REPORT OF THE 2014 TSWALU DIALOGUE

End of an Era of Intervention?

Lessons for a New Generation of Peace Missions

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Strengthening Africa's economic performance

THE BRENTHURST FOUNDATION

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Cover photo: *Ray Hartley speaking on his recent book* Ragged Glory *to the participants, gathered on the dune.*

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Introduction

On 17–19 October 2014, the Brenthurst Foundation, in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the British Peace Support Team and the African Center for Strategic Studies, held an international dialogue on the 'End of an Era of Intervention? Lessons for a New Generation of Peace Missions' at the Tswalu Kalahari Reserve.

Since the Brenthurst Foundation was established in 2005 it has devoted considerable effort to analysing the phenomenon of 'fragile states' and in particular how international and local actors come together to attempt to stabilise them. As articulated in the Tswalu Protocol,[1] published by the Foundation in 2008, 'the great long-term challenge for countries, organisations and individuals involved in stability operations is getting the formula right in the first place, and then making those gains stick.' This year's 'Tswalu Dialogue' afforded a longer-term perspective to reflect again on key international interventions of the past decade, both in Africa and outside the continent. Although there was a strong emphasis on African experiences, other well-known (Afghanistan) and less well-known (Solomon Islands) interventions were also analysed in detail. Critically, all of these experiences were considered in the light of one of the most successful national case-studies in counter-insurgency in recent times – Colombia. Several of the participants had recently completed an extensive tour of Colombia at the invitation of Colombia's Ministry of Defence, who were represented at the Dialogue by the Minister of Defence and several Colombian officials, and the Brenthurst Foundation. Colombia's (ongoing) campaign against rebel groups within its borders and the government's successful efforts to restore stability to restive parts of the country, including major cities, provided a compelling reference point over the three days of discussions. Some of the key lessons to emerge from the Colombian example reinforce the findings of previous research and Tswalu Dialogues which examined peace-building/stability operations, though many new insights and dynamics were brought to the fore during this convening. The focus on Africa was given added potency by the participation of three former African Presidents (South Africa, Zambia and Nigeria) and one former Prime Minister (Kenya) in the 2014 Tswalu Dialogue.

In preparation for the Dialogue, the Brenthurst Foundation commissioned nine background papers covering recent or current international interventions in Africa (Mali, DRC, Somalia); Afghanistan; Solomon Islands; Colombia; the Nigerian military's response to the Boko Haram insurgency; and the role of the African

Greg Mills introduces a panel at Motse.

Development Bank. Brief presentations on these case studies provoked wider discussions on the challenges of peace-building and the key factors which will shape future interventions. The main insights and findings from this year's Tswalu Dialogue are grouped under six overarching themes below.

Dealing with Complexity

The most basic questions which animate decisions to intervene in security crises – such as why, how and for how long should we intervene? – generally do not adequately account for complexity. Across nearly all the cases discussed at the 2014 Tswalu Dialogue, interveners had not grasped *a priori* the complexity they would encounter 'on the ground'. The is as true of the initial US-led intervention in Somalia in 1992, which failed to adequately account for the country's elaborate clan structures that underpin all aspects of Somali life, as it is of the West's intervention in Afghanistan, where culture, values and warlordism are so determinant, almost ten years later. In both cases, interveners initially devised policies and plans that reflected their own idea of the 'state' – but it was not a state Somalis or Afghans recognised. Successive attempts by the United Nations to intervene in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have arguably been overwhelmed by the complexity of the 'combatant landscape' – in the Eastern DRC alone, there are about thirty different armed groups, ranging from lightly-equipped local militias to battle-hardened armies, each with their own distinct aims and objectives. The challenge of distinguishing rebel groups from the local population is not a new one, but it has become particularly acute in weak states like the DRC. All this is overlaid by private business interests, which historically have tended to exacerbate insecurity in the country. In neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR), South African forces were inserted into a situation that was infinitely more complex than their political masters had anticipated – and as a result, paid a heavy price.

President Obasanjo, Hakainde Hichilema (c) and Moses Khanyile.

The Tswalu Dialogue delegates at Lekhaba.

The wellsprings for insecurity in Colombia are no less multifaceted than the examples above. The government has had to tackle different types of insurgency – secessionist movements, leftist guerrillas, drug traffickers – simultaneously. Its distinct advantage over external interveners is that the government, naturally, knows the terrain better than anyone else. This is no guarantee of success but it does afford important benefits, not least a better understanding of the likely impacts, unintended consequences and second- and third-order effects of actions at the local, provincial, national and regional level. The recent success of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) – comprised of troops from Malawi, Tanzania and South Africa, that was stood up to fight the M23 rebel group in the DRC – is testament, several participants argued, to the fact that it is composed of Africans more sensitive to the realities on the ground than other UN peacekeepers based in the region, which are drawn mainly from non-African armed forces. The same has been suggested of AMISOM's success in retaking Mogadishu in Somalia, a feat no foreign intervention force had been able to achieve in the past two decades.

The issue of complexity is intimately linked to the types of conflict that lead to foreign intervention. Within the African context, rarely does one conflict fit into a single category – there is much overlap – but any list of the types of conflict which can give rise to intervention would include: post-colonial conflicts; boundary/territorial disputes; conflicts linked to secessionist ambitions; resource-based conflicts; identity based conflicts; transnational criminal operations; marginalisation or poverty-induced conflicts; and terrorism and Islamic extremism.[2] When considering the utility of intervention in any one (or a combination) of these type of conflicts, an additional calculation will be the degree of 'state collapse' in which the state finds itself. Iraq, for instance, was not a failed state when the US and its allies invaded the country – but once they entered with the goal of forcing regime change, they owned it and had to (attempt to) rebuild the country. Mali, in contrast, was perilously close to total collapse when the French intervened to halt an expected advance on the capital. The degree of state failure or collapse that precedes intervention is a crucial, albeit difficult analysis to make – and will bear heavily on what mix of diplomacy, military and state building requirements are necessary. All the while, we need to be mindful that interventions may begin as one undertaking but mutate into another. Afghanistan was a reaction to a terrorist attack and campaign to defeat those protecting the terrorist group – but a whole series of unexpected consequences flowed from the initial operation, which subsequently changed the nature of the mission. Similarly, some of the largest peace-building operations in recent times did not actually start that way.

Prime Minister Odinga, President Obasanjo, Colombia's Defence Minister Juan Carlos Pinzón, President Banda and President Motlanthe at the Waterhole.

Tensions

The complexity characteristic of any intervention was expressed at the Dialogue in a series of tensions or conundrums.

- The first and most acute tension is between development and security. It was clear from the discussions that without establishing security other goals are not possible. One participant reminded the group of the words of a famed counter-insurgency expert commenting on the Vietnam War, whether 'security is 10 per cent of the problem or 90 per cent of the problem may be unknown, but what is certain is that security needs to be the *first* 10 per cent or the *first* 90 per cent'. That said, making peace and security stick requires development; one cannot be done without the other. This was a truism across all the cases examined at the Tswalu Dialogue.
- The second tension, which was largely absent in the case of Colombia, is between external intervention and the imperative for local ownership. External interveners invariably have far more resources, capacity and (in some cases) political will than local actors, which in itself creates an inherent bias for externally-derived solutions. Ultimately, however, the success of any intervention will rest on locally-derived and accepted solutions.
- A third, related tension is evident between tactical external assistance (such as airlift support to local armed forces) and strategic/institutional assistance, which often involves considerable foreign civilian personnel and political investment in state-building.
- A fourth tension typical of nearly all external intervention is between the civilian and military components. This tension manifests itself on both the intervener's end and the local.
- A fifth tension exists between the government on the one hand, which invariably seeks to maintain control and resources, and the private sector, which wants the freedom to operate and create wealth and jobs.
- The sixth and last tension which came to the fore during the Dialogue is between the time and resources required to ensure the intervention achieves its objective, and the level of political will that is necessary to sustain the commitment. Rarely are these two in harmony.

The six tensions above are reflected in greater detail below.

Building the State

There was a strong consensus amongst the Tswalu Dialogue participants that 'state building' is the hardest thing to do for outsiders. The aid community has vast experience in attempting to create and/or strengthen public institutions in post conflict situations, but its record in most cases has been meagre. The question of 'who builds the state' is always paramount, but that changes depending on the situation and stage of intervention. Reflecting on the different examples discussed at Tswalu, they ranged from Colombia, where the government itself was the state-builder; to Australia in Solomon Islands, who on balance was a fairly neutral intervener; to Somalia and Afghanistan, where historically interveners have been anything but neutral. It goes without saying that when the goal is to overthrow the state there is no possibility of neutrality.

State building has to start sooner and last longer than interveners have typically allowed for. For any state-building effort to be successful people must, as a fundamental first step, relinquish their right to protect themselves and their family from threats and give it to another entity – usually the national government. Everything else that comes under the 'state-building' rubric flows from that 'contract' with the state. Only once there is confidence that government will protect them can the other elements fall into place. Needless to say, this can prove a very lengthy process, and be subject to numerous setbacks and periods of instability and violence. This is the historical norm, perhaps most acutely demonstrated in the United States' experience of civil war, nearly a century after independence, and the failure of many European states over the course of

A panel composed of Christopher Clapham, David Kilcullen, Phillip Carter III and former Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga. Former presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Kgalema Motlanthe and Rupiah Banda look on.

the 20th century. What is unique about Africa is not that fifty years after decolonisation there are failures, but rather that its failures have not resulted in state collapse and new states. Elsewhere in the world the response to state failure has been some reconfiguration of borders. However in Africa, the states drawn by Colonial powers which came into being and were ratified as independent states in the 1950s and 1960s have been perceived within Africa as the only viable alternative. For its part, the international community is concerned about humanitarian issues and the threat of contagion of state failure in Africa. But equally, it has shown itself unwilling to invest significant political capital in pushing for any change in boundaries (perhaps with the exception of Sudan/South Sudan), which is one reason why Somaliland, for all its lobbying and justifiable claims for recognition, has failed to achieve independent statehood.

State-building costs money, but the funding available for such missions will always reflect the interests of the intervener more than a neutral assessment of the recipient country's need. There was no shortage of funding for the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, but these were arguably historical anomalies. More likely in future is the situation currently obtaining in places like Mali and CAR, where state-building is done 'on the cheap'. Regardless, it was emphasised by several participants that state-building is always a long-term process; depending on the length of the conflict and the period of state decline, it can be a generational, multi-decade effort. Local actors are playing the long game; interveners typically are not. This disjuncture is often a recipe for flawed policies, not least around money. Interveners generally assume that more money can reduce the amount of time required for state-building. On the contrary, state-building will always take however long is necessary; indeed, 'throwing money' at state-building can skew economies and embolden the forces of instability, as we witnessed in Afghanistan and more recently in Libya after the downfall of Gaddafi. Financial links between the intervening force and local political groups can be inherently unstable and prejudicial. In propping up a local government with foreign funding, interveners can easily (unwittingly) transform it into a representation of foreign interests in the eyes of local people.

Local Ownership

If the past two decades of interventions reveal a single, overriding constant it's that 'local ownership' is *sine qua non* to their success. It has become almost cliché to aver that if intervention is required, local governing entities must be kept in the lead wherever possible; where this is not possible, their capacity to do so must be built up as soon as possible. An intervention will not have legitimacy nor will it produce stability if the aspirations of local populations are not met, if community leaders are ignored, if active assistance, rather than passive acquiescence, is not forthcoming. All this is now widely accepted. Yet interveners typically hold an inherent, though rarely acknowledged bias that they can do things better and more quickly than locals. So while interveners may understand that there can be no 'victory' without local ownership, bridging the divide between rhetoric and reality remains an enormous challenge.

The mere act of intervention puts you in a political landscape where perceptions of your relative neutrality amongst locals will never match your own. One participant drew an analogy to the Heisenberg principle to explain that insofar as state intervention is concerned, as soon as you enter the landscape you change the dynamics. When US Marines arrived in Somalia in the early 1990s, they were essentially seen as another clan, and dealt with accordingly through the local understanding of politics. Interveners across all cases have found it extremely difficult *not* to be perceived as part of the problem that their intervention was meant to solve. This challenge is exacerbated in circumstances where the intervention is prompted by the government's abdication of its responsibilities – and it doesn't necessarily want to recover them, or at least in the way the intervening force desires. Instilling what might be called 'best practice' vis-à-vis local ownership in this type of context is virtually impossible.

As one participant elegantly elaborated:

> *The critical point is that the intervening force does not (and cannot) stand above the conflicts that it seeks to resolve, but is itself of necessity sucked into those conflicts, and in the process becomes an element in them, rather than simply a means to end them. From the viewpoint of local actors – a viewpoint all too often overlooked or misinterpreted – the immediate priority is to define their own position vis-à-vis the interveners, and most obviously whether they see the incoming force as a threat or an opportunity. Given that the domestic society is itself already deeply divided, this comes down to a calculation of whether the new participant is likely to come down on their side or that of their opponents. In this situation, it is all too probable that the domestic combatants who believe themselves to be in the stronger position in the current struggle will greet the incomers with suspicion, as thwarting their hopes of victory, whereas who are in the weaker position will see them in the role of the US cavalry in the classic western, rescuing them and therefore to be welcomed with open arms. The result is that the interveners, quite regardless of their own intentions, are liable to find themselves identified as supporting the weaker faction in domestic politics, massively impeding their ability to build support among the population and bring about a lasting peace.*

Lessons from the Afghanistan experience have proved hugely instructive in this regard. The concept of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), rolled out in Afghanistan from 2002 onwards, was to introduce skill-sets that are typically civilian to assist the local government development effort. In practice, the PRTs found themselves delivering outcomes directly and being perceived as delivering something the government was supposed to. Though this in itself had some positive effects initially, far too little attention was given to empowering provincial councils (and engaging with the warlords) who were essential to carrying things forward once the mission began to wind down. One of the more telling innovations to speed up this process involved ISAF (the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan) changing their planning meetings from being conducted in English to the native Farsi language, which instantly put the Afghans in the lead. This example speaks to the need to revert to indigenous mechanisms by which locals have historically resolved their differences, even if their failure necessitated the intervention in the first place.

Another recurrent stumbling block to local ownership in interventions are so-called 'spoilers'. In nearly all of these conflicts there are other external actors, often neighbouring states, which undermine processes of stabilisation and transition. Much has been made of Pakistan's unhelpful role in neighbouring Afghanistan but the same could be said of states meddling in other ways (such as terrorism financing) in states far from their own borders. It is extremely difficult for interveners to 'cordon off' these conflicts so locals can (ultimately) own their own peace process and move forward, but in many cases that is what is required. This suggests that it is not only imperative to transition to local ownership as soon as possible but also to ensure insofar as possible that whatever external actors are required to assist the process going forward should be regional institutions, who after all have the greatest stake in stability. Again, much easier said than done, as clearly demonstrated by the case of Mali, where regional (and indeed continental) bodies proved unwilling (whether due to lack of political will or resources) to act decisively when required, necessitating the intervention of France. Currently Africa lacks the type of financial autonomy that would permit it to undertake successful interventions/peace-building operations without external assistance.

Sustainability

The issue of funding and local ownership goes to the heart of one of the critical, yet still poorly analysed elements of intervention – sustainability. Once a degree of security and stability has been restored (or achieved, in cases of near-perennial conflict), how do you translate that into a lasting and sustainable political peace? In nearly all cases of initially successful armed interventions, the possibility that insurgencies will reignite, mutate into a different vector for instability (such as criminality), and so on will remain high for many years.

The case of Colombia suggests a number of important lessons, even if the Colombian participants themselves openly acknowledge that their process of transition and peace-building is far from over. Colombia has been able to cement and build on the gains it has made against the criminal/insurgent groups in its country by ensuring that it remained true to its democratic vision and principles. Since it gained the upper hand in the conflict after 2000, the temptation to eschew rules in pursuit of singular aims such as defeating an enemy has remained ever present – but it has doggedly stuck to its rules, only deploying the minimum force necessary, casting the armed forces as a protective system rather than merely 'waging war', emphasising human rights and economic opportunities, promoting development in areas of the country where popular support for insurgents was high. None of these measures were easy but they were (rightly) seen as essential to gain legitimacy and win (their own) locals over to the government's cause. Such legitimacy was bolstered by the government's successful effort to secure bipartisan support in parliament for its counter insurgency strategy.

Of course while the Colombian example offers important lessons, its utility as a model is limited by virtue of being both 'intervener' and 'local'. That said, it was not a given that Colombia would *own* its own problem. It sought and received a considerable amount of external assistance, particularly from the United States and to a lesser extent the UK, but Colombia never outsourced its problem in a way that has been evident historically in places like the eastern DRC. Rather, the Colombian government remained highly motivated to tackle rebel groups in their own way, utilising external assistance (eg training) on their own terms. Had US forces been permitted to do the job alone in Colombia, in all likelihood they would have failed.

Colombia did not, naturally, suffer from the same deterioration of political will that is characteristic over time of all foreign interventions, especially where it involves large commitments of personnel and/or materiel and resources. But maintaining political will and achieving sustainability are inseparable. Australia's mission in Solomon Islands is an instructive test-case in drawing in domestic support (in and outside of parliament) for a sustained intervention and commitment. Australia resolved beforehand that the length of time and cost for the intervention were secondary considerations to the need for Australia to maintain regional leadership. This helped give locals confidence that there was a long-term political will for state building and development, which enhanced the legitimacy of the peace settlement. Moreover, there was a strong sense there was no 'exit strategy from the region' for Australia, the price of low key intervention that would continue for as long as it was welcome and required was worth paying. The Solomon Islands intervention was not complicated, however, by many of the features which beset other missions, not least the issue of troop density (Solomon Islands has a population of just 500 000). Interventions in the DRC and Somalia, for instance, have historically been enfeebled by troop densities so low that military gains would be reversed almost as quickly as they were achieved.

The sorry record of foreign interventions in Somalia highlighted three 'drivers' of sustainability (political and military). The first was human capital. Populations in war-ravaged states such as Somalia may appear almost inherently incapable of building efficient and stable systems, but the simple reality is that wars take their toll: leadership and talent atrophy in conditions of constant conflict, undermining the ability of people to collaborate constructively and get things done. A human capital 'recovery plan' may take a generation, regardless of how much money is spent in the effort. The second was 'back fill'. Militaries are often very adept at creating security but then they get stuck; they cannot take the fight to the enemy because they are holding ground, attempting to generate or reconstitute police, local civilian forces, government, courts and so on – jobs that the military ideally ought not to be doing. At the same, if intervention forces expand too quickly outward, often there is nothing that comes in behind them to maintain security in places. This happened in Mogadishu, where as soon as troop density drooped Al Shabaab was able to re-infiltrate the city and degrade the progress made. And thirdly, political focus – there is often only one window of opportunity. This 'moment' needs to be planned for carefully ahead of time, not something to be seized suddenly. Mobilisation of political will and building civilian governance needs to be prioritised at the outset of an intervention, so when security is achieved – whether months or years later – the essential transition from military to civilian power is successful.

Missing Pieces of the Puzzle

Not surprisingly, many of the core issues raised at the 2014 Tswalu Dialogue echoed the findings and debates of earlier Dialogues on fragile states and international interventions. A number of questions were also left unanswered. The brief list below points to the need for further research and sharing of experiences.

- The role of transnational actors, such as kidnap and drugs/weapons/people smuggling networks. These have grown in scale and impact over the past decade, especially in Africa – yet the policy frameworks in place to confront them have not evolved.
- The role of police forces. The importance of police capacity and coordination (with military and civilian actors) was highlighted in the case of Solomon Islands and Colombia, though in Africa it remains one of the least examined, yet vital factors in ensuring sustainable security – and it will become ever more so as the continent urbanises.
- The role of power, infrastructure and the private sector in ensuring sustainable security and development.
- The role of radical Islam and ethno-religious inspired violence. Africa is the most religious continent in the world. While 'jihadism' has been grossly misapplied and misunderstood as a concept, in conditions of rising inequality and joblessness, extremist ideologies can find fertile ground.
- The response to the threat from Boko Haram. For all the attention on the terrorism threat in northern Nigeria, stark questions remain about why the response to Boko Haram has proved so ineffective.
- Targeting and neutralising the leadership. By doing so, do you break the will and capabilities of an organisation, or instead fuel support for it?
- The role of early investment in security sector reform.
- The role of conflict early warning systems.
- The protection of civilians. Too often overlooked, it is often the primary purpose of an intervention. The African Union has an elaborate framework on protection of civilians, and experts agree that it has better defined standards for intervention than UN – but there is no capacity to implement it.

Endnotes

1 The Tswalu Protocol is a set of principles, guidelines and choices derived from the experience of heads of state, governments, non-governmental organisations, military professionals, and academics who have been at the epicentre of peace support missions. See http://www.thebrenthurstfoundation.org/Files/Brenthurst_Commisioned_Reports/BD1101_Stablising-Fragile-States.pdf.

2 See also Olusegun Obasanjo (with Greg Mills), 'Perspectives on African Security', Brenthurst Foundation *Discussion Paper 02-14.*

Participant List

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