

## BOOK REVIEW

**Stabilization Operations, Security and Development**, edited by Robert Muggah. London: Routledge, 2014, Pp.248 + bibliography + index £90.00 (hbk), ISBN 978-0-415-53676-9.

This edited volume, part of a series on emerging patterns in conflict, development and peacebuilding, should be of interest to scholars, policymakers, diplomats and practitioners. The book offers a comprehensive overview of the emerging security stabilization agenda by examining the origin, nature, manifestations and outcomes of so-called stability operations. The latter is a term of art used to describe a wide range of policies seeking to pacify and bring order to zones of fragility experiencing civil war and/or other types of violence. Robert Muggah, who edits the book, explains that stability operations is a rather elastic term lacking a conclusive definition; it should therefore be understood in general terms as a cluster of military, humanitarian and development practices that seek to 'bring "stability" to countries beset by fragility' (244). Conceptually, stability operations ought to be conceived of as practices lying somewhere in the middle of a continuum with nation-building operations at one end and peace enforcement operations at the other. Stability operations, Muggah explains, have sprung from a gloomy international climate in which Western and several non-Western policy and military circles have reached the conclusion that underdevelopment can be profoundly destabilizing and that the best way to tackle the dangers posed by it is through comprehensive programmes that seek to break the vicious circle linking underdevelopment and violence.

The book develops several interesting arguments. It posits that policymakers have uncritically assumed the terminology and assumptions informing stabilization efforts – that underdevelopment causes fragility – and failed to carefully weigh the real impact of underdevelopment. It argues, moreover, that contemporary stabilization schemes resemble past security programmes implemented by colonial and major powers to curb violence and insecurity in the periphery. It further claims that while stability operations have rendered some positive results, they have also prompted several externalities that have negatively impacted the life and well-being of the individuals residing in fragile zones. Negative outcomes often stem from interveners' inability to adequately understand the political and social environment in which security programmes are carried out, which then inform policies that are ill suited for the socio-political context in which they are implemented. Stabilization programmes, the book finally claims, have also deeply influenced humanitarian and development work, more often than not in negative ways.

The volume touches upon several, critical issues for contemporary security in the global South and provides a nice balance to recent work examining post-war violence and peacebuilding,<sup>1</sup> the link between security and development (i.e. the

<sup>1</sup>Suhrke and Berdal, *The Peace in Between*.

security–development nexus)<sup>2</sup> and new challenges in humanitarian work.<sup>3</sup> The book is divided into two parts. The first features five thematic chapters, including the introduction, that elaborate on a series of important aspects including: the evolution, **aetiology** and conceptualization of stabilization operations; the tensions and links between humanitarian, military and development components of these operations; and the role of the United Nations in developing and promoting these types of programmes. The second part of the book consists of eight case studies: Afghanistan; Pakistan; Somalia; Kenya; Mexico; Colombia; Brazil; and Sri Lanka. A brief conclusion closes the volume. Contributions come from an interesting combination of scholars and seasoned practitioners with considerable field experience.

Overall, the book is an excellent and thought-provoking one that provides a solid overview of how existing conditions and challenges in the realm of security have propelled stabilization operations into the top of the global security agenda. As such, it discusses a wide array of stability operations including unilateral or multilateral foreign directed ones (e.g. Iraq), joint operations involving the cooperation of external and local players (Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan, Colombia) and strictly domestic-led operations (Brazil, Sri Lanka). While the quality and focus of the chapters varies a great deal – a perennial problem in edited volumes – the book is a contribution to the growing literature on international security examining new conditions and challenges in the realm of peacebuilding and post-war violence. Muggah, a talented and prolific scholar whose work has featured widely in academic and policy debates concerning urban violence, security and forced migration, delivers a volume that is theoretically sound, empirically rich and politically savvy and it is clearly intended to reach a wide audience. Ambitious projects of this nature are not easy and seldom accomplish their purported goals.

Several strengths are worth noting in this work. First, the book connects the development, war, international security and humanitarian literatures to show the complexity and inherent contradictions (e.g. civil–military relations) that multi-dimensional relief and reconstruction efforts entail. While these bodies of literature have evident and multiple links, it is rare to see them discussed together in cogent ways. These themes are examined across the book. In the first section, Colleta (**chapter 4**) links these elements as he contrasts theory and practice, while Garbonnier (**chapter 2**) presents a thoughtful discussion of the tensions and problems that stability operations pose to humanitarian organizations, in particular how the increasing involvement of military personnel in humanitarian missions has constricted humanitarian space and compromised the security of humanitarian workers. Garbonnier's sound theoretical discussion could have been improved by a greater reliance on concrete examples illustrating some of his points. This omission is partly remedied by the superb discussion of the humanitarian problems in Somalia offered by Menkhaus in **chapter 7**.

<sup>2</sup>Amer *et al.*, *Security–Development Nexus*.

<sup>3</sup>Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*; Weiss, *Humanitarian Business*.

Arguably, one of the strongest points of the book is its treatment of the **aetiology** and evolution of stabilization operations in **chapter 1**. Throughout the book, the idea that current stabilization policies have antecedents in the policies metropolitan powers used to maintain order in their colonies is persuasively articulated. With variations, this behaviour continued during the cold war through super-power intervention in the Third World. Zyck, Barakat and Deley illustrate this point in **chapter 1** as they discuss programmes developed by the United States and France to put down insurrection movements in the Philippines (1898–1902), Algeria (1954–62) and Vietnam (1967–75). By tracing the evolution of this practice, the authors show how stability programmes evolved from rogue, forceful impositions of stability to military missions incorporating civilian components aimed at winning the ‘hearts and minds of the civilian population’, to the existing operations characterized by an infinitively more complex design that incorporates a multiplicity of players. This latest version of stability operations entails a broad effort in which military, development and humanitarian actors coalesce in their efforts to promote economic development, human rights and the rule of law, and the creation of institutions and services for the population (15–18). Zyck, Barakat and Deley present concrete evidence of how past operations bear clear resemblance to contemporary multi-pronged programmes in places including Iraq and Afghanistan. They also show how successful ideas implemented in the past have been disregarded and how, surprisingly, elements of the US stabilization policy in Vietnam were more progressive than current efforts in Afghanistan (16).

The discussion on the evolution of this practice continues in **chapter 3**, where Muggah investigates the evolution and framing, both conceptual and political, of stability operations within the UN system. He traces how different UN organs and agencies (political, developmental, humanitarian) have, not without tension, managed to give shape to the stabilization formula pushed by a group of powerful **Western states** (**the USA, the UK**, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, France). He provides evidence of how this difficult amalgamation has evolved over time in the diverse missions that the organization has embarked upon over the last two decades, such as the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO). In approaching this matter, one topic that could have been more thoroughly developed by the author concerns the demarcation and conceptual link between different types of UN peace operations (peacekeeping, peace-making, peacebuilding) and stabilization operations (62).

The empirical section of the book is splendid, even though the quality of individual chapters varies. Barring perhaps one chapter, all of them offer a sound, nuanced analysis of recent stability operations and furnish a wealth of information. The selection of cases is clever, as it combines the insights of widely discussed operations (Afghanistan, Somalia, Colombia, Sri Lanka) with others that have received scant attention over the years (Brazil, Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan).


Probably the only shortcoming, indeed the main weakness of the book, is the lack of a common lens through which the cases are examined. Some chapters (the solid discussions of the Afghanistan, Kenya, Brazil and Pakistan cases) centre

their analysis on the role of the security forces; others talk about the difficulties faced by humanitarian actors (Somalia) or describe efforts to address the predicament of displaced populations (Colombia). Still others devote their attention to 'intermestic' dimensions of security operations (Mexico) or talk about the perils of illiberal models of stabilization, as in the sharp, critical analysis of the Sri Lankan case. Employing a more consistent lens to analyse the cases would have certainly provided greater coherence to the empirical part of the book.

The editor does a fine job bringing the chapters together however, underscoring interesting commonalities and deriving useful lessons that make for interesting conclusions. Still, while compelling, conclusions could have been developed more fully in the final section, which was undeservingly short. Nevertheless, *Stabilization Operations, Security and Development* is a solid, well-crafted book that represents an important contribution to the discussion of how to bring about and refine the international society's responses to the vexing security problems afflicting fragile zones in the twenty-first century.

### References

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