also include non-interference by security sector actors in economic and social life. In the Middle East and North Africa, national and local budgets and accountability for security actors and institutions have been opaque at best with little oversight by independent agencies. Moreover, security actors have been major drivers in the national economies of many MENA states, including those not in active conflict zones. The role of security actors in all the states is central to addressing the challenges of stability and development.

Comparative study of post-conflict and civil war cases since the end of the Cold War suggests that third-party security actors can play an important role in supporting national efforts preventing conflict relapse.[19] But third-party forces need not be independent actors (and UNSCR 2151 suggests they be nationally accepted) — they can also provide security support as "accompaniers" of indigenous security forces. Since new international (e.g., U.N.-backed) forces are unlikely to be deployed in MENA states, accompaniment and other models are worth exploring.

SETTING THE BAR: HOW MUCH CAN EXTERNAL ACTORS REALLY ACHIEVE?

Our workshop discussions revealed significant skepticism as to whether international actors have strong models of success for effective stabilization that includes postwar governance reform. In the Iraqi context, the United States and its allies toppled and dismantled the autocratic government of Saddam Hussein and then invested years and billions of dollars in efforts to reconstruct the Iraqi state on new, more inclusive and accountable foundations. And yet, it is not clear that this massive effort has succeeded in generating more stability, security, or human development for Iraqis, for the regional neighborhood, or for external stakeholders.[20] Through workshop discussions, we arrived at several alternative approaches for international actors to take in seeking to advance stabilization that can ameliorate violence, prevent conflict relapse, and create conditions for inclusive development.

Examining premises of international engagement

Many actors — both national governments and multilateral development institutions like the World Bank — engage diplomatically and economically on Middle Eastern stabilization, reconstruction, and governance efforts on the premise that sustainable stability and development in this region require significant governance reform. This is, for example, a fundamental premise of the World Bank's 2015 MENA strategy, "Economic and Social Inclusion for Peace and Stability in the Middle East and North Africa," which posits the need for a revised social contract between citizens and state rooted in greater inclusion and accountability.[21] Likewise, the G-7's Deauville Process, the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy, and the U.S. government's assistance strategies for MENA countries all prioritize governance reform as a key contributor to security, stability, and equitable developmental progress.

While the premise of the centrality of governance reform for stability and development is applied across political contexts in the Middle East and North Africa, it has particular importance when applied to the civil-war states of the region. The traditional view has been that conflicts, persistent violence, and war economies evidence a collapse of order, institutions, and power structures. Ending conflicts and reconstruction, therefore, present opportunities for substantial reform of governance institutions with better outcomes for human development and conflict prevention.[22]

Notwithstanding the overarching premises of the desirability and opportunity for governance reform, the region's conflicts reveal complex, fluid fragmentation in approaches to governance reform. Various actors within and external to the conflict states take varying views of what post-conflict governance should look like or who should benefit from and direct it. At the end of 2015, for example, the United Nations embraced a transitional successor government in Libya that today is locked in military conflict with a challenger government supported by some key regional states. In Syria, the United States and other OECD donor states have made clear they view the surviving government of Bashar al-Assad as illegitimate. Consequently, they provide stabilization assistance only in areas and to actors outside Damascus's control. Yet other states such as Russia and Iran support the Assad regime as necessary for stability, claiming the need to counter certain terrorist and extremist groups. The United Nations, meanwhile, continues to work through the Damascus government in providing humanitarian assistance in Syria.

Syria and other MENA conflict cases are unlikely to see international reconstruction assistance at the levels that were directed at other cases such as in Bosnia or Iraq after 2003. This is due not only to tighter budget constraints in assistance but also to widespread skepticism as to the efficacy of reconstruction assistance, and to the deterrent effects of political fragmentation and external state sponsorship of fighting factions.

Fragmentation of approach is further evident in the timing and sequence of international engagements. Some external actors are motivated by an imperative to engage quickly with broad, deep, and ambitious efforts at building political, social, and economic orders, with institutions capable of good governance and hopefully aligned with the external actors' values and interests. Others — mindful of local legacies and external actors' interests and capacities — exercise caution, advocating incremental steps building on what remains from prior to the conflict and aiming to forge trust for a reconstructed social contract. The fragmentation of external actors' approaches and desired outcomes pose serious dilemmas for international agencies.

In light of these trends, our workshop participants asked whether the traditional frameworks for international engagement in stabilization and reconstruction, focused on the central government and the capital city, offer a realistic basis for international actors to engage on questions of governance reform. In considering these questions, discussions first centered on those states that show evidence of fragility but are not facing violence or civil war. Taking a cue from Steven Heydemann, several participants noted that national leaders in the Arab world derive their legitimacy in large measure from their assertion and defense of long-standing conceptions of a rigidly-controlled central state. They rely on traditional perceptions that such a state can best provide physical security and stability for development. Juxtaposed to this view is an analytical judgment of both internal and outside observers that such rigid centralized systems may be brittle, perhaps inept at service delivery to localities or particular demographics, and thus vulnerable to local and external shocks that can shatter their seeming stability. These observers note that the rigid, central state has often failed to provide opportunities for economic, social, and human development, and may exacerbate inequalities — thus increasing the likelihood of violence and conflict. Nevertheless, that prospect may not feel sufficiently urgent or realistic to local leaders to induce them to change their way of doing business. To the contrary, these actors understand existing institutional arrangements as assets for resource mobilization and deployment to maintain their leadership. Continuity, not change, in the overall form and delivery modalities of governance, is perceived as critical to their maintenance of power and the integrity of the state. Given this, international agencies and external stakeholders quickly face the choice of whether to irritate national leaders, and perhaps lose their effective cooperation, by insisting on their paradigm of governance reform as the basis for their investments in stability. Yet engagement at the center may not only fail to bring stabilization, but may contribute to further destabilization in areas of the country not firmly under the state's control.

In the Middle East and North Africa's conflict countries, the dilemma is yet greater. In discussing this issue, several workshop participants cited the emergence of war economies which have replicated pre-war governance practices across conflict lines. In these contexts, both state and non-state armed actors have continued to rely heavily on coercion, illicit activities, extortion, and predation. As conflicts have become prolonged, these patterns have become ingrained, with populations either developing coping

mechanisms to achieve minimal security or fleeing. War economies have given armed actors vested interests in the continuation of conflict. These war economy leaders, often including leaders of local institutions, are unlikely to accept external assistance with central government controls, even for humanitarian purposes or infrastructure and service delivery, if they perceive their ability to allocate that assistance so as to sustain their own power and protect their own security is threatened.

International actors could begin to seek ways to resolve this dilemma through carefully crafted strategies based on thorough, realistic assessments of a context's actors, institutions, and structural factors, including the structure and leadership of the war economies. The assessments would identify ways and means of entry, and incentives for actors to end violence, instead deploying their resources and building institutions for economic and human development. Governance compromises may be necessary, and security rules would need to be transparent, predictable and enforced in an equitable manner. This highlights the relevance of engaging both internal and external security actors as well as economic actors such as financial and logistics firms in the work of assessing power relations on the ground and developing and implementing assistance strategies that support conflict resolution rather than conflict relapse.

In fluid and fragmented MENA contexts, as international reconstruction support is likely to be limited in size and duration, it does not make sense to seek the same large-scale objectives as in other cases that featured greater international consensus and investment. Such objectives would include the rebuilding of physical infrastructure or the renovation of major state institutions and functions. Still, a minimalist approach to stabilization that sets up basic security and essential services is highly unlikely to prevent conflict relapse — the primary concern of international actors — as it ignores longer-term issues of political and economic development that are drivers of fragility and violence.

As Steven Heydemann noted in an article written within the framework of our joint project:

> Recent data indicate that since the start of this century, 90 percent of civil wars have occurred in countries that previously experienced mass violence.[23] In a major study of the breakdown of peace after civil war, Charles Call identifies political exclusion as the most significant factor contributing to the recurrence of mass violence.[24] "How, in the wake of bloody war," Call asks, "can external actors help foster a society that can resolve its conflicts without recourse to mass violence?" The answer lies in the principles and priorities that guide early recovery and post-conflict reconstruction.[25]

The foregoing suggests that *international actors must consider how to apply their limited assistance toward objectives that prioritize preventing conflict relapse*. Four possible approaches emerged from our workshop discussions and associated research. We outline each one below, noting here that they are not all mutually exclusive, but could potentially be combined in part or whole.

The case for modesty

In the face of the skepticism emerging from the Iraq experience, and drawing on the 2011 World Development Report's lessons, Stephen D. Krasner has argued for adopting a more modest measuring stick for external engagements in reconstruction, one he

calls "'good-enough' governance."[26] The basic components of good-enough governance are security, some economic growth, and improved public services. In this analysis, fundamental changes in governance are almost impossible to drive from the outside or from the bottom-up. Rather, history suggests that most progress in political development toward more inclusive and accountable government comes from political elites who see an interest in constraining their own authority in a rule of law system and governing in a more inclusive manner. By ensuring that post-conflict environments achieve a minimum standard of security, economic growth, and improved services, Krasner argues, the international community can establish a foundation for wider and deeper political reform that will take place through internal evolution and over a long timeframe. Krasner concludes that, since there is no evidentiary basis on which to believe that more intensive, expensive, or longer-term state-building projects produce better outcomes over the long term, and little reason to believe international donors are prepared any longer to make such investments, there is no justification for embarking on them.

This approach reflects the difficult lessons learned from two decades of effort at state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan while helping to manage local populations' expectations of what international engagement will and will not do for them. But it is important to note that even a "good-enough" governance approach requires that international actors make choices about which political actors to advantage or disadvantage in a reconstruction or post-conflict context. *There is no avoiding the inherently political context and impact of stabilization and development assistance.*

For three reasons, international actors may find it difficult to implement a disciplined, "good-enough" approach. First, their own norms, rules, constituencies, expectations, and commitments often push them to do more than the minimum on issues such as women's empowerment or human rights protections. This complicates their engagement in the theater, curtailing the coherence and logic of the good-enough paradigm. Second, international actors' understanding of state fragility, and their desire to prevent conflict relapse, press them to address deeper issues of governance and power relations within society. As the term of former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki suggests, "good-enough" governance may achieve short-term stability, but fail to address deep grievances and prevent conflict and violent extremism from re-emerging. Finally, counterterrorism or other security interests may keep international actors engaged with a "good-enough" government and its security forces longer and in more ways than a "good-enough" paradigm would recommend. *The good-enough paradigm, if finely crafted with a firm understanding of the context, is one approach international actors might adopt to advance stability and security in conflict-affected MENA states while avoiding open-ended commitments or becoming overly enmeshed in local politics. However, it may not be sufficient to prevent conflict relapse.*

Go small, go local, go slow

Some of our workshop participants encouraged practitioners to complement a traditional approach focused on national level engagement and top-down strategies with approaches that are small, bottom-up, localized, and integrated; that focus on local needs and assets; and that prioritize physical, economic, and social security, designing short-term initiatives within the parameters of a long-term vision for sustainable peace.

Traditionally, international actors wait for a political agreement to end a conflict before embarking on reconstruction aid, but recent cases challenge that practice. These cases raise the questions of whether and how international actors can usefully operate even during ongoing conflict to address urgent human needs, stabilize specific sub-state areas, reduce human displacement, and shrink the available space for terrorist organizations to operate. Building on suggestions by Steven Heydemann to "go small, go local, and go slow," our discussions revealed options for local-level, small-scale projects that could provide donors an opportunity to learn and innovate for impact even while a conflict continues.[27]

Local, targeted interventions should build on existing assets — and focusing on assets (in terms of human, economic and social capital) rather than damages can also create a value proposition for other intra-community, countrywide initiatives. Efforts to rebuild within and across communities can also be complemented with efforts to reach displaced people where they are, as many of them will not return for years or decades. Beyond providing basic services, these policies for displaced people might also include support for individuals, families, and groups to begin the work of transitional justice, build conflict-resolution skills and practices, and actively promote community cohesion and development, regardless of place of origin.

Options for engagement may take advantage of pockets of stability at the local or possibly sub-national level. These options could focus on security incentives that will provide opportunities and space for better or good-enough governance institutions to evolve without being overwhelmed by demands from an unmanageable range of constituencies. A bottom-up, inclusive dialogue is critical, featuring the patient construction of social consensus and trust on the local level through the identification of security deficits and the tailoring of measured responses. Introducing elements for economic security could be central in creating modest but potentially replicable opportunities, especially for the most vulnerable and historically excluded groups such as the youth.

Venture capital: A new risk paradigm to plant seeds for future inclusive governance

International donors could also combine the concept of "go small, go local, go slow" with a "venture capital" approach. In this concept, international donors could engage quickly and close to the ground in a pre/post-conflict context, spreading small investments to a wide array of actors. The donors would subsequently assess who among these actors was prepared to use those international resources to serve local needs in ways that reflect and reinforce responsive, transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance. Where amenable and effective local partners were found, they could be bolstered through additional aid; where local partners failed to deliver, they could quickly be cut off without too much waste of resources or time.

The key to success in using such an approach to reconstruction would be to build in a robust evaluation mechanism for the projects from the outset, so that projects and partners could fail fast and fail often, making way for new ideas and for successful projects to grow or replicate. Further, a reconsideration of international agencies' risk tolerance would be desirable to better measure successes and to cut losses more quickly and effectively.

This approach would not address the fundamental reluctance of central government authorities to yield or share power, but it could have two other salutary effects. First, by focusing on local power relations and local needs, it could ameliorate grievances and conflict triggers in local communities and improve humanitarian outcomes. Second, where successful, this approach could create islands of relatively better governance and outcomes that could serve as both magnets and models for other communities. The attraction of such models could increase pressure on other non-state actors and on the central government itself to adopt similar practices.

Co-opt existing governance structures

Some participants noted that states riven by civil war may lack governments, but that doesn't mean that they lack governance, which is often provided by militias or other non-state actors. Where militias are providers of local security, stability, and justice, they may rely on autocratic structures of their own or those left behind by the state, but they may also be open to other forms and mechanisms for governance that lower their transaction costs in providing this order while carrying on their larger struggle for power.

This might offer opportunities for creative engagement by international actors, who can offer financial resources and specific guidelines for their use. Such engagement could induce militias to govern local communities in ways that plant the seeds for more inclusive and accountable governance down the line. For example, it might be possible to create accountability for militias in exercising their authority over the community by making their access to international funds subject to community preferences or community veto, or by connecting their command structure to some local civilian authority.

Simultaneously, as argued in a 2017 paper prepared by Ranj Alaaldin, international donors could support local civil society actors who could reinforce more accountable modes of governance by, for example, monitoring and reporting to the community on the militia's actions and effects, surveying local populations on their priorities for governance, or convening local dialogues to address divisions and grievances or to agree on principles for local governance decisionmaking.[28]

These ideas suggest a possible approach for international stakeholders that would enable them to circumvent recalcitrant central governments and advance governance reforms by planting seeds of change across local communities through governance projects with civil society, local government, and community institutions, and other sub-state and non-state players.

MAPPING AND DIALOGUE: ADD-ONS FOR EFFECTIVE STABILIZATION WORK

Each of the approaches outlined above has advantages and disadvantages, and international actors may find different pathways suit them better in different regional conflict zones. Understanding the ways in which their engagement might shape local politics, and deliberately addressing the power relations that will shape community-building, governance, and conflict relapse are essential components of planning and implementing stabilization and reconstruction assistance. Regardless of the approach

chosen, or the time and resource limits placed on those engagements, there are two additional elements our discussions indicated are helpful for international actors engaged in stabilization.

Our project's discussions stressed that international actors need to go beyond generalized, idealized norms and premises of good governance and think differently about how to support a transition toward stability, sustainable peace, and human development in the MENA region. As a starting point, these actors should clarify what sustainable peace means for a country or community. Putting the country on the path toward sustainable peace requires identifying what can be done to create the conditions for a situation without violence, built on social cohesion, with equitable opportunities for human development. How would international actors identify those factors and prioritize actions?

As described below, a dynamic mapping exercise would identify key actors, institutions, and structural factors and their interactions in arenas of contestation. An overarching consideration for interventions would be to identify windows of opportunity for an immediate and direct suite of interventions. These engagements would be undertaken with realistic goals, tailored to a fluid context, and with risks and results calibrated to an evolving context. Such a window of opportunity (or opportunities) can emerge more clearly once the broad asset map is completed.

Conflict mapping as a tool for development actors

Donor spending and engagement in MENA conflict zones have already affected the relative strength of various local actors. Those engaged in reconstruction need to take responsibility for their political impact and avoid setting the stage for conflict relapse by ensuring that their programs do not reinforce or exacerbate autocracy, exclusion, or other political grievances.

It would be wise for reconstruction donors to undertake a careful assessment of actors, institutions, and structural factors in each particular context in which they operate. Such an assessment would help to promote a pragmatic setting of priorities in an intervention. This would, in turn, facilitate the improvement of security, the creation of economic opportunity, and the crafting of incentives for stabilization — while recognizing the constraints, risks, and tradeoffs associated with each intervention. The assessment would include considerations of how these interventions could link to prospective long-term peacebuilding efforts by supporting the transition toward restoring economic, social, and political life.

An assessment process could be structured around the three key elements noted above: actors, institutions, and structural factors. The assessment should identify all the relevant key actors and include them in its analysis, including of interests, capabilities, constraints, risks, and tradeoffs. Security actors are often taken as a given by development actors, even where they are an obstacle — but they should be included in this analysis.

A second assessment element should consider institutions, examining their status, capacity, and prospects for functional, resilient, inclusive service provision and mediation to preserve, protect, and expand people's security. The scope and quantity of services and goods delivered is less important than the manner of delivery. Is the institution and its service delivery inclusive? Equitable? Accessible? Transparent and accountable to

the population served? Assessing "the how" may reveal what to offer as incentives and improvements for security. An institutional assessment should examine not only formal state institutions but also formal and informal sub-regional and local ones. As part of a peacebuilding assessment process, the institutional assessment looks closely at whether and how infrastructure is managed and, prospectively, how it can contribute to security from the bottom up. The assessment identifies resilient platforms and coping structures that have emerged in conflict and could deliver incentives to the relevant population to build or strengthen responsive local institutions for increased security — perhaps better policing, clean water or power, or an access road.

A common theme voiced in our workshops was that actors engaged in stabilization efforts often assess service provision according to its *scope* — the quantity of service delivery, the functionality of service-provision institutions — rather than according to the governance *values* expressed by the way in which services are provided. Workshop discussions suggested that an assessment should consider how the institution delivers service. Does delivery manifest the values of equity, inclusion, and justice — or does it aggravate grievances and violence? Assessing "the how" may reveal what to offer as incentives and improvements for security.

A third assessment element would monitor structural factors that influence the overall context. These include fairly standard features of a country such as geography, economic structure, the long-term pattern of relations between social groups, the impacts of climate change, the investment climate, the status of existing infrastructure, the degree of corruption and other governance factors, and the level of dependence on external assistance.

An asset map would summarize the assessments of a country's actors, institutions, and structural factors. It would help to produce a country balance sheet, detailing basic statistics, poverty, assets, constraints, challenges, risks, and liabilities. Ideally, the map should present a full picture — identifying an entry time and entry point for reconstruction. By providing a baseline of what already exists, asset maps permit better targeted international assistance aimed at improving people's security and laying a foundation for sustainable peace. The map would become a framework for a dynamic assessment process, underpinning operational flexibility and adaptation and helping all actors and policymakers to identify their comparative advantages and potential areas of partnership and coordination.

The asset map should be prepared by bringing together different partners and sources of information and tools. This particularly requires cooperation and commitment among security, humanitarian, and development actors. The completion of mapping may not be feasible while conflict continues in all or part of a country, but new tools are available to collect the voices of actors whom we cannot reach.

Dialogue in divided societies: The role of conflict resolution in stabilization and reconstruction

Ultimately, political dialogue and political agreement are essential for success in stabilizing states affected by conflict, experiencing collapse, or undergoing rapid political transition (i.e. revolution). In divided societies, especially those emerging from war, political agreement enables a national government of sufficient legitimacy and capacity to provide security and basic services to citizens. From the perspective

of frameworks like the World Bank's MENA Strategy or a 2016 analysis by Tamara Cofman Wittes, such political dialogue could result in an agreement that reflects the beginnings of a revised social contract for sustainable governance.[29] In practice, however, three major challenges emerge in building political dialogue and political agreements that will address the governance drivers of state fragility:

1. In the Middle East and North Africa, international actors may have agendas linked to their own interests, beyond sustainable governance and development, that they seek to see reflected in post-conflict governance arrangements. In Yemen, for example, international actors have been keen to have the central state operate as an effective counterterrorism partner, and that priority may outweigh considerations of the state's inclusiveness and accountability to citizens. The agendas of these international actors are, at times, driven by geopolitical or security concerns that do not relate directly to the drivers of the conflict. When pursued through local proxies, such international political agendas can serve as an obstacle to dialogue.

2. Often, dialogue efforts to end conflict and build political agreements privilege the voices of those doing the fighting. Although international actors may understand the imperative of inclusion in building stable and sustainable postwar arrangements, the urgency of ending the conflict might still direct them to focus dialogue on those with guns. International diplomatic efforts must embrace research showing that including women and civil society actors in peace negotiations yields more durable solutions, and international actors must work to bring their assistance approach and their diplomatic approach to conflict resolution into greater coherence.

3. Several workshop participants noted that in the post-2011 period, transitional justice has often been delayed or even excluded from political arrangements concluded after a revolution or civil war. This leaves deep-seated grievances unaddressed at the level of national dialogue, providing a ready foundation for conflict relapse and endangering stability. International actors should seek to include transitional justice efforts explicitly in political dialogue.

International actors must be mindful of these obstacles and work to address them — including by wielding assistance as a tool to identify and empower sub-state actors who can effectively represent citizen interests and constrain the rapacious self-interests of militias, warlords, and regime stalwarts.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Throughout this two-year project, researchers and workshop participants emphasized the simple fact that stabilization and reconstruction are inherently political activities, particularly so in the context of intercommunal conflict and a history of autocratic governance. Even when an end to the fighting is agreed upon, negotiations among combatants (some with external sponsors) over future governance will be high-stakes. Every dollar donors spend on the ground can affect the balance of power between contending actors in these civil conflicts, and affect those negotiations. Yet, surprisingly, most development agencies and actors do not have frameworks for assessing the impact of their assistance on political and security relationships within their area of

operations, in part because they failed to gain a clear grasp of those relationships at the outset. And external military actors engaged in counterterrorism operations may understand the connection between governance and ameliorating terrorist threats, but may also be ill-equipped to map the impact of their activities on local power relations. Further, when these actors do have the tools at their disposal necessary for the effective pairing of security and political efforts, too often a conscious choice is made to keep these areas separated. Even as technical barriers to such cooperative efforts are overcome, cultural obstacles must also be recognized and overcome within those institutions overseeing security and development initiatives.

International development and security actors can reflect on their relative benefits of the four approaches laid out above in choosing how to shift their efforts on stabilization and reconstruction in the Middle East and North Africa to take account of the findings of this report. A strategy characterized by modest goals promises to avoid the haunting failures of the last two decades, beginning with the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. But in setting the bar for "good-enough" governance, international actors must also concern themselves not to over-learn the lessons of the recent past, which risks excluding possibly beneficial outcomes in favor of too conservative an approach.

> In setting the bar for "good-enough" governance, international actors must also concern themselves not to over-learn the lessons of the recent past, which risks excluding possibly beneficial outcomes in favor of too conservative an approach.

Going small, local, and slow makes both intuitive and empirical sense. It seems to avoid the worst excesses of the U.S. experience in Iraq while picking out those efforts that produced some successes in both Iraq and Syria. But it also contains a warning. Projects that are small, local, and slow offer real promise in improving economic and security environments in MENA countries, but they are also highly vulnerable to higher-level changes in the security situation. Successes, while real, can be all too easily swept aside in an environment where security cannot be guaranteed beyond the near term. Going small, local, and slow seems most effective when combined with a clearly defined overall strategic approach to ending violence. For different reasons, American efforts did not meet this criterion in either Iraq or Syria.

In the Middle East's civil wars and disorder, local militias seeking to control territory, resources and population have employed, built upon, and entrenched some of the institutions and mechanisms of the autocratic state structure which they ostensibly seek to replace. Steven Heydemann notes that:

> The economic norms and practices developed by authoritarian regimes before the war persist during conflict and affect both how conflicts end and how post conflict political economies are organized.... These economic norms and practices were accompanied by social norms, institutions and political practices that further eroded the distinction between prewar and wartime conditions, including decentralization over the control over the means of violence and delegation (or de facto privatization) of the authority to tax and extract resources from citizens.[30]

International reconstruction efforts undertaken without an eye toward this political economy of civil wars can inadvertently end up helping to reestablish patterns of autocratic governance structures and styles in the postwar environment. Or, further, such failure could lead to the development of yet new sources of tensions and grievances, empowering the opponents of a new social contract and perhaps sowing the seeds for conflict relapse.

Even after conflict ends, international actors embarking on stabilization and reconstruction must take care not to recreate or reinforce the governance conditions that helped lead to the conflict, including exclusionary governance and development, corruption, coercion, and weak social service provision. The pressure to revert to the old social contract is greatest during the post-conflict phase, when donors and military actors keen to stabilize areas and provide basic services to populations tend to prioritize short-term efficacy over medium and long-term concerns over governance. This concern is particularly sharp for areas of Iraq and Syria liberated from IS control, where initial stabilization and reconstruction assistance is driven by military actors and imperatives, and sometimes by a desire for a swift reduction in the presence of international forces, rather than by consideration of the political consequences. At the same time, the various militias allied to international forces in the anti-IS efforts now seek to translate their battlefield sacrifices into political and economic gains, reaching into various sectors of the economy, taxing citizens, and replicating old patterns of authoritarian governance. As a consequence, broken political trust can pervert political and economic recovery unless institutions of governance can be built and strengthened to tackle these issues.

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