Historical Precedents

The term ‘stability campaigns’ can be seen as an extension of other similar terms such as military operations other than war and low-intensity conflict. It represents a basket of activities including, but not limited to, peacekeeping, peacemaking, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, rebuilding institutions and infrastructure, reviving the public sector, and control of narcotics trafficking.

Historically, the concept of stability campaigns in the US military has been slightly more delimited. In the mid-1960s, stability operations were seen as core missions, ranked third in priority behind general war and limited war. The purpose was to provide security through military assistance or direct intervention to protect political, social, or economic programs. The employment of force was neither meant to maintain the status quo, nor to support any particular group; rather, it was meant to establish a climate of order under which a government could function effectively. By 1972 there was a manual on stability campaigns which focused primarily on counterinsurgency. It was replaced in 1974 by a manual called ‘Internal Defense and Development.’ Thus the term slipped from usage until now.

Historical Challenges

American experiences carrying out stability campaigns illustrate the challenges faced by contemporary missions. American interventions in the Caribbean led to extended military presences in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua. All missions were carried out under the assumption that Western political values would be welcomed by the indigenous population. While the interventions led to the formation of strong gendarmeries, these gendarmeries gave rise to powerful dictators. Another
complication is the primacy given to the organization of elections. The introduction of
democratic practices is important in most stability campaigns; however, the democratic
process can be highly problematic in a state that lacks a democratic tradition.
Nevertheless, there have been some successful interventions (US intervention in the
Dominican Republic 1965, Grenada 1983, British and US interventions in Jordan and
Lebanon 1958, British intervention in Sierra Leone 2000). Some propose that these
missions experienced success due to the fact that they were short in duration. As a
result, involvement in protracted conflict should be avoided. A multinational force may
be acceptable to support a weak government provided that there is wide-scale
international consensus. Without that consensus, the best course of action is
containment.

The contemporary use of the term ‘stability campaigns’ by such institutions as the US
DoD is quite broad. It is used to describe civilian and military activities conducted
across the spectrum from peace to conflict to establish or maintain order in states and
regions. Abstract declarations of internationalism in policy offer a broad scope for
action. Nevertheless, broadness could be problematic especially when viewed in light
of the challenges in garnering support for open ended objectives.

Re-conceptualizing Conflict

Redefining Power

Contemporary warfare as a result of stability campaigns is often termed ‘asymmetrical
war.’ A closer examination of the dynamics of power reveals that this term is at once
accurate and misleading. In this type of warfare, the parties possessing more military
power are, in general, constitutional democracies. However, the overwhelming military
advantage does not necessarily garner for the party absolute power. Asymmetrical war
is characterized by a meeting of the constrained objectives and means of Western
powers and the unlimited objectives and means of the domestic enemy. Constitutional
democracies must exercise a certain amount of moral restraint in key dimensions. For
example, action requires that the domestic public and international communities be convinced of the necessity and legality of the war. There is a responsibility to minimize collateral damage and maximize force protection. These are factors for consideration that not only create pause in execution, but also act as overarching constraints – moral and technical – on the action of military powers. The weight of these responsibilities is a burden not shared by the enemy. Parity in technical capacity and weaponry is no longer typical in contemporary warfare. Unconventional weapons such as words, images, ideas, and perceptions have increasing importance. These must be seized upon. Indeed, the conventional conception of power is not the determinant of outcomes; instead, the parties are simply ‘differently powered.’

*Setting the Tone*

Military force has been replaced at the centre of gravity of warfare by public opinion and leadership. To be sure, the primary domestic challenge which typifies contemporary warfare is establishing a narrative that resonates with the public and sustaining support through that narrative. This dimension seems to have eluded current political leaders.

In order to sustain support for a long-term campaign, political leaders must develop the appropriate language. The public must have a sense that a long-term timeline can abide by benchmarks according to which human and material resources may be shifted away from the conflict area. It was suggested that perhaps it is necessary to adjust the perception of stability campaigns away from an end-state orientation and towards a notion of continuous warfare. There was also a suggestion that what is needed is a clear doctrine (perhaps modelled after the Weinberger doctrine), to strongly articulate a domestic and international basis for assistance and the use of force. The purpose of this doctrine would be twofold: (1) to provide the technical legitimization for the use of force and (2) to provide clear political objectives based on national interest. Such a doctrine could facilitate relating the campaign to the public.
Destroying the Enemy

In general, the destruction of the existing state institution is necessary as the initial step in the process of a stability campaign and is often a point of pride. Credit taken for the initial deposition, however, may hamper the long-term objectives of the mission. The absence of local ownership of the process – the fact that it was not an internal initiative that resulted in the celebrated outcome – can have serious implications for the campaign. A foreign army may annihilate a state structure, but the rebuilding requires broad-based participation and cooperation from local actors – military and civil. Engaging those actors will be a constant challenge in stability campaigns. Nevertheless, the initial sense of victory must be balanced by a clear and participatory strategic and operational plan for the reconstruction phase.

Learning at the Strategic and Operational Levels

Institutional Culture, Institutional Learning

Strategic learning entails a level of planning at which a state or a group of states determines national or multinational objectives and develops and uses national resources to accomplish those objectives. Implied is the presence of military headquarters, interactions at all levels of government, and a long-term perspective. Indeed learning can occur on a personal basis, whereby an individual internalizes experience, reflects on that experience and draws lessons; however, strategic learning requires that learning occur at the institutional level. While individuals as leaders are critical to institutional learning, the challenges to a leader of effecting institutional learning are many. There must be recognition on the part of the whole organization of performance criteria and the necessary adjustments to the institution’s role and the approaches and capabilities required to fulfil that role. The process of translating corporate experience into long-term lessons is far more difficult in the strategic environment than in other command-centric environments.
There are three main responsibilities required of a strategic leader and a strategic organization in fostering a learning institution. First, the organization must develop strategies to support the government’s defence and security objectives. This will demonstrate the organization’s understanding of the history of the region and the evolution of the specific conflict. This knowledge is necessary so that the organization may adapt its response as the conflict evolves. Second, the organization must manage the business of defence. This involves the generation of forces to meet objectives, the building of capabilities, and the maintenance of personnel and equipment. Third, the organization must develop military capabilities for an uncertain future. It is necessary to anticipate the long-term defence and security needs of the country, to prepare for the next conflict. Rarely do militaries get this right. Often the best outcome is that capabilities may be quickly adapted to suit the upcoming conflict. The strategic leader must ensure that institutional learning is occurring over all three key areas of responsibility in the short, medium, and long term.

**Challenges to Strategic Learning**

Western militaries can be seen as particularly ill suited to institutional learning. There are four limitations to learning in the overall strategic environment:

1. **The strategic environment is not conducive to learning.** A learning environment requires a high degree of openness and a willingness to tackle tough issues, namely organizational failure. Given the protective cultures of government branches, it is difficult to generate a degree of openness. This is true despite common tasks such as implementing an all-of-government approach. Strategic thought is dominated by tactical considerations which do not readily tolerate a long-term perspective. Furthermore, the lack of continuity and limited mandates of leaders are more conducive to addressing “hot button issues” as opposed to strategically determined priorities.

2. **The military culture is action-oriented and does not encourage reflection and learning.** The organization is not entirely resistant to adaptation, but adaptation occurs
over relatively short timelines and is based primarily on the experience of failure. In some ways, the culture verges to groupthink and tends towards re-organization as a solution as opposed to strategic learning. How can a learning culture be fostered? Embedding a learning culture begins at the bottom of the organization, in the early stages of involvement through such initiatives as after-action reviews in training. Cross-fertilization with other institutions must also be encouraged at this stage. This learning must be complemented by support from the leadership.

(3) Leaders are not well prepared for strategic employment. While there is certainly no shortage of effective tactical leaders, there is a shortage of leaders with the perspective and corporate and tactical experience required to be effective at the strategic level. Such leaders employ a systematic approach exemplified by the disciplined laying (or refining) of the institutional foundation for addressing problems. This requires a broad historic perspective, deep knowledge of how the government works, and long-term planning. The scarcity of strategic leaders is exacerbated by the lack of continuity. Lessons learned are displaced along with the individual, leaving the organization to repeat the learning process.

(4) There is no effective, formal process for strategic learning. There are innumerable processes in place such as force development process, force generation process, performance measurement process, lessons-learned process; however, these processes are not connected, nor are they truly owned (or necessarily used) by strategic leaders as part of the routine management of the organization.

*Strategic Choices for Operational Success*

The likelihood that a stability campaign will succeed in the long run is greatly enhanced by the presence of key qualities in the target country: a political tradition that favours stability, the perception that inhabitants have a role to play as *citizens*, a public expectation that the government and its agents are meant to serve a common good, the establishment of a secure environment, a focused development infrastructure, and the basis for an open economy. It is clear that the convergence of these factors is unlikely;
however, the presence of some of these factors can greatly impact a country’s decision to intervene – the perception of the probability of success. It becomes necessary to identify key factors early in the planning process and manoeuvre them in an advantageous fashion.

**Organizational Forgetting**

Organizational forgetting takes many forms. The loss of organizational knowledge, whether intentional or not, consists of the failure to transfer knowledge or the failure to retain knowledge. Key lessons regarding counterinsurgency missions learned in the Vietnam War have been lost. It could be said that this case is an example of intentional organization at forgetting. The negative connotations of the war have created resistance, if not open hostility towards the notion of extracting meaningful lessons for contemporary counterinsurgency missions. Managed unlearning is meant to serve a function, mainly to pave the way for innovation. Unless the vacuum of memory over Vietnam is supplanted by innovative strategies for launching counterinsurgency missions, the organizational forgetting is a disservice to the institution.

Organizational forgetting is exacerbated by reliance on technology. Knowledge is difficult to extract from digital information. This is because there is a tendency to take comfort in the fact that the information has been compiled and saved. Rarely is there a cause to revisit the information. As a result, the information gathers dust. Little to no effort is made to draw from the information and convert it into significant lessons.

The memory of an organization is intimately related to that organization’s culture. It is insufficient to deliver the information to the target audience (through military training and courses); rather, it must be ensured that the lessons have been ingrained such that the information may develop into knowledge. This requires constant effort. In short, strategic and operational learning cannot be said to have occurred until the lessons have become a part of the organizational culture.
Procurement

One of the key limitations of operational success is the absence of necessary military resources. In Canada especially, effort is being directed at ensuring that capabilities and resources at the operational level reflect institutional knowledge generated through strategic learning. Force expansion and force transportation has become the main area of focus in this regard. Core combat capability is certainly a basis for a military’s ability to launch a stability campaign; however, while heavy fighting constitutes a substantial portion of operational activity, transportation, protection and delivery of aid and other components particular to stability campaigns require specific attention in procurement as well.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

The PRTs represent efforts to bring together political objectives and operational challenges. Unfortunately, many feel that the teams lack interfaces with local leaders and citizens. Where these connections are made staff rotation becomes an issue. Concerted effort has been made to create a smooth transition that involves the transfer of local trust from one team leader to the next. Nevertheless, rotation presents the potential for a gap in the transmission of knowledge.

Intelligence

Intelligence operations can act as a true force multiplier in stability campaigns. Understanding tribal, ethnic and religious relations, for example, can direct drastically different action and if introduced early enough in the planning process, can contribute greatly to the success of a mission. Furthermore, intelligence operations contribute to the avoidance of collateral damage.

Aside from the issues already discussed, key areas for consideration include: engaging the private sector and integrating demographic analysis into pre-campaign planning.
Civil-Military Cooperation

Mutually Supporting Pillars

Civilian and military efforts must be appreciated as mutually supporting pillars. Neither can independently achieve the security objectives in Afghanistan and in future stability campaigns. Effective strategic leadership must be able to analyze the campaign environment and determine which dimension of human resources would be most effective and in what quantities. A careful balance must be struck between engaging all relevant and necessary actors in the campaign and respecting each participating institution’s mandate and autonomy in decision making.

Implications for NATO

Increased civil-military synergy is redefining NATO’s operational style. Indeed, the concept of a comprehensive approach is not new to NATO; however, in the past such an approach engaged multiple actors on an ad hoc basis. While there were some advantages to this arrangement, contemporary challenges require a higher degree of structure and effective coordination at all levels of engagement, namely the institutional level. Now 26 member states must approve all actions and concurrence is required from all engaged actors. This is necessary in order to achieve the common goals of all relevant actors according to a legitimate international strategy. NATO sees its involvement in stability campaigns in terms of its contribution to the international community’s comprehensive approach. NATO-led PRTs can provide assistance in the development of employment opportunities, power supply, transportation infrastructure, medical facilities, educational facilities, but overall success will depend on the broader effort from the international community. This encompasses military missions, diplomatic missions, reconstruction agencies, NGOs, and other international agencies.
A False Dichotomy

The gap between NGO-led local society building and military-led tactical counterinsurgency has widened to the extent that a false dichotomy has been established. In reality, there are many initiatives such as law enforcement, local governance, and anti-corruption that rely on the coordination of efforts, expertise, and resources of both camps. Rhetorical primacy of counter-terrorism has proven problematic in maintaining the balance of contemporary stability campaigns.

Traditionally, effective partnerships are fostered and perpetuated by the mutual use of language that resonates with all parties. The strong organizational cultures of the military and NGO communities often clash in concept and rhetoric; however, at the field level, cooperation is fostered out of environment-driven necessity. The overwhelming interdependence that is experienced in theatre must echo up through the partnered institutions and permeate the strategic process.

As it stands, effective coordination is often dependent on personal relationships formed between military and civilian actors. There is a distinct absence of joint civil-military concepts, doctrine, training and operations. Given the regular and relatively brief, rotations of military actors, a long term, functioning, strategic approach cannot rely on such ephemeral bridges. NGO workers already hold the longest rotations, so extending the length of rotations is not the best solutions. Instead it is necessary to build robust institutional bridges.

Accommodating Overlapping Space

The necessary overlap of battle space and humanitarian space has meant that parties must master comfortable operations in shared environments. Whether this demand can be met within the existing construct of a traditional NGO is questioned. In fact, some propose that there may need to be a reconfiguration of the NGO structure into a hybrid NGO. Increasingly the development community is being drawn away from familiar territory. The stability-development nexus requires that such organizations as CIDA and its affiliated NGOs work cooperatively with actors that are not focused
primarily on development. This cooperation demands a certain degree of accommodation to reconcile different mandates, policy frameworks, cycle time for program planning, and organizational cultures. The fostering of such a cooperative culture involves a progression through a continuum from information sharing to mutual support with the ultimate goal of achieving joint operation planning. This is a slow process.

Learning in Non-Military Institutions

Early-Stage Planning

Overall there is a need for better incorporation of development advisors in the early planning stages of stability campaigns. The benefits of such a move would be twofold: (1) stability campaigns would be more reflective of community mapping projects that identify local leaders and other key actors, problematic relationships, and local sensitivities, and (2) it would provide an opportunity for development organizations to learn outside of the development bubble and contribute cooperatively to the overall direction of the campaign.

Staffing Challenges

Due to their traditional working environments civilian institutions lack the organizational ethos to take casualties. This makes staffing campaign efforts extremely difficult. Maintaining experienced staff on the ground has been a constant challenge. Instead, the field is dominated by young, eager, and inexperienced individuals with varying skill sets. While such individuals contribute greatly to the overall campaign, leadership skills and knowledge of the institution are qualities necessary for high performance and are more often found amongst experienced staff. In overarching development organizations such as CIDA, serious attention to the staffing challenges in the field is required. One area for specific consideration is a possible benefits package including special insurance for workers on the ground.
Fostering Local Ownership

It is necessary to foster local ownership of economic and social developments as a means of sustaining development initiatives beyond the direct involvement of NGOs and the military. Consultation at the local level through community development councils can contribute to the sense of ownership. This agenda is difficult to pursue, however, due to the lack of choice over programming partners – local civil society and the public sector are weak, limiting local and provincial options for cooperation. To complicate matters, local capacity building is being hampered by the fact that domestic human resources are being drawn towards secondary public service and the international community efforts.

Restricted Movement and Security Measures

Development workers have strict controls on their movements. They are often transported in LAVs and accompanied by military personnel. These and other precautionary measures are without question necessary for their security; however, they do affect the ability of development workers to function as they would otherwise. By creating an affiliation between military and development workers, a perception is created that the development workers pose a potential threat. This dynamic is highly undesirable. Nonetheless, the precautions are important and unlikely to abate. Training for development workers must, therefore, adapt to functioning in a securitized environment. This speaks to the need for higher order integration. As established in the discussion on civil-military cooperation, development organizations are unaccustomed to working as an integrated portion of a larger unit, especially not an overwhelmingly military one. Re-orienting the organization towards integration is one of the foremost challenges to learning in non-military institutions.
The Role of the Media

Setting the Narrative

Media must be treated as a key factor in a stability campaign. Television and print media have the ability to set the narrative of a campaign and relate that narrative to the public. In fact, this ability seems to exceed that of political leaders. While media outlets have a key role in conveying information to the public, many feel that this role has not been fulfilled through quality coverage, especially regarding casualties of warfare. The recent revolution in media delivery could have something to do with this; the advent of the 24-hour news cycle has a detrimental effect on the quality of the news being delivered. Furthermore, the reliance on television media also has an unfavourable effect on the way in which the public absorbs the news. The nuances and complexities surrounding an issue that make many media outlets less accessible may be stripped away through television reporting. As a result, trends in television media may be driving other forms of media and the way in which they address the story. The Internet is another news source on the rise. The potential for a locus for quality control and legitimacy are even further removed in this case.

Embedded Media

Embedded media campaigns, as a part of a broader military public affairs program, are seen as necessary to give the public a better understanding of the dynamics of the stability campaign. Specifically, it is thought that enhanced coverage of the multiple dimensions of stability campaigns (“the stuff people feel good about”) will aid in maintaining public support. Doubtless, the public would be affected in some way by more coverage; however, the effect of that coverage is not guaranteed. More information will not necessarily enhance support for the war. It is important not to underestimate or discount the scepticism of Western communities vis-à-vis troop deployment regardless of the influence of media. Attention to combat and casualties through media coverage is a likely outcome of stability campaigns, but one must also
consider the willingness of key campaign actors to make clear their contributions – namely in the diplomatic and development streams.

*Expectations of Media Coverage*

Given the criticisms launched at the way in which media cover stability campaigns and the call for enhanced coverage, it is necessary to explore precisely what the expectations are of this coverage. What constitutes legitimate reporting? What is the expectation for the message being delivered? If the perception is that political leaders have not been able to articulate a rationale for the campaign that resonates with the public, is it the responsibility of media to take on the challenge? Should that responsibility fall to the media, what grounds exist for criticism?

*Training Correspondents*

There is a suggestion that media correspondents should be trained. While it is necessary for correspondents to undergo a certain amount of training, especially to gain awareness of military culture and the nuances of the field, they should not be trained with a view to becoming ‘part of the team’. One should not aim to achieve what was present during WWII where media correspondents wore uniforms and were given ranks. A high degree of independence must be retained.