
Conference Report

'So many times when you get into situations like Iraq, Afghanistan, like I found myself in Bosnia Herzegovina, we reinvent the wheel and that tremendous storehouse of knowledge and of the folklore of about how this is done is lost, and that's a tragedy and it contributes to our mistakes... Coming together to share practice, to codify practice, to hand on knowledge, to hand on skill, to bring experience to bear, instead of doing as we have done in the past, reinvent the wheel every time, think we can do it, involving ourselves and inevitably bringing about the inevitable suffering that we've seen in Afghanistan, that's the wrong way to do it... Actually the lesson of Iraq and Afghanistan is not never do it again, the lesson is we must learn to do it better and Post Conflict People and the conference you are on today will make a major step, I am sure, towards that direction'.

*Rt Hon, Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon, GCMG, KBE, PC
on Post Conflict People – November 2008.*

The Post Conflict People inaugural annual conference took place on November 19th 2008, at Church House Conference Centre in London. The event brought together post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction practitioners, business leaders, government representatives and military to address the challenges presented by post-conflict theatres.

Speakers in alphabetical order:

Andy Bearpark CBE (keynote speaker)
James Fergusson
Alistair Harris
Richard Harvey
Geoff Hill
Iain King
Daniel Korski
Christina Lamb
Norine MacDonald QC
Felix Martin
Andrew Michels
Michael Moller
General Sir David Richards KCB, CBE, DSO (keynote speaker)
Rory Stewart OBE
Phillip van Niekerk
Richard Williams OBE
Jasmine Zerini



General Sir David Richards



The Aims Of The Event Were As Follows:

1. To explore real, immediate solutions to specific stabilisation and reconstruction challenges.
2. To discuss best practice in the architecture of the approach to stabilisation operations.
3. To draw new partners in to the reconstruction and stabilisation strategic complex.
4. To establish 'post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation' as a discipline in its own right.

This report outlines some of the main points raised and debated by each panel, as well as ideas provided by our keynote speakers and audience participants. However, it should be noted that not each panel member necessarily supported the conclusions attributed to the panel in general; rather that these were some of the main points that emerged from the discussion amongst themselves and with the audience. There was, as should be expected, some disagreement on the best way to effect post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation. This report is a snapshot of the wealth of material that emerged at the event. The ideas outlined here are going to form the basis for Post Conflict People's work in 2009, which all members will be informed of.

Several of the speakers chose to speak under Chatham House Rules in order to allow for a more open discussion.



Architecture of Approach

Speakers:

Mark Etherington CBE, Alistair Harris, Daniel Korski, Michael Moller, Jasmine Zerini

What does a 'comprehensive approach' to stabilisation mean? We are seeing convergence of civilian and military responsibilities in theatres such as Afghanistan. For example, the US military is now combining state-building tasks with their more traditional military role, which is starting to produce results. Military action is not sufficient alone; how can civilian and military capabilities be integrated, and who can lead the process?

In Iraq and Afghanistan, two of the theatres dominating current debates on post-conflict operations, the severe security situation has prevented civilian expertise being utilised to the full extent. High levels of violence make it necessary for the military to take the key role at least in the initial stages of an international assistance mission, but it is difficult to separate the phases of 'stabilisation' and 'reconstruction' in particularly insecure post-conflict theatres. Iraq and Afghanistan typify the challenges of establishing stability and beginning reconstruction as a necessary precursor to 'ending' the war, rather sequencing in distinct consecutive phases. However, Iraq and Afghanistan are unusual in the sheer number of well-trained troops dedicated to the operation; are there lessons that can be learned from these theatres which are still applicable to, for example, the Congo, where under-funded peacekeeping troops are the only available international forces?



What is needed is a combined strategy where military action is informed by nuanced understanding of the specific political and socio-economic demands of a region. Unfortunately, where high levels of insecurity prevail, it can be difficult to integrate civilian expertise for two reasons. Firstly, duty-of-care requirements for civilian staff are prohibitive for the most insecure places. Secondly, without effective mechanisms for coordination between NGOs, civilian government advisors, and military, civilian expertise can be wasted and mismanaged. There is then an overlap that must be bridged more effectively at the juncture between civilian and military capability, expertise and responsibility.

Outcomes of the Panel:

A Repository of Knowledge:

There is an immediate need for a repository of knowledge; an institutional memory. There is a high turnover of civilian staff in particular, and it is important to retain people and to capture the knowledge of those who have moved on. This needs efficient management so that collective lessons are institutionalised, and experienced staff are used imaginatively, regardless of their civilian or military background. A major priority in the French administration is to recruit civilians with the most appropriate skills, despite the fact that most crisis management initiatives are militarily-led in France. In addition to storing this knowledge, there needs to be a greater emphasis on acquiring it; it was argued that the US military has completely transformed itself and developed a unique ability for a military to undertake post-conflict reconstruction, simply through its institutional thirst for knowledge.

Preparation and Financial Commitment:

There was some comment on the differential pace between military and civilian preparation and learning. Whilst the military devotes more time to preparation of its staff for post-conflict work, it also



is keen to move much more quickly once in theatre. Civilians though are trained for insufficient periods of time, but are sometimes prepared to devote more time to complex in-theatre problems that require careful solutions. Strengthened planning capacity and information gathering is proving to be necessary for success, as is financial commitment to the training and preparation necessary.

Architectural and Cultural Change:

One panellist argued that we have reached the limits of the possibilities of a comprehensive approach without major structural change to the architecture of the approach to stabilisation and reconstruction, and that this change must be entire in its scope. Without a supra-authority in the British government, we are witnessing institutional protectionism whereby the various civilian and military bodies are reluctant to accept responsibility for mistakes made. This also leads to completely isolated analysis, monitoring and planning programmes taking place. Whilst some speakers called for an inter-agency doctrine, others speculated that agglomerating departments cannot prevent this isolation; rather the creation of one body, such as a National Security Council, is needed.

Culturally, military and civilian efforts need to be reconciled conceptually, with a greater understanding of local issues on both sides. This cultural change must infiltrate the training of military and civilian employees.

Communications:

Public information is not receiving enough emphasis. Particularly in the context of the United Nations, explaining properly to the host population why an international team is present can determine whether or not a mission is successful. As with Panel 3, speakers emphasised that 'smart messaging', and a rigorous effort to ensure that a speedy and positive message is dispersed in the affected regions is absolutely essential to bringing about consensus and cooperation. In addition, expectations need to be managed effectively so that false expectations of the stabilisation and reconstruction efforts are not raised beyond what is possible, and hence bringing closer the benchmark of failure. There were several calls for greater levels of consultation with local populations in advance and during post-conflict operations in order to design the most appropriate solutions and to gain legitimacy. It was speculated that this will facilitate a greater level of local ownership over the political process essential for stabilisation and reconstruction.

In addition to improved public communications, a strategy for improving communications across departments is absolutely imperative in the absence of the previously mentioned supra-authority.

The EU:

There was some discussion of the possibility of reducing reliance on national structures and instead strengthening the capacity of the EU so that there could be more unified leadership on post-conflict issues. However, this was not agreed on by all panellists and requires further discussion.

A Set of Guidelines:

The panel called for more research on what actually works well in stabilisation and reconstruction operations, and how integration between civilian and military capabilities has been done successfully. To consolidate this, a guide is needed, with universally accepted terminology. This could take the form of a handbook, or a toolkit, or even a short field reference guide. Stabilisation skills templates need to be distributed, and the accepted knowledge on this has to be updated and adapted as we gain more knowledge on how to succeed in post-conflict theatres.

More General Integration:

Civil-military integration is but one challenge of implementing a comprehensive approach. The panel also repeatedly referred to the necessity of integrating the private sector. After the 2004 Asian Tsunami, the response was totally inadequate, but local business communities led some of the



regeneration possibilities. And throughout the event, regionalisation proved to be a major point of discussion; should strategies be designed at the regional level and then coordinated, or does a national strategy simply need compartmentalising? This is further complicated in, for example, Afghanistan where there is a need to divide responsibility for regions between nations. There needs to be increased coordination of aims between the various troop providers across the country to ensure a coherent strategy.

The Private Sector

Speakers:

James Fergusson, Richard Harvey, Felix Martin

Challenges posed by suffering in places such as Zimbabwe and the Congo require new ideas and involvement of new groups of people. This panel addressed the underused potential of the private sector and its future role in post-conflict stabilisation. Many companies have the expertise to produce imaginative solutions to post-conflict challenges, which could be exploited by practitioners and governments.

Much of the discussion of the private sector in post-conflict theatres tends to focus on only two aspects of involvement; the first being that the private sector has a 'corporate social responsibility' to donate funds to reconstruction and development efforts, and the second being the particular ethical pitfalls of the private sector operating profitably in emerging, fragile post-conflict states. Extraction of natural resources and cheap labour are particularly contentious issues, and have been so scrutinised as to lead to questions regarding the validity of the initial motives for Western participation in certain post-conflict missions.

Post Conflict People also wishes to draw attention to a third aspect of private sector involvement. The private sector contains a vast pool of expertise not necessarily utilised properly by public-sector actors in post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation measures. The private sector by default is diverse in its skills-sets, approaches, capabilities and resources, which can and should be turned to the challenges of reconstruction and stabilisation through proper collaboration.



Outcomes of the Panel:

Private Sector Ethos:

Many insights were offered as to the key to understanding not only the relationship between the private and public sectors, but also the differences between them. Whilst the quality of the individuals working in each is not different, the structure within which they work encourages certain types of behaviour. The public sector, due to the complexity of its objectives, has a lower tolerance of risk. Within the public sector there is an institutional problem of staff avoiding mistakes but not necessarily striving for success, since 'success' is less likely and the time scale is longer. The private sector by contrast has a much higher tolerance of risk and therefore a faster assimilation of knowledge from lessons-learned. Ideally, it would be beneficial if some of this attitude could be transferred to the public sector with regards to stabilisation and reconstruction efforts.



An Indicator of the Status of Conflict?

It was suggested that the speediest way to cement peace is to encourage a strong private sector, but that a healthy private sector is also an indication that there is some stability. Capital needs to be available to reconstruct societies; economic activity is essential to bringing about peace. In addition, the influx of the private sector provides some of the tools needed for the population to gain consensus independent of propaganda; for example, mobile phones are useful for people to find out about the context of the information they are receiving.

The Private Sector Independent:

The integrated approach to stabilisation and reconstruction also ideally applies to non-governmental bodies. With regards to the private sector, do we need integrated strategy? Panellists raised the point that NGOs are culturally suspicious of the activities of large corporations in post-conflict theatres. It was suggested that perhaps it would be beneficial for all if NGOs could develop willingness and the mechanisms to engage with the private sector properly, so that societies could rebuild and become independent through economic sustainability.

There was a suggestion that where there is sufficient business opportunity for the private sector, there is almost no need for a strategy designed by NGOs or stabilisation experts in terms of managing the effects of an economic injection; that in effect the gains from a major corporate project will distribute from employment to stability. Both positive and negative examples of private sector involvement in Bosnia stimulated discussion; whilst privately funded media broadcasts were instrumental in weakening the Milosevic message, unrealistic criteria imposed by banks on citizens in Bosnia far over-inflated interest rates.

There was some debate as to the possibility, and indeed desirability of the private sector acting as a stabilising force, with or without NGO cooperation. A comparison was made with the way in which the East India Company 'bought off trouble' in order to further their economic benefit. Whilst mobile phones empower oppressed populations, they also facilitate the activities of insurgents and militias. The extractive industry does rely on a certain degree of stability, but without being part of the stabilisation strategic complex, their aims are different and so the likelihood of a positive impact is almost incidental; in short it is difficult to harness the private sector and ensure cohesion of aims with the public sector.

The Private Sector as a Means of Encouraging Cooperation:

One example was raised of the impact of corporate incentivisation. In 1997, Unocal started ongoing talks with the Taliban about the possibilities of a gas pipeline from Afghanistan, and flew representatives out to Texas. There are increasing calls for negotiation with the Taliban in light of the worsening security situation in Afghanistan, but the private sector has almost side-stepped the complexities of this debate, for better or worse, and has been in negotiations for much longer.

Overall, whilst there were varying degrees of confidence in the private sector's ability to be a positive agent in the stabilisation and reconstruction process, it was generally agreed that a role is there but that we should advocate with some caution. Important questions were raised. For example, what can the private sector do to try to bridge the gap and reach out to post-conflict practitioners?

Theatres

Speakers:

Geoff Hill, Christina Lamb, Norine MacDonad QC, Andy Michels, Rory Stewart OBE

How are stabilisation and reconstruction efforts tailored to each particular theatre, and also what common lessons emerge? The panel featured expert insight into some of the most demanding post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction challenges in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Zimbabwe.



This panel explored the fine balance between the universal applicability of lessons learned from previous post-conflict operations, and the necessity of designing each approach in a theatre-specific manner. There have been few attempts to design a blueprint 'how-to' guide for post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction, and those attempts have been limited in success, simply because some of the toughest challenges of post-conflict situations; such as neutralising specific political grievances, are so context-specific. By overly-relying on the examples of other theatres, operations run the risk of 'planning to fight the last war' but it is nevertheless essential to systematically examine what has worked in the past, what has categorically not worked, and whether or not these lessons *can* have relevance in a different context.

Outcomes of the Panel:

The Light Versus Heavy Footprint:

This proved to be a particularly contentious discussion point with regards to Afghanistan. Demonstrably, international efforts in the country are not successful at present. The reasons for this, and the way to rectify past mistakes, are less agreed on.

Some panellists called for a reengineering of the security environment and an acceptance that basic services, such as employment and food supply are security requirements, requiring the same financial input as the military operation. Basic services have not been provided, in part because this has been one of the most under-funded peacebuilding operations with insufficient planning for non-military action. Those with this view called for increased financial and time-commitments to rectifying the problems faced by Afghanistan and international partners.

This point led to an excellent debate as to whether or not troop numbers and military funding are directly correlated with operational success. It has become clear that increasing troop numbers have not improved the situation, but is this due to planning failures and is there something fundamentally flawed about the international efforts here? One panellist argued that in fact the relationship between Britain and America with Afghanistan is very skewed; it produces more heroine than any other country but still receives extraordinary quantities of aid rather than being sanctioned. To increase military spending and troop numbers, and stay in Afghanistan for the long-term, is unsustainable. From this point of view, some panellists called for instead a light-footprint and a more measured attitude to what we can achieve in the country and region.

There was therefore no absolute consensus as to whether or not success can be guaranteed through increased troop numbers and a heavy footprint, but with the Taliban's successful (some said *more* successful) military tactics and political integration strategy, will the light footprint suffice or even be feasible?



International Introspection:

There was much reference to the issue of introspection on behalf of Western governments and civil society as to why a post-conflict operation is taking place. Again, it emerged that the panel had diverging views on how much attention and consideration should be given to the reason for the international community's presence in a theatre once the decision has already been made to go in. With regards to Kosovo, it was pointed out that whilst many mistakes were made, success has been achieved nevertheless, and that the international community can claim to have done the right thing despite some operational failings. Questions over excessive spending of resources in Kosovo were similarly deemed unnecessary in light of success.

However there was some debate as to whether the level of spending and commitment to Afghanistan is justified. According to one panellist, the country is 'running a protection racket on the world', receiving more money the more badly it behaves, and that our assumption that Afghanistan is at the frontline of the war on terror or a 'national responsibility' on the part of Britain is misguided and leading to false expectations of possible achievements.

What emerged is that it is essential to understand why the international community is in a theatre to recognise the rationale for certain decisions which may turn out to be flawed or, surprisingly successful.

Loyalty and Messaging:

As with other panels of the day, strategic communications was raised as a key issue. There was some consensus that the situation in Afghanistan is dire, partly because the Taliban has a much more successful and sophisticated media operation. The international forces were not initially seen as occupiers but liberators, but lost that good-will with Afghans however because of failures to tackle the warlords and provide security. Meanwhile, the Taliban has developed a vast communications network by liaising with journalists, using websites and seizing the initiative in a timely way. After a clash between international forces and Taliban, there is often a lack of information from NATO forces, whereas the Taliban will release a message immediately and capture the ability to set the message. It is because of this that people are too scared to cooperate with international efforts or the Afghan government; the Taliban are going to be there for the long-term.

In Kosovo, the priority is to ensure that a single voice is presented strongly in contrast to the counter-narrative presented by the small minority of Serbs in Kosovo today who do not recognise the right of Kosovo to independence. This messaging is key for maintaining success and consolidating democratic gains made.

In Zimbabwe, the importance of communications is highlighted by the fact that there is no free media. The panel recommended that as an immediate priority Zimbabwean journalists are trained outside of Zimbabwe so that after Mugabe has lost power there will be an opportunity to radically alter the media structures in place.

Pre-emptive Approach Without Military Action:

There were calls for a pre-emptive approach to post-conflict planning that side-steps military intervention and instead focuses on basic steps that can ensure a more smooth reconstruction process. Simply the emphasis should be on planning rather than financial injection; train journalists, develop a tool-kit for depoliticising the police after the end of Mugabe's rule, create an army of social workers, and most importantly, compile a database of skilled Zimbabwean exiles worldwide so that when the time is appropriate, bring them back to use those skills in their home country. This issue of losing the skilled population has been just as pertinent in Afghanistan and Iraq. How can these suggestions for managing information on skilled people be transferred to benefit these theatres? It is indicative in itself that this panel formed the least consensus, since it is the context-specific decisions which are demonstrably so difficult to get right in post-conflict theatres.



Adding Value

Speakers:

Iain King, Phillip van Niekerk, Richard Williams OBE

This panel was a discussion of immediate solutions, innovation and best practice. Post Conflict People acts as a hub of expertise collecting lessons-learned from theatres worldwide. The challenge is to turn this expertise into innovative ideas, to reform methods and capabilities. The priority is to improve effectiveness of practitioners and operations immediately. As best-practice in post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation evolves, so do the tools and equipment used to support missions. To ensure that these innovations are in keeping with the demands of the field, rather than being led by industry, we would like to provide a forum to ensure that technological developments provide appropriate solutions for the challenges at hand.



Outcomes of the Panel:

Technological Developments:

With earlier panels outlining the dangers for civilians working in some of the more insecure theatres, this was the forum for providing some answers as to how civilian in-theatre needs could be met. Whereas previously technological equipment was made specifically for the military, at a huge cost, today there are many commercially available and inexpensive communications and security devices available for people to use in the field. Innovation is keeping pace with the influx of civilian workers in post-conflict, but there was some comment throughout the day that perhaps developments are industry led and need to be informed by better dialogue with practitioners. It is also clear that uptake is somewhat slow and coordination of technology is not efficient enough; communications are still failing in post-conflict environments.

Applicability of Ideas:

It was emphasised through the example of Zimbabwe that in order to realise many of the good ideas for addressing the challenges of stabilisation and reconstruction, financial investment is key. Latest surveys indicate the many countries in Africa have great economic potential and are increasingly safe for investment, which is leading in turn to increased growth. With Zimbabwe in particular there is the risk of Western governments being cast as the imperialists; this has contributed to a lack of action and dwindling will. Every attention will need to be paid in the next two years (until Mugabe leaves) on finding ways of changing the international context and developing answers.

100 Ideas



Andy Bearpark, Director of Post Conflict People, challenged the delegates at the commencement of the event to produce at least one hundred ideas to address the challenges of stabilisation and reconstruction. One panellist explicitly listed 26 ideas here but the event overall certainly produced more than one hundred. We are compiling this list of ideas, and we will be sending this out to the network in the coming weeks.