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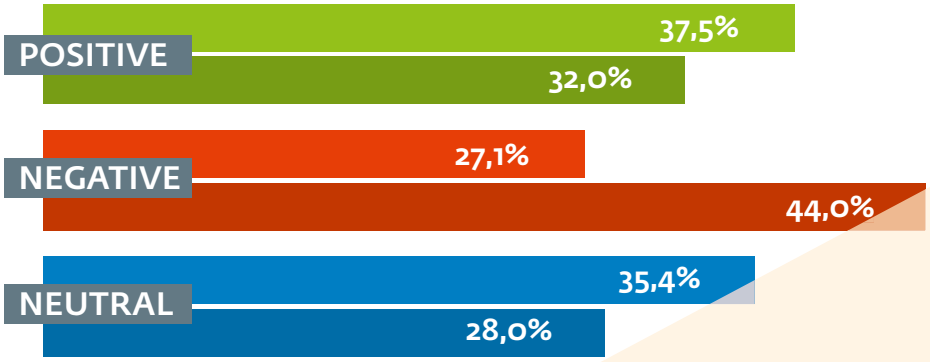
Stabilisation— For Whom and to What Ends?

CONFERENCE DOCUMENTATION

Esther Meininghaus, Katja Mielke, Max M. Mutschler (Eds.) **\ BICC**

"What is your perception of stabilisation?"



Results of the surveys before and after the discussion

SUMMARY

On 20 November 2018, BICC hosted an international academic conference entitled "Stabilisation—For Whom and to What Ends?" in Bonn. The conference brought together a good 80 participants, academics and practitioners from around the world, to exchange research insights and discuss their understanding of 'stabilisation'.

'Stabilisation' is becoming increasingly important as a policy paradigm in international security and development policy. However, different approaches to stabilisation are discussed in academia, policy and practice. Often, there is a tension between short-term approaches to stabilisation that are dominated by concerns for security and the establishment or maintenance of order and more long-term perspectives which seek to transform the underlying structures, e.g. with regard to democracy, peace and human rights. BICC's international scientific conference reflected this controversy. The lively and engaged exchange of the participants was enhanced by the highly interactive, participatory format of the conference.

The leading questions of the conference, introduced by Esther Meininghaus, Katja Mielke and Max Mutschler, formed the basis for the discussions of the day: a) What is our understanding of stabilisation? b) How does stabilisation work in practice? c) Does the growing significance of stabilisation imply abandoning support for democracy and human rights, focusing instead on the establishment and maintenance of order? In three parallel topical groups, the participants shared their views on three core themes related to stabilisation: "Peacekeeping and Military Intervention", "Train and Equip Programmes and Security Sector Reform" and "Migration Management and Humanitarian and Development Aid". Three parallel discussion groups on Iraq, Syria and Mali also followed these questions. Additionally, the participants were invited to discuss the results of these breakout groups in a 'market place' and in plenary sessions.

The conference was generously funded by the Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung (DSF, German Foundation for Peace Research) and the Foundation for International Dialogue of the Savings Bank in Bonn.

Figure cover: At the beginning of the conference, the organisers asked the participants to vote by mobil phone in a poll expressing their perception of "stabilisation". At the end, having been asked to vote again, the result was different.

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**Esther Meininghaus, Katja Mielke and Max Mutschler (f. l. t. r.) ** opening the conference

Stabilisation: Positive, negative, or neutral?

To open the conference "Stabilisation—For Whom and to What Ends?", the three organisers, Esther Meininghaus, Katja Mielke and Max Mutschler presented and discussed the central themes and guiding questions which, focussing on stabilisation as a policy paradigm in international security and development, would lead all participants through the day.

Is your perception of stabilisation a) positive, b) negative, or c) neutral? The organisers posed this question to all participants in a poll at the very beginning. The result was quite mixed and showed that there was no clear-cut winner, even though 37,5 per cent voted positive, while 27 per cent voted negative and 35 per cent neutral. Several participants explained their votes, which pointed toward some of the central themes that would emerge during the conference. For example, while proponents of a positive view of stabilisation saw it as a pragmatic approach to reducing violence, sceptics referred to a dangerous overemphasis on security, order and authority inherent in the concept of stabilisation.

**Conrad Schetter ** welcomed the participants

As noted by the organisers, it is this tension that requires further discussion now that stabilisation is regaining currency as a policy paradigm in international security, foreign and development policy. So-called stabilisation efforts are directed particularly at regions that witness violent conflict or that are perceived to be at risk thereof. Under the umbrella of "stabilisation programmes", we find measures as diverse as direct military interventions, train-and-equip programmes for security forces, as well as development and humanitarian aid programmes.

Meininghaus, Mielke and Mutschler introduced several definitions of stabilisation from various policy documents by key actors in this field to illustrate the extent to which these differ both between actors and over time. For example, an early US definition of stabilisation from 2010 stressed the ambition of building sustainable peace and government institutions able to promote development and protect human rights (among other things).[1] In contrast, the 2018 US definition of stabilisation is primarily about supporting locally legitimate authorities in managing conflict and preventing violence—with no reference to further norms like human rights.[2] Similarly, Germany's conceptualisation of stabilisation from 2017 is open not only towards support for government institutions but also for effective non-governmental partners. It acknowledges explicitly that 'circumstances may compel us to temporarily accept political orders which are not entirely compatible with our own values'.[3] The organisers also showed that, indeed, the European Union and United Nations implement programmes under the heading of 'stabilisation' at a significant scale, but without reference to any clear definition of what this entails.

1 US Department of State/USAID (2010): Leading Through Civilian Power. Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review; available at: https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/153108.pdf; p. xiii.

2 US Department of State/USAID/US Department of Defense (2018): A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas. Stabilization Assistance Review; available at: https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/283589.pdf; p. 1.

3 Federal Government of Germany (2017): Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace; available at: https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/1214246/057f794cd3593763ea556897972574fd/preventing-crises-data.pdf; p. 52.

**Max Mutschler ** gave an overview on the guiding questions of the conference

This overview on the conceptual evolution of stabilisation provided the basis for the introduction of three bundles of guiding questions for the conference:

1 \ **What is our understanding of stabilisation? Who or what is meant to be stabilised, and to what ends?** With national ministries, multilateral organisations and transnational NGOs employing a range of differing, often conflicting, understandings of stabilisation, the first central question was whether there is a shared core that allows us to speak of the/a concept or paradigm of stabilisation in the first place or whether it is only a new label for measures that have always been applied in conflict contexts.

**"What is your perception of stabilisation?" ** Participants polling at the very beginning of the conference

**Before the breakout groups ** Plenary session reflecting the conference's guiding questions

2 \ **How does stabilisation work in practice? What are the concrete means and practices of stabilisation?** Guided by these questions, the conference participants explored the potential benefits and risks resulting from stabilisation policies for donors, local partners and local populations. What are the lessons learned from various regional and thematic contexts? Are there conflicts between short- to medium-term measures of stabilisation and the long-term goal of stability? And if so, how can we deal with them?

3 \ **Does the growing significance of stabilisation imply abandoning support for democracy and human rights, instead focusing on the establishment and maintenance of order?** In other words, has the turn towards stabilisation resulted from failed attempts at holding onto the normative concept of liberal peacebuilding or are the two concepts complementary? Proponents of stabilisation often imply that a liberal peace (i.e. democracy, human rights and free markets) is the central objective of stabilisation, at least in the long run. On the other hand, one can argue that social change—as an important condition for achieving peace in post-conflict countries—requires transformation across the different levels of society. And stabilisation, with its focus on the establishment of order and control, does not allow for such transformations; thereby eroding the central idea of the liberal peace paradigm.

As Meininghaus, Mielke and Mutschler pointed out, this last question in particular illustrates that besides the academic interest, this exploration of the concept, means and practices of stabilisation has an important ethical dimension, too.

**Ann L. Phillips and Peter Rudolf (1st and 2nd f. l.) ** were input-givers in the breakout group "Peacekeeping missions and military intervention"

Stabilisation is no panacea in peacekeeping

For the breakout group "Peacekeeping missions and military intervention", Peter Rudolf, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Ann L. Phillips, Civilian-Military Relations Program at the United States Institute of Peace and Larry Attree, Saferworld, introduced their perspectives on the relationship between stabilisation and peacebuilding, on who benefits from stabilisation measures and the involved risks in stabilisation operations.

Peter Rudolf pointed out that peacekeeping missions are often overburdened by the claim of stabilisation, arguing that traditional peacekeeping missions with a liberal peacebuilding mandate have a respectable working record. Therefore, the usefulness of the term stabilisation is not evident, and it should be abandoned. Moreover, the gap between stabilisation mandates and enforcement is huge. In practice, stabilisation missions are determined by "Western" interests, and UN peacekeeping missions with a stabilisation mandate overlap with counter-insurgency operations. A state-centric bias is pursued in stabilisation missions even though the state and predatory elites are part of the problem. Consequently, Rudolf stated that peacekeeping troops are increasingly becoming part of the conflict, complicit in atrocities and are tasked with conflict management that involves proactive use of force (violation of UN peacekeeping principles). Rudolf argued that risk assessments regarding human rights are necessary.

Ann L. Phillips outlined that stabilisation missions should be regarded as a first step for long-term peacebuilding. Regarding a key question of whose security and stability is addressed in UN peacekeeping missions, she pointed to ambiguity in UN mandates that prioritise the protection of civilians and force protection. Given the high threat environments in which peacekeepers work today and the difficulty in distinguishing the "enemy" from civilians, peacekeepers often default to force protection and fail to protect civilians. Another common ambiguity resides in the responsibility to protect the government while facilitating a peace process with insurgents. Training for dealing with such complex environments is often insufficient as well. Thus, Phillips called for rethinking realistic expectations for peacekeepers. As "coalitions of the willing" become more prominent in stabilisation missions, the geostrategic interests of the stabilisers inform the conception of stabilisation interventions. This is *inter alia* reflected in the fact that the stabilising actor has the power to decide which local actors are considered legitimate. At the same time, Phillips outlined impediments in the United Nation's structure hindering any changes recommended in the HIPPO report and implementation plan to improve peacekeeping of which stabilisation is a part. As to the US government's interagency Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR), Phillips pointed to the ongoing challenges to implementation of its findings and recommendations.

Larry Attree scrutinised the intended end of stabilisation as part of peacebuilding. According to him, stabilisation success should be judged against aims such as reducing violence, respect for human rights, ensuring access to justice, good livelihood opportunities and civic participation. In practice, Attree, too, sees a bias in how stabilisation is conceptualised and understood predominantly from a "Western" or interventionist perspective motivated by external concerns (e.g. regarding migrants or terrorism). He furthermore called for a more nuanced understanding of stabilisation with lower expectations that take into account the various trade-offs among the involved actors that need to be accepted.

In the subsequent discussion, it was outlined that many drivers of conflicts are neglected in stabilisation mandates and their practical enforcement because conflict causes are not addressed. Instead, groups are labelled as terrorists often for political reasons and, thereby, excluded from peace processes. Empirically, we observe that many countries where stabilisation has been attempted are origin countries of refugees and migrants. This led to the question of whether the military can contribute to a reduction of violence; is policing a possible alternative to current stabilisation practices? What would be an effective balance between security and development assistance? Further discussions revolved around the questions of whether arms control should be a major player in stabilisation. The panel ended on the unison note that stabilisation assistance needs to be very contextual; local actors and their interests have to be the focal point. This requires deep local knowledge to understand what has impeded constructive assistance in the past.

**Anne Bennett (r.) and Hugh Blackman ** gave insights from different examples of SSR

Security sector reform: A transformative long-term process

After inputs by Hugh Blackman, Senior SSR Advisor and Team Lead Gambia Project of the Geneva Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and Anne Bennett, Head of the Sub-Saharan Africa Division of DCAF, the breakout group discussed several aspects of "Train and equip programmes and security sector reform (SSR)".

From an SSR-perspective, Hugh Blackman in his opening input defined the role of stabilisation as "buying time and space to allow a political dialogue to develop". He referred to the bridging component inherent to the concept of stabilisation and led over to practices and means, such as the initial reduction of violence and necessary engagement with all armed forces to induce an immediate deactivation of violence. During downstream processes, stabilising efforts would include the identification of those to be reconciled to build dialogue and initial low-level capacity-building at the same time. One major difficulty would include strategic identification of actors in institutions to be tasked with responsibility in order to achieve a positive outcome.

Anne Bennett gave insights from different examples of SSR missions in the Sahel during her input. She stressed the relevance of considering specific contexts within the region when implementing SSR measures; namely state fragility, significant regional and international strategic interests and threats related to violent extremism. She, therefore, claimed that SSR needs to be conceptualised beyond a state-centric understanding to include those multilayered rationalities. Referring to DCAFs work, Bennett stressed the necessity of theory-driven research on local perceptions and dynamics (e.g. local perceptions on "fragility") to develop sufficient knowledge that can be translated into effective policies and programmes. Bennett emphasised that stabilisation is meant to guide a long-term process that requires a fundamental transformation of institutions, enabling the state and society to respond to the changing nature of risks.

During the discussion, participants from many backgrounds revealed experiences from SSR while repeatedly stating that confrontation with a broad set of institutions/actors combined with a general lack of understanding of mechanisms and relations of institutions and practices remains difficult. The prominence of civilian oversight over security forces was perceived to be essential as well as the incorporation of human rights and gender aspects in SSR to prevent human rights violations.

It was discussed that training and equipping state security forces can be counterproductive to stability if those forces are not accountable to legitimate political authority and present themselves as a security threat to the people they were meant to protect. While security forces can be trained and equipped short-term, successful reform of the security sector is usually a long-term endeavour and frequently depends on the "ripeness" of a state to adopt reforms to be effective.

Open questions that arose from this discussion invited to think ahead. One participant encouraged us to question how we actually define the "success" of SSR and what can be expected from, let's say, a G5-state's involvement in stabilising a neighbouring country. When further elaborating on definitions of "success", the question arose how to operationalise and measure success and sustainability within SSR. Another contribution encouraged us to critically think of an underlying "theory of change" which may provide a framework and basis of analysis for SSR's contribution to sustainable peace and development in the long run. Regarding existing difficulties within the coordination of varied security forces, it was asked how or whether these are addressed by different units either from the host country or from sending states.

In sum, stabilisation still seems to be an inconclusive concept inasmuch as it oscillates between the short-term necessities to reduce violence and a long-term perspective that requires the challenging transformation of institutions as part of a holistic approach. Future conceptualisations of stabilisation missions should acknowledge these interrelated dimensions and translate them into profound policies tailored to local contexts. If stabilisation is not a status quo enterprise, as one participant put it, a central problem is that it frequently depends on cooperation with status-quo-oriented actors.

**Sabine Wenz (2nd f. l.) ** explained about the Better Migration Management Programme (BMM)

Migration management as a means to stabilise European politics

The breakout group "'Migration Management' and Humanitarian & Development Aid" debated the relationship between stabilisation and migration and migration control. Sabine Wenz, Director of the Better Migration Management Programme (BMM) of GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), Oliver Bakewell, Senior Lecturer at the Global Development Institute at the University of Manchester and Matteo de Bellis, Researcher for Asylum and Migration at Amnesty International Headquarters, gave opening statements.

Oliver Bakewell explained that migration is often portrayed as a problem that needs to be 'managed' and controlled. The initial focus on the situation of refugees has been sidelined by broader concerns, namely the containment and the perceived need to channel irregular and/or forced migration. Stabilisation is one of the tools used to this end. Bakewell sees programmes such as the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) or the Better Migration Management programme as part of this shifting discourse towards stabilisation as a means to contain migration to Europe.

Sabine Wenz argued that the BMM aims to improve the ability of partner countries on the African continent to manage migration flows so that they benefit of its potential, and she stressed that the BMM agenda on migration is not based on the stabilisation pillar of the EUTF. She also mentioned that local concepts are often not taken into account when discussing stabilisation, while programmes like the BMM are making an effort to conceptualise and implement its measures in coordination with African partner institutions.

Matteo de Bellis criticised attempts of 'migration management' as acts that prioritise migration control over the protection of human rights. De Bellis argued that instead, stabilisation ought to be an instrument that allows maximising human rights protection. Current efforts of migration control focus on European interests with worrying effects on human rights due to the cooperation of European governments with autocratic regimes. This undermines the EU's credibility on upholding human rights with the effect of losing leverage and being subjected to blackmailing by despotic regimes.

**Matteo de Bellis (m.) ** argued that stabilisation ought to be an instrument that allows maximising human rights protection

In the following discussion, there was considerable debate about whether migration management is a European policy tool and a means to an end to fulfil European political interests. Participants agreed that migration management is a European concept that excludes African perspectives on migration, which are often more constructive and considerate of the long history and importance of inter-African migration in particular. They also viewed the implicit goal of migration management as an attempt at "stabilising" Europe, which has witnessed a very heated and populist debate over (im)migration in recent years—the apparent underlying reason for the recent shift in public discourse. Yet, even though migration management is a European concept for European interest, it does offer African countries increased bargaining power in international politics.

Many of the programmes that are implemented under the umbrella of migration management, such as the Khartoum Process, the European Trust Fund for Africa or BMM, work with despotic or authoritarian regimes, which discussants criticised strongly. Practitioners from the development sector argued that these programmes neither aim at stabilisation nor legitimise authoritarian rulers but are rather a tool for development to improve the delivery of basic services to nationals and non-nationals in the respective countries. Conversely, human rights advocates raised the concern that training police forces and delivering surveillance technology or cooperating with militias has detrimental effects on the upholding of human rights. Both sides agreed that the blurry concept and often differing understanding of stabilisation of the actors involved lead to a strong variance on the interpretation, usage and

**Participants ** of the breakout group "Migration management"

implementation of it. Thus, it must be born in mind that definitions of stabilisation differ between every single actor involved and their respective viewpoints.

This point was also taken up in the discussion on the relationship between stabilisation and state, where it was argued that the concept of stabilisation contains an inherent understanding of territoriality. Working with non-state actors is often considered to be de-stabilising as it undermines the ordering framework of Westphalian nation-states and state power. Yet, in practice, this often happens. What does approaching non-state, regional or local actors then mean for stabilisation? Is it a fragmentation of power structures and thereby de-stabilises the state as the primary, legitimate actor? Or does the focus on state actors support the political elite who defends the status quo and their own position?

The debate on managing and containing irregular migration is also closely tied to the question about regular migration flows. The EU's political interest neglects the local perspective on mobility and its importance for livelihoods. This aspect was not debated in detail, but the effect of new border regimes emerging on the African continent that might not be in the local or regional interest received some attention. Moreover, participants emphasised that local perspectives and understandings of mobility and migration were not sufficiently considered in the policy arena, although they are crucial on the ground.

**Oliver Bakewell ** explained that migration is often portrayed as a problem that needs to be 'managed' and controlled

**Ekkehard Brose (2. f. r.) ** argued that the case of Iraq should be considered a relative success

Iraq: A success story?

Ekkehard Brose, Special Envoy for Crisis Prevention and Stabilization at the German Federal Foreign Office, Erica Gaston, Non-resident Fellow, Global Public Policy Institute and Jan Jaap van Osterzee, Head Public Affairs PAX, gave inputs and discussed with the participants in the breakout group "Iraq".

Erica Gaston opened the session with her research perspective on stabilisation and argued that one key point to achieving stabilisation is to reduce violent conflict and establish law and order. As concerns the protection of civilians, the highly fragmented security landscape (split into many variations of minority defence groups, Iraqi national security forces, Popular Mobilization Forces and others) and local mobilisation of armed groups have to be reduced. In the context of a weakening rule of law and state control and higher rates of abuses and marginalisation among the different ethnic groups, DDR, SSR, country stabilisation and reconciliation ought to be the tools for bringing about/approaching stabilisation. However, Gaston concluded that the introduction of such comprehensive programmes depends highly on political will, the lack of which can be seen as the key obstacle to the stabilisation process.

**Erica Gaston ** opened the session with her research perspective on stabilisation in Iraq

In contrast, Ekkehard Brose argued that the case of Iraq should be considered a relative success. It had been paramount for the Iraqi government to realise—after the military defeat by Daesh—that the problems that had led to the debacle were homemade. Having realised this, stabilisation measures after having recaptured territories from Daesh were implemented with full government support. Brose pointed out that UNDP was a major player in this process aiding the government to regain legitimacy. National governments needed to support the stabilisation trust fund and similar measures to enable and enhance stabilisation. Germany and the United States, in particular, had taken a lead role in stabilisation.

Jan Jaap van Osterzee added a complementing perspective by focusing on the social aspect of peace, in particular, the importance of social justice and reconciliation. He spoke about the well working cross-sectarian solidarity among the different communities, and how stabilisation can potentially serve as a connecting component for them. Nevertheless, he pointed out that several layers of conflict coexist and have to be addressed to achieve long-term stability. In particular, the marginalisation of certain segments of the population (minority groups like Yazidi and Christians) is a major cause for conflict that needs to be responded to.

The discussion took up the identified lack of awareness of several conflict layers that need to be disentangled (historical blindness) to reduce the risk that stabilising measures exert destabilising effects in the long run. It remained an open question when stabilisation would actually end and with it the responsibility of 'stabilisers'. Moreover, the participants also scrutinised whether stabilisation entails a new quality as a concept, means or practice. From an academic point of view, aiding locally legitimate partners would allow circumventing the government apparatus. From a political decision-maker's point of view, working with the Iraqi government of which parts are known to be primarily rent-seeking, constitutes one of the few options to push-start the stabilisation process in the country. Thus, the political will of the stabilisers, in this case, supersedes concerns about underlying conflict drivers which might not bode well for sustainable stability and peace.

**Samer Abboud (m.) ** focused on the dilemma that Syria appears to face, that of "illiberal peace"

Syria: Dilemmas of stabilisation

The Breakout Group, which dealt with the stabilisation efforts in Syria, started with inputs from Nona de Jonge, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abdulaziz Hallaj, Coordinator of the Syria Project at the Common Space Initiative, Beirut, and Samer Abboud, Assistant Professor at Villanova University, Pennsylvania.

The first panellist, Nona de Jonge, reported on a Dutch stabilisation project in Syria, which ended last summer due to internal political pressure. The Durch Foreign Ministry defines stabilisation as legitimate stability, i.e. it includes programmes with partners who are locally accepted by the population, uphold the rule of law, pursue a long-term approach and address grievances. The Dutch Foreign Ministry has operated in opposition-held areas only. De Jonge raised five dilemmas which occur during the implementation of stabilisation projects: 1) Which non-formal actor should receive support? 2) How can such programmes be effectively monitored from afar? 3) When stabilisation projects have been implemented, when and how should they be stopped considering that such programmes inevitably also create dependencies? 4) How to best coordinate within multi-donor programmes and different approaches pursued within each of their support lines? 5) How should we balance the political reality on the ground, where an autocratic regime is recapturing territory where stabilisation programmes have been running, often for many years?

Abdulaziz Hallaj stressed that the reality on the ground shows that even the opposition is not a homogeneous unit, but highly diverse. The fact that foreign governments worked with selected partners, thereby often pursuing different, if not conflicting agendas, has led to a fragmentation of armed groups rather than stabilisation. He further pointed out that there are only few well-informed, contextualised programmes, and projects often do not continue, which has resulted in a lack of connection among armed groups. Consequently, the opposition received enough support to stay alive, but not enough to be able to change the political situation on the ground. He stressed that given Syria's very young population, the country—if not the whole region—is headed towards a perfect storm by 2030, for which forecasts project oil and gas devaluation, trade deficits and a bulge of youth unemployment.

Samer Abboud focused on the dilemma that Syria appears to face, that of "illiberal peace": A military defeat of opposition forces whereby an autocratic regime stays in place without any accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed over the past decades. Syria will likely not see a consensus on political reforms. Thus in such a situation, what does it mean to "stabilise" when we face authoritarian peace? "Liberal peace" is a paradigm with set goals; illiberal peace means no political process, no reconciliation and continuing violence. Indeed, permanent violence and persisting enmity are even goals for some parties.

In the following discussion, participants determined that existing coordinated funding lines for stabilisation programmes do not exhibit any clear logic and coordinated goals. Fragmented funding and conflicts of interests between donors have effectively fueled conflict and weakened opposition forces—armed as well as civilian. For the peace process to proceed, participants referred to crucial aspects, such as lacking attention to human security and reconciliation as well as enforced disappearances. In practice, human rights questions are forced into the background when individuals in Syria face the choice of either accessing life-saving medical treatment—which is often only available in government-controlled areas due to the strategic bombing of hospitals—or of pursuing their strife for democracy and human rights but forsaking interaction with the regime, or regime-held areas. Among many Syrians, such decisions reflect a sense of betrayal and desertion by the international community, which had voiced its support for democratic reform but offered no protection on the ground. Although stabilisation projects, which, e.g. entail technical cooperation, police training and support for local communities in building resilience had temporarily improved the living conditions in many areas across the country, these were severely weakened by a lack of coordination and political will, Russia's support for the regime/blocking of the UN Security Council and a regime that has proven unwilling to make any concessions. Now, the question of the physical safety of current or former local partners in stabilisation programmes—and whether and how aid can be delivered with the regime regaining control is confronting locals as well as the international community with new, but no less tragic choices.

**Louisa Waugh, David Lochhead and Denis Tull (f. l. t. r.) ** presented on Mali

Mali: How to operate in an increasingly complex and hostile environment?

The Mali breakout group, began with inputs by David Lochhead, formerly United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Louisa Waugh, Security Governance in the Sahel Expert and Denis Tull, Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM).

In his presentation, David Lochhead pointed out that key problems in Mali are contested state control and trafficking networks. The priorities of stabilisation should hence be the control of trafficking routes as well as national capacity-building, human rights training and border management. As there are several security actors active in Mali, it is also necessary to raise the question of who wants stability and to realise when interests of external actors run counter to the needs of the country and its population. In practice, coordination mechanisms and a common strategy between different security players are very important but often not easy to achieve.

Louisa Waugh noticed that there is, in fact, no clear concept of what stabilisation actually means. When actors talk about stabilisation, they mainly think about peacebuilding. In her view, stability cannot be brought from the outside. Crime, violence and instability (CVI) is part of everyday life in Mali, which causes enduring low-intensity conflicts. As the state is not able to provide security for the local people and its security forces are perceived as even more brutal than local armed groups, frequently these very groups take up the position of the national forces. A concrete and promising approach to civil peace is the establishment of civil–military dialogue structures which aim to build trust between civilians and military forces. The local population's accessibility to justice and the prosecution of human rights violations ought to be part of this micro-level peace-building process.

Denis Tull gave the last statement. In his view, the local context is highly complex, mainly because of blurred boundaries between different social groups and armed groups in Mali. He noticed that it is also important to keep in mind the different perspectives on stabilisation between international agencies and the Malian government which seems to be unwilling to undertake significant reforms, for example in the security sector. Institutional learning is not very efficient because past experiences are often ignored by the different actors, and human rights protection is not given the role it should have. In general, he observes a "security actor traffic jam" in Mali.

In the following discussion, many questions were raised. One of the first comments centred on the definition of different groups as extremists, terrorists or part of social movements. It was stressed that not all rebel groups in Mali are terrorists and that the label "terrorist" is used inflationary. A further question was, how civil and international peace missions can operate in an increasingly complex and, at times, hostile environment where the legitimacy of international actors is on a low level among the local population? Louisa Waugh noticed that building trustful relations with local partner organisations is the key to establishing legitimacy. The difficulty of UN missions is that they are closely following the logic of anti-terrorism campaigns. To reach a level of stability, it is important to consider the deeper lying causes of instability. Another comment was that international actors largely perceive the nation-state to be the appropriate governance structure. Local perceptions often diverge from this position and would favour a less state-centric approach. Finally, migration became part of the discussion. The control of migration flows and migration management are of great interest within the European Union. The governments of Mali and other Sahel countries know this well and use it as bargaining chip in negotiations with donors.

**David Lochhead ** pointed out that key problems in Mali are contested state control and trafficking networks

**Abdulaziz Hallaj ** was input-giver in the breakout group "Syria"

Conclusion: Stabilisation is neither unproblematic nor unpolitical

A "market place" format in the morning and reports to the plenum in the afternoon allowed all participants to access the results of the breakout group discussions and invited them to compare and further discuss the results. In the final Wrap Up, Meininghaus, Mielke and Mutschler aimed to synthesise the insights of the day and relate these back to the three sets of guiding questions that were set out in the morning.

The participants were asked to repeat the morning poll to observe possible changes in their opinions. Indeed, the overall impression of stabilisation was now more critical; 44 per cent voted negative, 32 per cent positive, and 28 per cent neutral. Opinions in the audience reflected a more cautious and nuanced attitude to stabilisation than before, because its meaning is so diverse, opening the door for all types of interest-based interpretations and actions. Our joint scrutiny of "stabilisation" as a concept and in practice showed to have challenged its perception as being "unproblematic" or even "unpolitical".

The final reflections on the three sets of questions revolved around the following main points:

What is our understanding of stabilisation? Who or what is meant to be stabilised, and to what ends?

Overall, given the diversity of interpretations, understandings and interest-driven implementation strategies undertaken as stabilisation, participants did not find any common, all-inclusive definition of stabilisation. They widely agreed that we lack criteria for 'successful' stabilisation. However, they also agreed on the smallest common denominator, that is the reduction of violence as the discursive and practical aim of stabilisation efforts. Especially representatives of policy circles and implementers of stabilisation programmes claimed to have quite a clear understanding of what stabilisation is and what measures it entails, but they also admitted that stabilisation is contextual and subject to changes. Overall, two poles of stabilisation were revealed in the discussions. On the more modest end of the spectrum, stabilisation seems to be seen as a bundle of short- to medium-term measures to decrease violence, while a more ambitious understanding also aims at the long-term transformation of societal structures to achieve sustainable stability. Who proposes which model depends on the professional background of the respective proponent.

How does stabilisation work in practice? What are the concrete means and practices of stabilisation?

Corresponding to the heterogeneous understandings of stabilisation, the range of practical implementation measures is even broader. When it comes to implementation, significant contradictions and problems between the theory and practice of stabilisation become apparent. One is closely related to interest-defined stabilisation policy, e.g. when migration from Africa to Europe is viewed as a risk to stability from the Northern perspective but thought to be stabilising when viewed from the South. Another problem becomes obvious when many donors are present in one stabilisation context and create what has been called a "stabilisation traffic jam", and when a lack of coordination regarding ends and means of stabilisation risks creating an overall destabilising impact. The so-called robust UN peacekeeping missions are another case in point. Here, stabilisation mandates are launched without a clear definition of either the stabilisation component or the endpoint/success criteria for intervention and without reflect-

**Nona de Jonge and Jan Jaap van Oosterzee ** presented in the breakout groups "Syria" and "Iraq"

ing on the implications of the lack of definition for the everyday work of the peacekeeping personnel. The unclear mandates carry considerable risks, not only with regard to the reputation and credibility of the United Nations when the peacekeeping principles get undermined but also to the physical security of the personnel and long-term stability of the conflict setting they are operating in. Finally, a central dilemma consists in the frequent necessity to work with non-legitimate regimes and actors to initially reduce violence. This collaboration risks benefiting these actors and aiding them to sustain their power and the status quo, which is often in their interest but is detrimental to more profound and long-term changes of the local power structures which have often led to instability in the first place. If stabilisation is "not a status quo enterprise", as one participant put it, it will also have to focus on structural changes. For example, meaningful SSR and DDR programmes would be highly necessary to decrease the likelihood of further violent escalations in the mid- to long term in Iraq and Mali.

**Elvan Isikozlu ** moderated a wrap up session

Does the growing significance of stabilisation imply abandoning support for democracy and human rights, instead focusing on the establishment and maintenance of order?

Throughout the day, a controversial debate emerged among participants discussing this question. While the overall impression was that everybody would agree that stabilisation aims at supporting human rights and democracy, reflections on actual practice clearly showed contradictions. In consequence, the practical sacrifice of ambitions might well be captured as consenting to modest motives dominated by mere policing objectives as they are manifest in the establishment and maintenance of order. However, this can be highly problematic, for example when the counterinsurgency measures of peacekeeping/stabilisation missions do not reflect the concerns of the local communities and are seen mainly as support for a corrupt and illegitimate government. In Syria, with the Assad regime 'winning' militarily, authoritarian peace is around the corner, and donors are struggling with how to position themselves. This shows that stability cannot be imposed from the outside unilaterally but needs to grow bottom-up, assisted by external technical support at maximum. The often observed contradiction between immediate stabilisation measures and long-term non-stabilisation points to the necessity of employing long-term horizons for stabilisation endeavours from the outset and the beginning of military and aid interventions. For example, serious SSR implies, besides train and equip measures, not only human rights training for the security forces but also a (re) institutionalisation of democratic control of the armed forces and security organs. In authoritarian settings, this poses a challenge because structural change will only be realised in the long term whereas there is a risk that authoritarian regimes misuse delivered arms and hijack training activities. Conditionality in development aid was discussed as one measure to tackle these challenges.

**Wrap up session ** Participants

Beyond the three blocks of questions, several synthesis messages can be deduced. We suggest that these are followed up in further discussion formats that involve decision-makers, implementers and scholars:

\ A number of participants raised the concern that stabilisation is an externally imposed agenda driven by interests and criteria of interveners/stabilisers that usually do not comply with the understanding of stabilisation of those subjected to these measures. 'Local' concepts of stability and stabilisation are disregarded more often than not. The gap between stabilisation from outside and internal (context-evolved) stability is unresolved and touches on ethical considerations that need to be followed up in future discussions. Since stabilisation cannot be imposed from outside, the intervention society is objectified and any existing understandings of how to end violence and mitigate conflict are sidelined. This must be avoided at all cost.

\ The observation by several participants that, indeed, short-term stabilisation measures do not guarantee long-term (however defined) stabilisation success calls for a revision of stabilisation policies and enforcement practices and an approach that is as comprehensive as possible. This requires identifying clear criteria for aims and thus success and the actual 'endpoint' of stabilisation, as well as integrating understandings of stability and measures how to reach these as judged by the society that is subject to stabilisation.

\ There are different approaches to the question as to whether governments should be partners in stabilisation efforts or not. However, working with authoritarian regimes at the cost of neglecting locally legitimate actors should be avoided. Where this is deemed unavoidable, stabilisation actors should identify strict conditions for intervention/aid (i.e. structural changes towards democratic governance), fixed timelines and milestones, as well as minimum standards ("red lines"). The decision whether to (dis-)continue stabilisation programmes should be continuously under review.

**bicc **
Internationales Konversionszentrum Bonn
Bonn International Center for Conversion GmbH

Pfarrer-Byns-Straße 1, 53121 Bonn, Germany
+49 (0)228 911 96-0, Fax -22, bicc@bicc.de

www.bicc.de
www.facebook.com/bicc.de

bicc Bonn International Center for Conversion \

Director for Research
Professor Dr. Conrad Schetter

Director for Administration
Michael Dedek

EDITORS
Dr Esther Meininghaus, Dr Katja Mielke, Dr Max M. Mutschler

CO-EDITOR
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COPYEDITOR
Heike Webb

SUPPORT
Kirsten Brinkmann, Luisa Denter, Rahel Lorenz,
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DATE OF PUBLICATION
14 February 2019

PHOTOS
Max Meßling \ BICC

LAYOUT
kippconcept.gmbh, Bonn

CONCEPTION EDITORIAL DESIGN
Diesseits – Kommunikationsdesign, Düsseldorf

JRF MEMBER OF Johannes-Rau-Forschungsgemeinschaft

The conference was generously funded by the Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung (DSF, German Foundation for Peace Research) and the Foundation for International Dialogue of the Savings Bank in Bonn

DSF Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung german foundation for peace research

Foundation for International Dialogue of the Savings Bank in Bonn

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