

No Stabilization Phase is like Another... but All Have the Same Basic Features

Stabilizations in Iraq, Haiti or Kosovo display **obvious differences that everything intensifies**. However, looking more closely, **common points** shall appear. Stabilizations phases are like carpets: their weft maintaining wool threads is always similar to the others, while their colors forming specific patterns make a difference between them. Like carpets, each one being unique, no conflict is similar to another. Identifying the weft is as necessary as distinguishing the threads. It enables to **better understand this stabilization phase which is decisive for the success of a military operation**.

BY COLONEL LUC DU PERRON DE REVEL - HEAD OF CDEF/DREX¹

Permanent features of stabilization phases

Use of force

Going from the intervention phase to the stabilization one is expressed by **an evolution of the force employment**. The military victory of a party over another or the separation of belligerents mean the end of combats. The nature of these latter is mainly symmetrical or dissymmetrical.

Those who want to go on fighting against intervention forces or against the current authorities have no other option than embarking in an asymmetrical fight. It constitutes the only opportunity to hope winning one day.

However the growth of such form of violence is progressive. Stabilization often starts by a period when intense political and diplomatic activity and violence temporarily quasi-

disappearing are the source of hope for better days for the majority. But such state of grace where everything seems possible does not last long. Some months or weeks of political or military mistakes, difficulties, changes or headlong rush of some people are enough for generating a re-start of oppositions and for violence to re-appear. Such violence is fuelled by an increasing discrepancy between military forces and populations.



Subsequently, although always necessary, force is less useful. It appears frequently as **an insufficient and sometimes inefficient response**. Capacities of destruction and aggression leave partly way to controlling and understanding the environment or the forces protection. **However, “conventional” and dissymmetrical fights still remain in the stabilization phase**. They happen, either from time to time on the occasion of crisis that are always violence bursts (Kosovo, Ivory Coast) or in a permanent way in areas surrounded by instability where armed and organized opponents are concentrated (Afghanistan).

Population, both actor and stake

Mere victim of conflicts for long, population became on all theaters a major stake and a full-fledge actor. It is everywhere at the heart of operations conception and conduct.

It is **a constant concern for military forces**. These draw a part of their legitimacy, a priori as well as a posteriori, from the feeling of security felt by everyone. In this field, any failure is charged to the forces account, including when this security is not relevant to their mission. While maintaining such violence, the adversary may want to deny such legitimacy, try to provoke a destabilizing political effect or continue his own objectives with a bet on the passivity of stabilization forces. This was the case in 2004 when Ivorian forces repressed with a lethal violence a tentative demonstration in Abidjan in March or when internal disputes within “Forces nouvelles”² killed dozens of victims at Korogho in June. That occurred in the north as well as in the south without impartial forces being capable to oppose. However, massacres are also a matter of a “mere” dynamics of violence. War by favoring the conditions to act out is the main matrix.

The victims-persecutors relationship cannot ignore the third component - the third party - military forces being part of it as well as the “neighbor”:

this can be such specific state or the “international community”. Constant slaughters are covering with blood some crisis theaters (Balkans, Ivory Coast, Darfur, Iraq...). They demonstrate **how important for decision are the action, non-action or incapacity** of these third parties, including sometimes our own forces in regard of perpetration or pursuit of these crimes. Massacres perpetrated almost under the eyes of international forces in Srebrenica in Bosnia or in Guitrozon and Petit Duékoué in the Ivory Coast can only favor the repudiation of forces unable to grant a minimum security to populations.

This security is essential but so difficult to achieve. It stresses the expectations of those for whom the end of conflict should allow better living conditions. Their impatience regarding this matter is growing as the time elapses. **Any prolonged failure in this area generates a feeling of rejection**. This can drive entire groups in the adversary’s hands as he appears as a possible recourse.

As urban areas are concentrating a large part of the population, they are at the heart of power stakes. They subsequently remain the privileged action field for the asymmetrical adversary. They are then essential areas for military forces which should act and deploy there in stabilization phase.

However, current crisis, for a part of them, are occurring in regions where rural population is still numerous. Some of these areas are crisis focal centers where lies a part of the conflict origins: land and ethnical conflicts in west Ivory Coast or in Darfur, mine resources in Liberia or Congo, ethnical enclaves in Kosovo, etc. They require a military presence. Other areas with difficult accesses, sometimes close to borders or common to several countries may constitute sanctuaries for enemy forces (tribal areas in Afghanistan) or favor fugacity and self-sufficiency of groups either hostile or manipulated by some conflict actors (Ivory Coast, Congo, Chad - Sudan - Central African Republic)...

A number of actors

By nature, stabilization always occurs in a country where the State is in crisis, in bankruptcy or has practically disappeared. Subsequently, it can only, in the best case, play its role imperfectly. A part of its missions is then performed by international and humanitarian organizations with which military forces should act and coordinate. But, with the exception of some specific domains such as the interposition between fighters, duties of general security or fight against guerrilla, these are “not calling the tune”. They are often obliged to wait for the political actors to progress in the crisis resolution and can only accompany them. In this context, the military are working together with multiple actors with whom they should develop a close cooperation.

This **frame common** to all stabilization phases generates **consequences for the forces**:

- The **transition period** between intervention and stabilization phases is a key period of the conflict which can durably orientate its course. It can be a privileged time of action, subject to have been anticipated and prepared. It is also frequently the **prelude to an increase of asymmetrical violence**.
- The committed forces are focused on a force employment totally devoted to military victory. Although this is indispensable to the intervention phase, the forces should however be able to re-orientate it in the stabilization phase. They should take care of **not fuelling a violence they try to control** and have available a sufficient power to impose a force sometimes necessary.
- The **population security is one of the pillars of legitimacy** of the forces action even when it is not an explicit mission.
- The **capability to intervene in urban areas as well as on wider and wider spaces along with difficult accesses** is a constant in the forces action.
- **Civilian-military dialogue is a key point**. At all levels, the military should

Lessons learned

integrate the action of various interlocutors. Their objectives, resources or interests, may however noticeably differ one from another.

Differences between stabilization phases

Countries and cultures

Countries and cultures are diverse, so are the conflicts. Ethnical, religious, historical and political aspects of countries in crisis are dramatically influencing the sequencing of the conflict. Excepted that both of them do not belong to the western world, there is less common points between Afghan and Ivory Coast cultures than between this last one and French culture. Our units are going from one theater to another in a feeling of continuity reinforced by a high operational tempo. They could then be tempted by an **abusive generalization** and by

implementing, with no difference, courses of actions or “recipes” that have been efficient elsewhere.

Moreover, these differences of culture have **a direct impact on the forms of violence** that the forces have to face out. These request diverse responses and, no doubt, resources to face them out or to be protected from them that are also diverse as well. The extreme violence of the Iraqi theater does not seem reproducible in Balkans or Ivory Coast’s theaters. This would be due in particular to the deep historical roots of local antagonisms or to the cultural and religious dimension. This enables a sublimation of individual martyrdom which is unknown in other regions. On the one hand, the act of the sniper covering Sarajevo streets with blood seems to remain a local course of action. On the other hand, violently hostile demonstrations, already experienced at a lower scale in Kosovo, developed at an exceptional level against our forces in Abidjan.

The intervention origin

The conflict can be the outcome of a crisis specific to the country. At the end of a shorter or longer process, it results in the intervention of forces from outside. This was the case of Ivory Coast or Congo, for instance. In this case, the military commitment aims, **on behalf of international legitimacy, at enabling the restoration of a stable social and political system.** The political goal of the operation is to return to peace. More modestly for an operation limited in space and time, it can be only the success of a specific phase. This was the case for operation Benga in 2006 where, in the wider framework of a UN operation, the European force (EUFOR) accompanied the organization of elections that were crucial for the country. Even if the task may reveal difficult, political legitimacy is usually accepted and reinforces this of military operation on the ground.



ADJ Jean-Raphaël DRAHI/SIRPA Terre

The crisis may also be the outcome of an **intervention from abroad**, itself locally generating the conflict, even if it can be considered as a piece of a wider whole. Iraq and Afghanistan are currently the best examples. Foreign forces intervene to overthrow the authority in place, replace it by a new form of government and promote the advent of a new society, democratic to be specific. This idea naturally conflicts with multiple oppositions. These are supporting the adversary in order to combat stabilization forces. These forces are considered as an occupation force by an increasing part of the population if the situation does not improve quickly. Success of the operation is, at least, extremely difficult. Key points are, on the one hand the achievement of transition period between intervention and stabilization phases and, on the other hand, the accuracy of initial orientations.

Different legal frameworks

From all on-going operations, none refers to the same legal framework. In the Ivory Coast, French forces from operation *Licorne* were initially committed on a national basis. They are now acting within the framework of a UN resolution without being

integrated to UNOCI³ Force. In Afghanistan, although under NATO command and UN mandate, ISAF (International Security and Assistance Force) intervenes in coordination with coalition forces under US command from operation *Enduring Freedom*. Conversely, in Central Africa, French detachment *Boali* provides support to Central Africa multinational force (FOMUC) established by CEMAC⁴... These different legal frameworks imply subsequently **roles, missions and rules of engagement (ROEs)** which are **very diverse for the forces**. The outcome is an always different assessment of action boundaries for military forces and relationships they should establish with their environment. It should be as accurate as possible.

The consequences for the forces of these differences from a stabilization theater to another build the **original and non-reproducible framework of each conflict**. They oblige every military leader to ask himself the eternal question: “what is it about?”. Without forgetting the common frame of these operations, responses that he brings enable him to **favor a success based on:**

- **a good assessment of his battle space and objectives to achieve** in order to keep, in this scope, his

freedom of action and not to commit himself beyond his domain of responsibility,

- **a fair definition of the role of forces** he commands and subsequently of the nature of required units as well as the most appropriated missions and courses of actions,
- **a full understanding of the crisis, of the general situation and of the threats** in order to estimate protection measures, capabilities to deploy and risks likely to be taken,
- **a knowledge as comprehensive as possible of the environment and culture specific to the society** where the forces are immersed.

¹ DREX: Research & lessons learned division.

² Translator's note: “New Forces”: Opposing Ivorian party.

³ UNOCI: United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire.

⁴ CEMAC : Communauté économique et monétaire d'Afrique centrale / Central Africa Economic and Monetary Community.

Although incomplete, the weft and colors so sketched out can enable to make a **combination**.

On the one hand, **lessons learned** perpetuate a **base** from a crisis to another. On the other hand, the **changing characteristic of crisis** gives each of them unique features. This harmonious alliance only can successfully conduct the stabilization decisive phases.