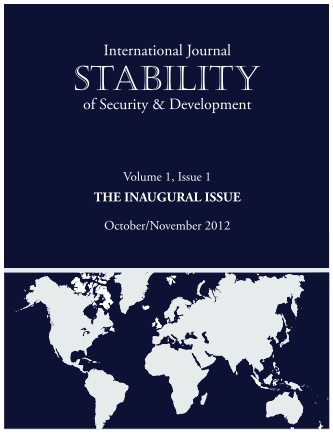

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ARTICLE

Against Stabilization

Roger Mac Ginty*

This is a polemic against the concept and practice of stabilization as practiced by leading states from the global north in peace support interventions. It is not an argument against stability. Instead, it depicts stabilization as an essentially conservative doctrine that runs counter to its stated aims of enhancing local participation and legitimacy. It is an agenda of control that privileges notions of assimilation with international (western) standards and mainstreams the military into peace-support operations. As a result, the value of peace is undercut.

This is not an argument in favor of instability. Instead, it is an argument against the specific policies enacted under the name of 'stabilization'. In particular, this polemic discusses why western states and organizations have fetishized control and order with consequences for peace, liberty and localized autonomy. Our interest in stability, and the often draconian stabilization policies pursued in societies emerging from conflict and authoritarianism, says much about us.

The article is offered in the spirit of debate and reflection. It begins by noting how the concept of peace has been side-lined in recent years and has been supplanted by 'stabilization', 'security' and other concepts that are based on ideas of control. The article then charts how the term stabilization has entered the peacemaking and peacebuilding lexicon. The term lacks definitional clarity and is often found alongside a broad range of security and peace-related terms. The article explains the ascendancy of the term, and the practice of stabilization locating much of the explanation in the fallout of the War on Terror. The thrust of the article raises an important question: why is so much international intervention based on the notion of control and stabilization rather than notions that promote emancipation, autonomy, and dissent? It seems that stabilization is axiomatically connected with foreign policy stances that tend to prioritize national interests. As a result, an internal contradiction (and therefore failure) rests in the heart of stabilization.

Whatever happened to peace?

One doesn't need to be a disciple of Foucault, Bourdieu or other dead French philosophers to realize that words matter. The fortunes of the word 'peace' seem to be at a low-ebb. This is not to romanticize the term peace. Human history has seen enough instances of victors' peace to know that 'peace' is often won on the battlefield or enforced through a secret police. In the first century AD, the Roman historian Tacitus observed the following in the aftermath of the Roman subjugation of ancient Britain: 'The Romans created a de-

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sert, and called it peace' (Mac Ginty 2006: 12–32). If we fast forward two millennia then we can see other instances in which cities have been razed and populations cleared to secure 'peace'. Colonel Jeffrey Martindale of the US Army noted the results of the 2010 military surge in Afghanistan thus: 'We just obliterated those towns. They're not there at all. These are just parking lots right now' (cited in Partlow and Brulliard 2010). Similar strategies have been used to pacify Grozny and Aleppo. While both ancient and modern leaders have used force to make 'peace', in recent years there have been further erosions of the term 'peace'.

In part this might be because of a puncturing of the hubris surrounding the liberal interventionism of the late 1990s and first decade of this century. The quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the global financial crisis, have tempered the optimism of would-be interventionists. The appetite for open-ended overseas interventions is very much diminished. There is a greater understanding that conflicts cannot be easily 'solved', and that ameliorative efforts are required to be multidimensional and long-term. International organizations and bilateral donors show a more nuanced understanding of conflict and its links with development (see, for example, World Bank 2011).

A quick survey of states that have experienced post-conflict and post-authoritarian international interventions shows that many lag in indicators on democratization and transparency. This is despite substantial and sustained international peace-support, transition and governance interventions. The 2012 Freedom House indicators list Afghanistan, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Iraq, Rwanda, South Sudan and Tajikistan – all states that have received substantial international assistance – as being 'not free'. All five states in which the UN Peacebuilding Commission has been active (Burundi, Central African Republic, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone) are ranked as 'partly free' (Freedom House 2012). Nepal, Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Cambodia, Burundi and Sudan languish near the bottom of Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Index despite being recipients of significant international attention (Transparency International 2011). The chief point is that the results of international intervention have been patchy at best despite the expenditure of blood, money and prestige. The cumulative experience has had a series of impacts on the ambition and optimism associated with international intervention.

Recent policy documents by international organizations underscore this new realism. There has been a rowing back from a rigid acceptance of western statebuilding and governance norms. The term 'good enough governance' has crept into the governance lexicon, suggesting minimally acceptable standards rather than an exhaustive list of institutional standards fragile contexts are expected to meet (Grindle 2005). There has also been a recognition of the utility and legitimacy of forms of governance that admit the importance of indigenous, customary or traditional decision-making processes (Mac Ginty 2008). The 2011 New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States lowers expectations by noting how 'basic governance transformations may take 20–40 years' and that 'overly technocratic' interventions have failed to make sustainable connections with populations in societies undergoing post-conflict transitions (OECD 2011). The United Nations Development Program's 2011 Governance for Peace report also moves away from top-down prescriptive rigidity by observing that 'responsive institutions are close to the people and so the emphasis is on local governance' (UNDP 2011). The World Bank's 2011 World Development Report recognizes the importance of 'best-fit approaches appropriate to the local political context'. In a break from the prescriptive tone of the World Bank in the 1990s, the World Development Report cautions 'Don't let perfection be the enemy of progress – embrace pragmatic, best-fit options to address immediate challenges' and highlights the importance of 'inclusive

enough coalitions' and 'local participatory practices' (World Bank 2011).

Indeed, the phrase 'good enough' has appeared with increasing frequency in relation to Afghanistan. The former British Defence Minister, Liam Fox, noted that Afghanistan could expect 'good enough security' (cited in BBC 2010). In 2012, the White House, State Department and Pentagon were all reported to be using the phrase 'Afghan good enough' as a shorthand for a lowered benchmark that would enable a swifter exit (Cooper and Shanker 2012).

In one respect, this 'good enoughery' suggests that lesson learning exercises have taken root in diplomatic capitals and in the headquarters of international organizations. Policies are being linked more closely to the capability of international actors to deliver and expectations are being managed. Yet, there is another reading of this new realism: that there has been a significant retreat from the essential goals of international intervention and a refocusing on liberal internationalism-lite, or a stripped-down budget version of intervention. In some cases, it as though the exit strategy has become the central plank of the mandate. It is worth re-stressing that none of this is to romanticize a golden era of international intervention in which pure notions of peace were pursued. Such an era never existed. The pursuit of peace has always had to contend with the prosaic realities of the facts on the ground, limited budgets, shifting policy priorities and demographic conundrums that pit communities against one another.

Yet if peace has always been unfashionable among foreign policy elites, it has become even more so in recent decades. Multiple factors account for this. The world is no stranger to Manichean worldviews, with individuals and societies often reaching for oppositional binaries to understand social phenomena: good versus evil, rational versus irrational, and modern versus traditional etc. Yet, there were signs in the 1990s that Manichean worldviews were eroding in western capitals. The 1990s was the period of inclusive peace processes in which combatants were urged to come in from the cold and negotiate. It was, as John Darby (1996) observed, a time for the 'weak smile and a hard swallow': De Klerk met Mandela, Arafat met Rabin, Adams met British government ministers. The decline of Cold War proxy conflicts allowed international actors space in which to encourage negotiated settlements, for example, Angola, Mozambique, Guatemala and El Salvador. The 1990s saw a massive extension of the number and remit of internationally-supported peacebuilding operations. While not an era of sweetness and light, it did seem as though negotiated settlements were internationally-condoned. Virtually all of the peace accords recorded by the Peace Accords Matrix involved some sort of international recognition or verification of implementation (PAM 2012).

The events of and response to 9/11 changed international (mainly US) attitudes to inclusive peace negotiations. The international space that had encouraged combatants to investigate negotiated settlements became more closed. The War on Terror ushered in a renewed Manichean era of them versus us (see, for example, Bush 2001). This had obvious and well-documented impacts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many other regimes, from Nepal to Zimbabwe, saw the opportunity to use the War on Terror narrative to their own advantage (Falk 2003; Darby 2012). Counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency were used as smokescreens to deny rights and avoid negotiations. The concepts of neutrality and humanitarian space became constrained. The line between combatants and non-combatants has always been blurred, but the armed humanitarianism of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan blurred this line even further. For many Iraqis and Afghans the United Nations was just another part of a western coalition, with the result that attacks on UN and humanitarian personnel have increased markedly over the past decade.

The chief point is that peace became subjugated to other concerns such as winning

the War on Terror or acquiring quiescent allies. Of course, the term 'peace' and the subdiscipline of Peace Studies have always been regarded with some suspicion; something of a hippie holdout while others got on with the serious business of policy and 'solutions'. Yet by the mid-1990s peace based on negotiations was about as fashionable as it was possible for the awkward kid to become. A quick perusal of the list of Nobel Peace Prize winners in the 1990s attests to the international affirmation of negotiated settlements (FW de Klerk and Nelson Mandela; Yassir Arafat, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin; John Hume and David Trimble; and Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo and Jose Ramos-Horta).

Enter Stabilization

The term 'stabilization' has crept into the governance and intervention parlance steadily since the mid-1990s. The term was commonly used in relation to economies undergoing the shock doctrine of rapid liberalization and the sweeping away of state support (Klein 2007). Stabilization, in this respect, was about controlling hyperinflation, paring back the state and ensuring that post-Soviet sphere states were integrated into an ordered, open economic system. In relation to peace and conflict, the term truly 'arrived' with the establishment in January 1996 of the Stabilization Force (SFOR) for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its association with the military alliance NATO is telling; it was inflected by a military paradigm of security rather than a more optimistic peace paradigm. 'Stabilization' was embraced in the US policy community. In 2003 the US Army Peacekeeping Institute was renamed the US Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (Schultz and Agoglia 2006: 23). Peacekeeping had become a domestically unpopular term. Stabilization was further internalized by the policy community with the publication of a new US Army Field Manual on 'Stability Operations' (US Army 2009). In 2004 an Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) was created within the State Department to pool knowledge from the Iraq and Afghanistan experiences. In 2011 the State Department established a Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations into which S/CRS would be folded.

The S/CRS mandate was to 'lead, coordinate and institutionalize US Government civilian capacity to prevent or prepare for post-conflict situations, and to help stabilize and reconstruct societies in transition or civil strife, so they can reach a sustainable path toward peace, democracy and a market economy' (Pascual 2005). The mission statement is interesting in that it does not explicitly mention military actors. The mandate is expansive in that it encompasses on-going conflicts and transitions, as well as conflict prevention. The S/CRS invocation of peace, democracy and a market economy is revealing as it locates stabilization firmly the 'liberal peace' paradigm. The liberal peace is taken as short-hand for the dominant form of peacemaking favoured by leading states, international financial institutions and international organizations. It uses a language of liberalism (hence the phrase 'liberal peace') and emphasizes the importance of democratization, transparent institutions, and free markets.

But stabilization is by no means a US preserve. Two United Nations missions have adopted the phrase 'stabilization': the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO). The UN-affiliated Peace Operations Training Institute in Turin offers a 'Stabilization and Reconstruction Management Senior Course'. The Government of the United Kingdom has a cross-departmental Stabilization Unit, comprised of personnel from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development. It defines stabilization as 'the process of establishing peace and security in countries affected by conflict and instability. It is the promotion of peaceful political settlement to produce a le-

gitimate indigenous government, which can serve its people. Stabilization often requires external joint military and civilian support' (Stabilization Unit 2012). In 2000 the European Union established its Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS) scheme for the western Balkans. This was followed by a process of Stabilization and Association Agreements for countries of the region. While much of the focus was on economic stabilization and preparing the way for eventual EU membership, the EU conceptualization of stabilization includes an interest in security (Council of the European Union 2000).

In one respect there is a good deal of comforting optimism within the definitions of stabilization, and the term 'peace' retains a position in many of them. What is noticeable is that many of the definitions lack precision and resemble a hodge-podge of words around the general areas of peacebuilding, security and development. A number of explanations of stabilization carelessly elide into terms that have distinct definitions. Siegle (2011: 2) for example, refers to peacekeeping 'and other forms of stabilization'. NATO refers to 'stabilization and reconstruction' or 'S&R' (Nelson 2006). Our interest in definitions is not to engage in terminological prissiness. The labels used by states, international organizations and their proxies matter a great deal. Making, keeping and building peace are clearly political projects. Yet it helps that there are some attempts to maintain non-political, humanitarian and impartial space within these projects. This is often difficult to achieve, and has not been helped by the continued blurring of distinctions between combatants and non-combatants (Hancock and Mitchell 2007). The danger is that the terminological imprecision surrounding 'stabilization' creates a meta-category; full of buzzwords but empty of meaning. Moreover, there is the danger that peace becomes subsumed by a range of other terms more closely associated with security.

So is it possible to reach a widely agreed definition of stabilization? Yes, but the definition has to be quite broad: an international endeavour to stop conflict, embed peace and routinize a functioning state that operates according to strictures of good governance. Most definitions mention the input of local actors in conferring legitimacy to a stabilized dispensation. What definitions like this fail to do, and what this article seeks to address, is the underlying ideological and power dynamics that underpin stabilization.

The ascent of stabilization needs to be examined within the wider context of the securitization of aid and peace-support intervention. Securitization is the prioritization of security and the security lens, especially in the development and aid spheres where traditionally notions of empathy and moral compassion held sway. Securitization, or a security-led paradigm, is not new and certainly predated 9/11 and the Afghan and Iraqi debacles. US support to authoritarian regimes in Central and South America in the 1980s can be regarded as an era of securitization in which workers and indigenous rights movements were viewed through a Cold War prism as threats to be extirpated. The War on Terror encouraged a renewed emphasis on securitization, and commentators have declared many areas of life as being 'securitized': the body, food, the environment (Martin 2010; Gueldry 2012). The literature on the securitisation of the humanitarian sector is particularly insightful, with Mark Duffield (2002: 89) charting how development and security have elided over the past two decades:

> 'A metropolitan consensus has emerged that holds that conflict is the result of a developmental malaise in which poverty, resource competition, environmental collapse, population growth, and so on, in the context of failed or predatory state institutions is fomenting non-conventional and criminalised forms of conflict. Instead of seeing a Third World as a series of states constituting a site of strategic alliance and competition, the world's conflict zones have been remapped in

> the representational form of the borderlands.'

These borderlands were to be kept at bay, controlled and securitized. Conflict and societal emergencies were exceptionalized and exoticized: something that happened over there, far away from metropolitan center and something to be defended against. Thus, for example, Haiti, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and many conflict zones were 'othered' and described as hopeless or 'anarchic' (Kaplan 1994).

As Duffield and others point out, we have seen the establishment of a transnational and international form of securitization in which it is associated with entire sectors (humanitarianism and development), regions (the Horn of Africa) and phenomena (AIDS, migration etc.). Securitization has become systemic, embedded within the structures and discourses that frame and respond to conflicts.

Explaining Stabilization

One can quite easily identify a series of proximate factors that have encouraged states, international and multilateral organizations and others to adopt the securitization lens. The already mentioned reaction to 9/11 and the Iraq and Afghanistan imbroglios are the most obvious explanations. Yet proximate factors can only go so far and must be seen in unison with structural factors that provide an ideological milieu and political economy in which stabilization (and an aggressively securitized version of stabilization at that) is regarded as a legitimate and mainstream activity. In the post-9/11 period we have seen the internalization of a security-dilemma in the technocracy of a number of states and international organizations (Booth and Wheeler 2007). Sophisticated political economies of risk identification and 'management' have become institutionalized. In a classic case of epistemic closure, social, economic, political and cultural phenomena are regarded through a security-lens and security-led prescriptions are recommended.

The story behind the development of a political economy and technocracy that regards stabilization as a norm to be achieved is complex. Crucial in this story is the inversion of the notion of liberalism that has traditionally underpinned much peace-support international intervention. In the widely accepted view of liberalism, the individual has the potential to become an empowered citizen who, along with other rational self-interested citizens, can steer the polity towards peace and economic success. In this view, international peace-support interventions seek to empower citizens (through democratization, restraints on centralized states and civil society enhancement).

David Chandler's *International Statebuilding* (2010) constructs a powerful critique of this 'liberal peace', arguing that we inhabit a world of 'post-liberal intervention' in which key ideas of liberalism (that have traditionally guided peace-support interventions) have been discarded. Instead we have entered a post-liberal paradigm that privileges difference over universality, intervention over autonomy and governance over government. So notions of universal human values and aspirations (foundational principles in classical interpretations of liberalism) are subjugated to meaner 'agent centred' views that locate 'the problems of international society with those who have the least access to global wealth and resources and are held to have blocked themselves from achieving this access, through the conscious choices and decisions of the people and/or their political elites' (Chandler 2010: 191). Stated bluntly: 'You've got conflict? That's your problem.' This framing of international problems locates the necessity (and blame) for international intervention with the poor choices of the inhabitants of the conflict area and justifies statebuilding and good governance interventions that manage difference.

The second presumption of the post-liberal paradigm is the privileging of preventive intervention over autonomy. Chandler notes how autonomy has been transformed from a

sphere of freedom and non-intervention in the classical liberal canon to a sphere that calls for intervention in the post-liberal paradigm. Hence forceful intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, but also sanctions regimes against Iran and Syria. 'The starting assumption is that external intervention is necessary as a precondition for social harmony, rather than that intervention is an exception or reaction to the breakdown of social peace' (Chandler 2010: 192). In this view, the autonomy of post-liberal states is regarded as potentially problematic and must be countered by the threat of preventive intervention.

The third presumption in the post-liberal framing of society, conflict and the need for international intervention is that governments have limited capability. Governments, and the formal institutions of sovereign states, are not to be viewed as active agents that deliver services. Instead, they are stripped down into facilitators and moderators. 'The post-liberal paradigm tends, in fact, to reject policy goals and is concerned more with processes of engagement, held to empower the other, enabling them to pursue their goals safely and within a framework of international constraints' (Chandler 193). This has profound implications for what the inhabitants of war-torn societies can expect from statebuilding exercises. They can expect governance rather than government: 'the tasks of international statebuilding are understood as those of the export of good governance rather than the tasks of direction or control' (Chandler 193–4).

The cumulative impact of this post-liberal paradigm is a context in which stabilization is justified as both a means and an end.

Concluding Discussion

It is worth restating the opening remark that this article is not an argument against stability. Much human development and social progress has depended on stability, security and ordered change. Indeed periods of rapid and uncontrolled change are often associated with high death rates; the French, Chinese and Iranian revolutions spring to mind. This article is a critique of the concept of stabilization and how it has been conceptualized and enacted. In particular, the article is concerned about the logic of control that lies behind stabilization.

An argument made in defense of stabilization is that it is an emergency interim measure required when the security situation does not allow a more expansive, civilian-focused international mission. This 'institutionalization before liberalization' argument has plausibility, but only in a limited sense. The author would contended that control and securitization are so hard-wired into contemporary peace-support operations that is difficult for them to adopt a laissez faire attitude to local autonomy.

Four points can be made by way of conclusion. Firstly, stabilization – as a concept and practice – lowers the horizons of peace and peace interventions. It moves us away from the realm of emancipation towards the realm of control. It is, of course, prudent to manage expectations. The peace-support interventions of the 1990s and beyond have been marked by interventions in which public expectations (especially in terms of the provision of public goods) were left unfulfilled. This has left a number of situations, Kosovo and Angola being good examples, in which there is significant public disaffection in the political sphere. Many people are unable to see a link between involvement in formal political activity (such as voting) and an improvement in their material conditions. Yet, while expectation management is sensible, stabilization risks extinguishing the optimism that many transitions require. The term suggests a conservative exercise of maintaining a controlled environment rather than emancipation or liberation. Profound social change (and it is worth remembering that the societies that experience civil war tend to have shocking disparities of wealth and power) requires transformation across many levels of society. Such transformation is likely to have unforeseen consequences, many of which might challenge western norms and sensibilities. It requires

social entrepreneurship, risk-taking and individuals and communities operating outside of traditional roles. All of this is anathema to the notion of stabilization which emphasizes control, order and institutions. Indeed, it is worth noting how statebuilding is the central plank of most peace-support interventions. Statist and institutionalist methods and ends are preferred by the international guardians of peace. Such an approach risks excluding creativity, innovation, dissent, resistance and pluralism; all indicators of agency and of a vibrant polity.

It is worth asking when reviewing stabilization operations: where does power lie? Certainly, many stabilization missions mention local legitimacy, participation, empowerment and consent. Yet the use of a corporate and plastic language often does not equate to a fundamental re-ordering of power away from national and international elites. The primary aim of stabilization is usually ordered transition, with the transition bounded by strictures set down by international financial institutions and diplomatic conventions. In cases where people power has challenged international order (whether Palestinians voting for Hamas or Icelanders reneging their debts) established actors from the global north have branded these activities as 'irresponsible'.

An argument can be made that stabilization missions are revolutionary, and provide opportunities for an expansion of human freedom. This is certainly the narrative employed by the stabilizers. There can be no doubting that international actions have helped topple despots and have introduced significant sociopolitical change in a number of societies. Yet such change is bounded by essentially conservative parameters that reinforce international order, the primacy of state sovereignty, and the dominance of the market economy. The World Bank and others have worked to limit the economic autonomy of post-war and post-authoritarian states. International financial institution strictures to pare back the state, trim welfare, keep inflation low and open (usually fragile) economies to outside competition are rarely empowering. Indeed, international stabilization programs are often a diet of compliance and discipline.

A second concluding point is that the mainstreaming of stabilization has resulted in a hollowing out of peace in international approaches to intervention. Peace still plays a role, rhetorically at least, in the statements of international organizations. Yet, with stabilization, it has to share a billing with securitized and institutionalized order. Again, it is worth restating that there is nothing inherently wrong with security and order; many basic societal functions require security and order. Most expansive definitions of peace, however, emphasize the emancipatory aspects of peace such as fulfilling human potential. The elision of peace with security, which is a recurrent theme in most definitions of stabilization, undercuts the distinctive value of peace. The danger is that peace is relegated to just another glib buzzword that is empty of meaning.

A third concluding point is that the concept of stabilization further normalizes the role of the military and aligned security agencies into peacebuilding. As seen by both the US and UK, stabilization is about harnessing civilian and military know-how, and institutionalizing the working relationships between the two sectors. This is not to impugn the military sector. Many militaries contain highly professionalized and ethical personnel, and they provide the security that is often essential so that public goods such as medical assistance can be supplied. Yet, the principal role of militaries is to fight. They are trained, equipped and conditioned to operate through a security lens. The routine and institutionalized inclusion of the military in peace-support operations endangers expansive notions of peace that are based on the fulfilment of human potential, imaginative and creative expressions of political and cultural desires. So the argument is not against the military per se. Instead, it is against the normalization of a military role in peace-support, which has profound

consequences for issues of impartiality and consent. Indeed, the ease with which NATO moved from stabilization to combat in Afghanistan underscores how the embedded nature of military forces in peace-support missions allows the military dimensions of missions to be stepped up (Suhkre 2008).

The final concluding point is to ask: what does the emphasis on stabilization say about us, in the global north? It has been argued here that stabilization is essentially a conservative doctrine that lowers the horizons of peace and normalizes a military role in peace-support operations. It is about control and ordering the transition of states emerging from civil war and authoritarianism. Many of the criticisms levelled at 'the liberal peace' (Campbell, Chandler and Sabaratnam 2011; Roberts 2011) remain valid for stabilization: it is an attempt to create compliant, market-friendly any-states that do not threaten the international order. The privileging of stability is manifest in multiple peace-support and statebuilding programs. Whether military mentorship or good governance reforms, the underlying ethos is one of control: the alignment of governing systems in the post-war society so that they meet international (read 'western') norms. This isomorphism reflects a significant insecurity on the part of leading states, international organizations and international financial institutions. It suggests an intolerance towards dissent and an over-eagerness to depict it as 'resistance' or something malign (Mac Ginty 2012b).

While it is sensible for leading states to minimize risk, there has been a fetishization of control. Yet, it is worth asking if it is possible to micro-manage transitions. The nannyish instincts of stabilization undervalues the agency that national elites and local communities have in interpreting, delaying, modifying and mimicking inputs from international peace-support and statebuilding actors (Bhabha 1980). All societies are 'hybrid political orders' (Boege, Brown, Clements and Nolan 2009), none more so than societies undergoing peace-support interventions in which international and local dynamics combine to produce a fusion polity. International statebuilding or good governance inputs are often adapted to suit local needs and mores. Many societies reach some sort of equilibrium whereby interest groups accommodate one another, and civility rather than civil war is the norm. This is not to romanticize all things traditional and indigenous, nor to underestimate the very real human hardship that emerges from pogroms and ethnic cleansing. It is, instead, to point to the prevalence of everyday diplomacy and civility in many societies. This may not be pretty and may not conform to western, legally enshrined notions of pluralism. Yet, in many societies, it operates at the village, street and workplace levels as a form of social capital that acts as a conflict retardant. The helicopter parenting of stabilization interferes with the tendency of many post-war societies to reach a 'natural' equilibrium. It often privileges some groups and systems of governance over others, and creates a political economy of prestige and resources around the newly built or reformed state.

It should be stressed that the argument in favour of 'equilibrium' should not be seen as a charter for ethnic cleansers and those who wish to impose their will. Instead, it is an argument for more circumspection with regard to international peace-support intervention and the range of activities that comprise the intervention. It is an argument that stabilization diminishes the ability of fragile societies to understand themselves, their conflict, and the ways in which sustainable accommodation can be achieved. This is despite the language of 'local participation' and 'local legitimacy' that often heavily features in the stabilization literature. S

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