

STABILISATION AND “POST-CONFLICT” RECONSTRUCTION

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by

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Introduction

Good afternoon. I am honoured to have been invited to speak at RUSI.

In his most recent RUSI speech on the 11th of January, the Prime Minister spoke of the post 9/11 world being one of “a hearts and minds battle as much as (a) military one”, and of the “immense challenges” that Britain faces in delivering the “reconstruction, reconciliation, development and governance” necessary to win it. What are these challenges? What role is the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) playing in addressing these, and what more might it do? In answering these questions, the views I express are my own and do not seek to represent an agreed cross-Government position.

Stabilisation and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

“Post-conflict reconstruction” gives a misleading impression of PCRU’s mission and of where these challenges are greatest. It conjures up a vision of rebuilding infrastructure in a relatively benign environment where security has been restored. This might have been true in Mozambique or Bosnia after peace agreements have been reached, but clearly is not the case in Basra or Helmand now. In both these places, the international community is seeking to establish stability in a country emerging from a violent conflict, where the state is unable to deliver its basic responsibilities, and is faced by widespread armed opposition that requires the presence of an international peace enforcement force. “Stabilisation” is a more appropriate description. I mean by this, “the process by which underlying tensions that might lead to resurgence in violence and a break-down in law and order are managed and reduced, whilst efforts are made to support the preconditions for successful

longer-term development”¹. Whilst there is no internationally agreed definition, this interpretation is equivalent to the term “stabilisation and transformation” used jointly by the UN and World Bank in their Post-Conflict Needs Assessment², and “stabilisation, security, transition and reconstruction” used by the US Government³.

Stabilisation operations combine military, political and development actions. Military intervention seeks to assist in the disarmament and demobilisation of armed opposition, to start the process of building effective security forces and to provide the security needed for the efforts of other actors. Political engagement, both internally and externally, seeks to ensure that there is a workable inclusive settlement that addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes reconciliation. Capacity building support seeks to enable the government to extend its authority. This means laying the foundations for the rule of law and basic economic governance. It also means putting in place the building blocks for sustainable development through supporting basic infrastructure and service delivery, and a framework for the private sector. Underpinning all these must be effective strategic communication, both in the country concerned and at home, to avoid unrealistic expectations and sustain support. All these lines of operation are, of course, interdependent. As in the oft cited analogy, the intertwined strands of a piece of rope are stronger than the individual strands themselves. We can only win by taking a comprehensive approach.

Some commentators talk of a golden window of 100 days to achieve success, or the stabilisation period lasting 12 months. It would be wrong to imply that stabilisation runs to a predetermined schedule. Afghanistan and Iraq are different to post Dayton Bosnia. But there is no doubt that the speed, as well as the nature of response by the international community, is crucial to success.

¹ See www.pcru.gov.uk.

² UN/World Bank Post Conflict Needs Assessment Review, January 2007, page 5

³ Department of Defence Directive (DODD) 3000.05

Best practice principles for effective stabilisation

There is a growing body of literature on how best the international community should help deliver stabilisation, from both military and development perspectives. A consensus is emerging in sources as wide ranging as evolving UK and US military doctrine, UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations guidance and the OECD's best practice principles for working in fragile states. PCRU's experience has reaffirmed these and helped develop them further.

I have already stressed the fundamental importance of a comprehensive approach. Let me highlight six more generic lessons before focusing specifically on lessons relevant to a leading member of the international community such as the UK:

- First, stabilisation can only be achieved if the international community acts coherently and in close consultation with the host government.
- Second, any stabilisation operation must be grounded in a deep understanding of the local context to identify the weaknesses of potential spoilers and determine the appropriate sequencing of activities. It also avoids false lessons being drawn – such as that from Bosnia that early elections are always undesirable.
- Third, resources and ambition must be consistent with one another – if the military presence is insufficient to dominate, the international community will have to reach an accommodation with some of the spoilers rather than confront them all at once.
- Fourth, stabilisation can lead to a different set of priorities to long-term development but must be informed by an assessment of longer term impacts to avoid exacerbating conflict or strengthening insurgents.
- Fifth, care needs to be taken to avoid a focus on winning consent for international peacekeepers undermining the primary objective of securing legitimacy of the host government.

- And lastly, in the absence of a fully inclusive political settlement quick impact projects alone can not bring about successful stabilisation but can be an important way to provide the time and space for such a political settlement to be nurtured.

PCRU's experience has been particularly relevant to identifying what is needed to ensure unity of purpose and coordinated implementation for a leading member of the international community such as the UK. I suggest four prerequisites to achieve unity of purpose:

- An agreed cross-Government assessment to ensure a shared understanding of the drivers of conflict and possible levers for change;
- An agreed cross-Government strategic aim and coherent set of objectives;
- An integrated delivery plan that forms the basis for the military campaign plan and other Departmental action plans, and that is periodically subjected to integrated cross-Government review;
- Clear accountability for overall delivery and a clear division of responsibility for individual elements.

And I suggest five prerequisites to achieve joined-up implementation:

- Cross-Government coordination and steering mechanisms to ensure resolution of strategic issues and appropriate allocation of resources;
- Country level coordination mechanisms to identify strategic issues requiring Government decisions at the centre and to resolve lower level operational issues;
- A civilian capacity to deploy at the outset, with the core skills required and any key enablers in place, such as secure communications;
- Flexible to enable swift financing for civilian stabilisation programmes;
- And a culture and processes to identify lessons and learn from them.

Changes in HMG's Stabilisation Capability

The UK Government introduced a number of changes in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq war, and again more recently, to improve its ability to deliver coherent stability efforts. UK Plans were developed for Afghanistan and for Helmand in late 2005. New coordination structures have been put in place in Whitehall at Ministerial and official level on generic conflict issues and for Afghanistan and Iraq. Cross-Government coordination committees, including the military, were established in Basra, Kabul and Helmand. Provincial Reconstruction Teams were set up as integrated delivery mechanisms in Mazar-e Sharif, Lashkar Gah and Basra. A Conflict Issues Group was formed in the Foreign Office to improve the coherence of Whitehall's engagement on conflict and promote best practice in conflict policy on the international stage. Efforts have been made to make the Conflict Pools more strategic and better managed, and to find a more effective balance between achieving the original conflict prevention objectives and responding to emerging needs and new political priorities in stabilisation operations. Successive deployment of troops to Helmand have benefited from the lessons learnt by their predecessors.

PCRU's Role

Let me now say a few words about the specific role of PCRU – the “new kid on the block” as one MP recently called it. PCRU was established in late 2004, with full operating capability in mid 2006. Its purpose breaks down into three roles:

- facilitating integrated British Government assessment and planning both in-country and in Whitehall;
- providing an operational capability to support more effective stabilisation activities in-country; and
- identifying lessons and sharing best practice both at home and internationally.

PCRU is jointly owned in policy terms by DFID, the FCO and the MoD, with the Cabinet Office also participating in its policy board. It draws staff not only from its parent Departments and the military, but also from elsewhere in Whitehall and from the private sector. It is almost entirely financed by DFID with management of staff and finances subject to DFID's rules and procedures.

PCRU was originally conceived to respond to an intervention of the same scale as Iraq in 2003, but it soon became apparent that another intervention of this size was unlikely and that a combination of much smaller deployments would be required. These deployments take three forms. Our most flexible resource is the 34 staff of the PCRU, the majority of who are deployable at short notice. Our second is our database of deployable civilian experts (DCEs). Whilst on paper some 500 names are maintained by Crown Agents on our behalf, we are focusing on up to 150 of them, training them in working in hostile environments, and soon to commence, on stabilisation planning. Together with core staff, we aim to be able to have up to 40 personnel deployed at any one time – with half of these at 10 days notice and the other half within one to three months. For demands beyond these 150, or for very specialist areas, we can make use of DFID's call down arrangements with a number of international consultancy firms, and are pursuing possible access to other sources such as home Government Departments.

Our £6 million programme budget finances the deployment of personnel, and key enablers such as armoured vehicles and secure communications. We have a catalytic role. We are intended to provide staff resources during the period that it takes parent Departments to put in place more permanent arrangements. Six months as a rule of thumb. We are not resourced to fund quick impact or capacity building programmes ourselves, which continue to be financed primarily by the Conflict Pools, DFID and, in Iraq, the US Department of Defence.

PCRU's involvement on any specific country depends on an invitation from one of our parent Departments and the acquiescence of the other two, or a

specific mandate from the Cabinet Office. Its primary role is to work in countries where the UK military is deployed –countries where the UK is spending most on stabilisation. But to the extent that there is capacity to work elsewhere in pursuit of British Government objectives, then it can do so. This has been the case, for example, in Nepal and Lebanon.

A key part of our work is cooperation with our bilateral counterparts such as the US State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization and Canada's Stabilisation and Reconstruction Taskforce, as well as a supporting role in British Government engagement with multilateral organisations such as the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations, the UN Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, the EU CivMil cell, NATO and the World Bank. We benefit mutually from exchanging emerging best practice and seek to harmonise conceptual thinking and ways of working to enhance cooperation on the ground.

PCRU has started to show its value. In Afghanistan, we facilitated the planning for the UK's engagement in Helmand in late 2005, and a cross-Departmental review last Autumn that led to a number of improvements in civil-military working. Our deployment of six staff and consultants to Helmand, at the outset and more recently, helped the Provincial Development Council to determine priorities for the Province, enhanced co-ordination between the Afghan Army and Police, and helped accelerate delivery of quick impact projects such as better irrigation, more reliable power supply, and extending reception of the BBC World Service Pashto Service. In Basra, PCRU has provided staff for the UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team that has enabled the Basra Provincial Council to identify and implement priority projects in areas such as water supply and economic development, and helped the British military improve the consistency of their quick impact projects with the priorities of the Council.

PCRU, along with the joint DFID/FCO Sudan Unit, has also assisted the Africa Union Mission in the Sudan in disseminating the benefits of the Darfur Peace Agreement to non signatories and the general public. In Lebanon, we

facilitated a cross-Whitehall assessment to develop options for HMG's response to the recent war and have provided a Stabilisation Adviser to the British Embassy in Beirut to improve coordination of security sector reform. Last month, we undertook a scoping mission to Nepal to agree areas in which PCRU can support DFID, FCO and the UN in their contributions to the peace agreement.

New organisations take time to build. PCRU has taken away a number of lessons about how it must improve its own performance in delivering the niche role set by Government. We are clarifying the range of skills required of our DCE database and taking steps to plug the gaps. We are being asked by DFID and FCO to take on bigger roles on stabilisation issues in Helmand and Basra. We need to disseminate further the lessons that we are identifying and do more to inform policy debates in Whitehall.

Is more radical change needed?

I will end by considering three more radical changes affecting PCRU that have been variously advocated – a strengthened central assessment and planning unit, military assumption of responsibility for stability operations, and a “one-stop shop” civilian unit in-theatre for deployment of civilians and delivery of programmes.

A strengthened Whitehall assessment and planning unit has been urged by some to generate the required understanding of a country, and develop clear strategic aims and operational planning. PCRU could form this unit, or parts of PCRU could be transferred to a strengthened Cabinet Office. There is no doubt that capacity in Whitehall needs to be increased to manage crises, and that there must be a greater recognition of the benefits of integrated assessment and planning. But to separate those parts of Government responsible for implementation from the planning process risks failure. Alternatively, the Cabinet Office could champion further the need for integrated assessment and planning, with PCRU playing a facilitating role. This was the model successfully adopted for the review of the Helmand Plan

and the one about to be used in reviewing the UK Afghanistan Strategy, where it has been recognised that one of PCRU's strengths comes from not having a policy role or particular position on any issue.

The assumption by the military of responsibility for all stability operations has its attractions. It offers the simplicity of a single chain of command and would lead to some differences in the way risks to civilians are managed. But the military, even with Reservists, do not have the full range of skills and experience required. The investment to create this would be substantial and distracting. Too much focus on a military-led intervention might shift emphasis away from the need for transition to a local government lead, and prevent lessons being applied from countries where there is no military involvement. The can-do, shorter term focus of the military may provide the wrong context for delivery of softer, less tangible forms of capacity building. But there are clearly roles outside of security where the military can make a crucial difference in hostile environments. In Helmand, the Royal Engineers (with guidance from PCRU and parent Department) have helped to identify quick impact projects and then managed the process of tendering and supervising local contractors. In southern Iraq, the military and DFID have worked very closely together to deliver improved local services.

An alternative way of simplifying coherence would be for PCRU to be responsible for the deployment of most, or all civilians, and the delivery of programmes in a specific theatre. This is the model partially adopted by our Canadian counterpart and being considered by the US Government for our US counterpart. Such a model could enhance inter-Departmental co-ordination on the ground, and would give responsibility to a unit which specialises in working in such environments. Whether this approach makes sense, however, depends on the extent of pre-existing HMG assets and the extent of non-stabilisation activities that need to be undertaken concurrently. For enduring stabilisation operations, such as in Basra, the costs of a radical change in structure need to be weighed against the benefits of change, taking account of the length of time any benefits would accrue. The case for this model is strongest where there are few pre-existing HMG assets and its post-

stabilisation footprint is likely to be modest, with no long term DFID programme and a minimal diplomatic presence. And even here, PCRU would not have any comparative advantage over the Foreign Office in providing some key enablers such as managing close protection team contracts.

Whatever course is chosen, PCRU is to playing its full part in delivering improved UK Government performance in stabilisation environments and in contributing to the step changes required of the international community as a whole.

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