

ICCT Research Report NATO Project

# Transitioning from Military Interventions to Long-Term Counter- Terrorism Policy

This NATO research project focused on assessing how military interventions can best prepare the ground for an effective long term counter-terrorism policy, looking at the interventions in Libya, Afghanistan and Mali. The combined insights of these case studies were distilled into a set of strategic policy recommendations, organised around the three phases of pre-intervention, entry and transition to local authority. The recommendations range from improving early warning methods to clarifying the strategic and political objectives of the intervention, and applying a whole of government approach in working with local partners. While based on the lessons identified and good practices of three very different and complex military operations (and their transitions), these lessons can help avoid common pitfalls that occur in times of crisis.

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Authors:  
Edwin Bakker  
William Maley  
Sergei Boeke

# About the Authors

## Professor Edwin Bakker

Edwin Bakker is a Research Fellow at ICCT, Professor of (Counter-)Terrorism Studies at Leiden University, and Director of the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) of that same university. He studied Economic Geography (Netherlands) and Political Geography (Netherlands and Germany). In 1997, he defended his PhD thesis on minority conflicts in Slovakia and Hungary. He taught classes in international policies on preventing and managing separatism and intra-state war in the Balkans at the Centre for International Conflict Analysis and Management (CICAM), Nijmegen University. Between 2003 and 2010 he was a fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' where he headed the Clingendael Security and Conflict Programme (since 2007). His research interests at Leiden University and the ICCT are, amongst other, radicalisation processes, jihadi terrorism, unconventional threats to security, and crisis impact management.

Dr. Bakker is member of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee (a rule of law advocacy NGO) and member of the editorial staff of the quarterlies Human Rights and Security, the Journal of Strategic Security, and Vrede & Veiligheid, as well as the monthly Internationale Spectator.

## Professor William Maley

Dr. William Maley is Professor of Diplomacy at the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at The Australian National University. He taught for many years in the School of Politics, University College, University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy, and has served as a Visiting Professor at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Public Policy at the University of Strathclyde, and a Visiting Research Fellow in the Refugee Studies Programme at Oxford University. He is a Member of the Order of Australia (AM), a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (FASSA), and in November 2003, he received the AUSTCARE Paul Cullen Humanitarian Award for services to refugees. He is author of several books on Afghanistan including *The Afghanistan Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, 2009), *Rescuing Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006), *Reconstructing Afghanistan: Civil-military experiences in comparative perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2015.) Maley has also authored *What is a Refugee?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) and he has published articles in several prestigious journals including *The Modern Law Review*, *Political Studies*, *Australian Outlook*, *The Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *Review of International Studies*, *The World Today*. He also produced a paper on *The Foreign Policy of the Taliban* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2000), and co-authored another paper entitled *Afghanistan: Reconstruction and Peacebuilding in a Regional Framework* (Bern: Swiss Peace Foundation, 2001).

## Sergei Boeke LL.M.

Sergei Boeke is a Research Fellow at ICCT. After completing Officer training for the Royal Netherlands Navy, he studied law at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, specialising in international and criminal law. After graduation he held several posts in the Navy, serving on different warships and with the Second Marine Battalion, deploying to Southern Iraq in 2003-4. After a short posting as fellow at the Netherlands Institute for International Relations Clingendael, he joined the diplomatic service and worked for the Department of Political Affairs in The Hague. Moving back to the Ministry of Defence in 2008, he was involved in supporting the Dutch comprehensive approach mission in Afghanistan. In 2011, he completed a 9 month training for civil servants at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) in Strasbourg, France. His areas of research include cyber- security governance and terrorism in the Sahel.

### About ICCT

The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) is an independent think and do tank providing multidisciplinary policy advice and practical, solution-oriented implementation support on prevention and the rule of law, two vital pillars of effective counter-terrorism. ICCT's work focuses on themes at the intersection of countering violent extremism and criminal justice sector responses, as well as human rights related aspects of counter-terrorism. The major project areas concern countering violent extremism, rule of law, foreign fighters, country and regional analysis, rehabilitation, civil society engagement and victims' voices. Functioning as a nucleus within the international counter-terrorism network, ICCT connects experts, policymakers, civil society actors and practitioners from different fields by providing a platform for productive collaboration, practical analysis, and exchange of experiences and expertise, with the ultimate aim of identifying innovative and comprehensive approaches to preventing and countering terrorism.

## Introduction

In recent decades, NATO member states have been involved in military interventions that were a direct reaction to terrorist attacks – for instance the case of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the attacks on the United States in 2001 – or in interventions that were aimed at preventing insurgents and terrorist groups from taking over a country – think of operation Serval in Mali in 2013. NATO member states have also taken part in military interventions aimed at stopping a repressive regime from attacking its own civilians or allegedly posing a threat to neighbouring countries – such as the interventions in Libya in 2011 and Iraq in 2003. The last two mentioned cases resulted in a power vacuum and political divisions which were exploited by insurgent and terrorist groups, creating new security problems for these countries and the intervening powers. In all mentioned cases, there were some short-term military victories, but no long-term successes. Insurgent and terrorist groups were not defeated or even managed to (re-)gain ground, as we see today in Iraq and Afghanistan. This raises the question: how to do better? In order to provide some answers to this fundamental question, the ICCT undertook a study for NATO looking into the transition of military interventions to long-term counter-terrorism (CT) policy.

This study builds on the 2014 ICCT Research Paper “Combining Exit with Strategy: Transitioning from Short-Term Military Interventions to a Long-Term Counter-Terrorism Policy” by Sergei Boeke.<sup>1</sup> The ICCT Research Fellow noted the study of military interventions and research on terrorism typically share a common aspect: “Both fields of research display a strong focus on the beginnings of the phenomenon. Much has been written on the decision-making procedures and processes for military interventions: how, why and under what conditions states decide to participate in military interventions abroad.” Boeke argues that much less (academic) attention has been devoted to how military interventions come to a close. Referring to the Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research by Alex Schmid,<sup>2</sup> he shows that on the subject of terrorism, whole libraries have been published on the possible (root) causes of radicalisation and terrorist activities, but less so on the question how terrorism ends.<sup>3</sup> Boeke argues we should know more about how both phenomena come to a close. Many of the military interventions in the post-9/11 period started as missions against (alleged) terrorist groups or their supporters, often framed as part of the ‘global war on terror’. Remarkably, many of these military interventions did not address or were unable to deal with the underlying causes of terrorism. Moreover, the interventions themselves proved much easier to start than to end, let alone to end after successfully ‘defeating’ the terrorists. The ongoing struggle against al Qaeda and its affiliates and successors, such as so-called “Islamic State” (IS), testifies to the difficulty of ending both the so-called war on terror as well as the phenomenon of terrorism.

Fifteen years after ‘9/11’, there is general agreement on the idea that the phenomenon as such will probably not end and that actions against terrorist groups or networks require long-term counter-terrorism policies. Despite several military interventions

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<sup>1</sup> S. Boeke, “Transitioning from Military Interventions to a Long-Term Counter-Terrorism Policy”, *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 5, no. 6 (2014).

<sup>2</sup> A. Schmid (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Exceptions include the following two works: A.K. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) and S. Jones and M. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa’ida* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008).

against terrorists, our understanding of the link between military interventions and counter-terrorism policies is still remarkably limited. In particular, the link between the closure of military interventions and the establishment and implementation of long-term counter-terrorism policies is not well understood and has remained under-researched.

## ICCT Research Project

To expand the existing body of knowledge on the nexus between military interventions and CT policies, ICCT, together with Leiden University's Institute of Security & Global Affairs and the Australian National University's Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, initiated a research project to assess how (temporary) military interventions can best prepare the ground for an effective long-term CT policy. This research was sponsored by the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme. The focus of this project was on the interaction between military transitions (exit strategies) and implementing an effective CT policy. Relatively little has been written on the interaction between these different fields of research, and the body of literature so far has limited value for policy practice. This project aimed to fill this gap and worked from a policy perspective to achieve practical insights.

## Project Goals

The ICCT research project aimed to identify key successes and best practices to be able to transform a broad military intervention, whether conducted by air and maritime assets only, or by troops on the ground, using a counterinsurgency or comprehensive approach, into a more limited, both in size and scope, CT policy. The project also aims to identify elements for a longer-term CT policy that would focus on alleviating the threat from terrorist groups, reinforcing host-nation capacity and addressing some of the causes of radicalisation and violent extremism.<sup>4</sup>

A roundtable expert meeting held in February 2015 in Brussels provided the framework and structure to work out three specific case studies. The following three interventions were explored in depth at international expert meetings in the second half of 2015:

- 1) Libya: with a focus on the aftermath of the intervention;
- 2) Afghanistan: focusing on the post-2014 transition; and
- 3) Mali: focusing on the ongoing transition.

The seminars brought together relevant former ministers, high-level decision makers, policy-makers and practitioners to exchange insights and best-practices, and resulted in three concluding reports.<sup>5</sup> This final overarching research report will compare insights from the different case studies and provide general policy recommendations.

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<sup>4</sup> Another term often used to describe a comprehensive approach to deal with terrorism is Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). The NATO research project uses the term Counter-Terrorism (CT).

<sup>5</sup> S. Boeke and J de Roy van Zuijdewijn, *Transitioning from Military Interventions to long-term counter-terrorism policy: the case of Libya (2011-2016)*, Leiden University – Institute of Security and Global Affairs (2016); W. Maley, *Transitioning from Military Interventions to long-term counter-terrorism policy: the case of Afghanistan (2001-2016)*, Australian National

## Research Questions and Methodology

The research looked into a number of key questions that need answers in order to be able to formulate strategies for transitioning from military interventions to long-term CT policy. The research questions were the following:

- The Formation of the Military Coalition and Determination of the Command Structure: how does this structure impact on (national) exit strategies and how can long-term CT planning be incorporated?
- Military Operations: How effective are CT/targeting operations? How to measure effectiveness of military operations (output versus outcome)?
- Security Sector Reform & Capacity Development: How can limited funds & training capacity be leveraged to ensure long-term effective local security forces? Should the focus be on Ministries or operational units, and co-opt or exclude local power-brokers?
- Intelligence Cooperation: How can intelligence services improve CT effectiveness?
- Civil-Military Relations: How to coordinate different national (re)construction efforts that are linked to countering violent extremism policy?
- Strategic Narratives: How to communicate the transition from military interventions to long-term CT policy?

To answer these questions, the authors studied the existing body of literature and organised four one-day round table expert meetings. The first one discussed the literature review and theoretical framework that constituted the basis of this research project. The three expert meetings were centred around the three cases studies on (attempts at) transition from military interventions to long-term CT policies in Libya, Afghanistan and Mali.

## Research Results: Lessons Learned

It is important that at the very beginning there is a strategy or vision that goes beyond the entry phase of the intervention, and that sets out the contours of a long-term CT policy. This is not something that should automatically be conducted by the Ministries of Defence as they do not necessarily possess the relevant expertise, but must involve other government departments. It is essential that at an early stage the general objectives of the CT policy are clarified and that planning begins. Based on the three case studies, the authors provided a set of overall lessons learned and best practices. They formulated 37 policy recommendations for the following three phases in the transition from military interventions to long-term CT policies:

1. The pre-intervention phase: improving decision-making by governments before the actual intervention;
2. The entry phase: the military intervention itself;
3. The transition phase: towards local ownership and a long-term approach to countering terrorism.

The policy recommendations are distilled from the three case studies and therefore not separately referenced. The reports on Libya, Afghanistan and Mali describe in detail how the intervention was conducted, and how the transition followed in each case.

## A. Pre-intervention phase: improving decision-making by governments

- 1. Prevention is better than intervention** A dearth of political will has notoriously thwarted attempts at preventing outbreaks of major conflict through binding decisions of the UN Security Council, but a range of other tools are available. These include measures to address factors such as the sponsorship of disruptive actors by states, looting of state resources by corrupt political leaders, and the spread of organised crime activities.
- 2. Knowledge networks** When capacity is not in-house, a knowledge network could ensure that relevant cultural, historical and linguistic knowledge about 'to be intervened' countries is quickly made available and accessible when necessary. Trust, however, 'has a face' and networks need to be actively maintained. Furthermore, conflict situations are invariably complex, and it may be necessary to access a range of different kinds of expertise – political, economic, legal and anthropological – from different type of actors – government, academia, NGOs – in order to secure a balanced picture.
- 3. Early warning and Intelligence** The world is full of potential conflicts and budding crises. There will always be surprises, but an early warning methodology can ensure that governments are not caught wholly unprepared. Good intelligence on potentially unstable regions and countries is indispensable to support decision-making during crisis situations. While intelligence agencies naturally focus on identified and potential adversaries, a risk management approach necessitates capacity with respect to areas that may seem stable and benign, but are not. Whether within Intelligence Services, Defence or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, knowledge centres of specific crisis-prone regions should be nurtured. Making better use of existing early warning networks and knowledge centres may be a low-cost way of accessing relevant information.
- 4. Meaning-making** Once a crisis or conflict has erupted, it is important to discern what it is about and what is at stake. Through an in-depth analysis of the drivers of conflict, organisations can take stock of the potential local, regional and international implications. A thorough answer to "what is happening and why is it important?" leads to a better preparation to address the question "what should we do?" that is invariably posed by politicians and decision-makers. Meaning-making frames the situation and is vital for garnering national and international support for an active policy on the issue.

- 5. International support** Obtaining support from regional actors is very important in the pre-intervention phase, although some regions, such as Southwest Asia, lack strong regional organisations. A broad support base can translate to a strong UN mandate for action. Nonetheless, the views of neighbouring countries can also be instructive. It is important also to note that support can dwindle over time; one way to minimise this risk is to have in place mechanisms of on-going engagement with regional actors.
- 6. Mapping local partners** An intervening force will be judged at least in part by the company it chooses to keep. As a crisis develops and a military intervention becomes possible, local stakeholders and partners will need to be mapped. Some of these may prove to be reliable primary sources, possessing a situational awareness that national decision-makers and policy officers often lack. Others should best be avoided. International actors can end up inadvertently furthering the interests of unappetising local actors; this happened frequently in Afghanistan after 2001.
- 7. Legal mandate** A precise and correct legal mandate at the outset is vital to minimise the risk of subsequent disputes over exactly what actions a mission can properly involve. This is important in maintaining support for an intervention in intervening states. Furthermore, public disputes over the purpose of an intervention risk emboldening those whose activities the intervention is designed to disrupt.
- 8. Establishing a strategic narrative** Framing and bias in the media coverage of events can affect public support for or against an intervention and can prevent decision-makers from receiving a balanced overview of the situation in theatre. This can be offset by clear and coherent strategic narratives articulated by state leaders and the spokespersons of alliances and international organisations. This was arguably lacking in Afghanistan until at least 2008-2009, in part because the invasion of Iraq in 2003 forced participating NATO countries to improvise in the Afghanistan theatre. It is therefore vital that any intervention be accompanied by appropriate strategies for the dissemination of information that can show how an intervention will serve the interests of the audience at home. In the host-nation state, the intervening powers will have to counter in a nuanced and sophisticated fashion the narratives being disseminated by opponents of the intervention. Too often, international actors focus simply on the spreading of images themselves, doing what they think is good, rather than identifying the concerns of locals and responding to these.
- 9. Contingency planning** Early contingency planning by the relevant government ministries, including Foreign Affairs and Defence, is a precondition for effective eventual deployment of military assets. While this might not seem politically opportune at the time, and send an escalatory signal if made public, militaries need a minimum time-frame to mobilise technically and prepare forces for deployment. In Libya, NATO had weeks to plan and prepare for the intervention, and this proved just enough to launch the attack when the executive ordered it. The case of Mali illustrated how different planning scenarios developed by the French Ministry of Defence proved instrumental in allowing a rapid military response to a surprise jihadist attack on the capital Bamako in southern Mali.

- 10. Action over inaction** When the spectre of impending massacres (framed as another 'Rwanda' or 'Srebrenica') raises its head, politicians tend to be pushed into action. The lack of available information, or uncertainty pertaining to the long-term consequences of intervention, are of secondary consequence, just as a fire-fighter is not concerned by water damage. The Libyan intervention was in response to what was perceived to be an impending massacre at Benghazi, and the subsequent defeat of the rebels. While it inadvertently detracted from the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, future crises could again.
- 11. Long-term implications** With fast news cycles and short-term politics demanding rapid decisions, bureaucracies must reserve time and capacity to analyse the potential long-term implications of intervention or non-intervention. While ministerial departments exist to support the political course and line, a red-team construction or devil's advocate office could offer an impartial dissenting opinion. Scenario planning would be an ideal instrument for high-level policy makers to illustrate possible outcomes or 'end states' of active involvement, and it is important to include non-military angles when developing worst case, best case and most likely case scenarios.

## B. Entry phase: the military intervention

- 1. Clear political objective** An intervention should have a clear overarching political objective. Operation Serval in Mali serves as an example of a clear objective and mission. In response to the Malian government's cry for help, the French military intervened to stop the salafi-jihadist attack on the South. The objective was to restore national territorial integrity, by reconquering the North from the three 'occupying' terrorist groups. NATO's intervention in Libya was less clear-cut. It was mandated to impose a no-fly zone to protect civilians. The US, France and the UK were at pains to deny that 'regime change' was the objective, but emphasised that there could be no solution with Gaddafi remaining in power. This considerably complicated the military operation and the strategic narrative.
- 2. Speed of decision-making** For escalating international conflict situations and crises, assuming that the intervening power works with a clear political objective and plans well, the faster an intervention is deployed, the greater its chances of success. Paradoxically, crises often have to attain a certain level of severity before enough political support in the intervening state can be mustered for active involvement. Appropriate contingency planning is essential if an intervention is to occur expeditiously.
- 3. Military tactics subservient to political strategy** Once combat has started, Ministries of Defence tend to dominate policy-making on an ongoing intervention, often outflanking Ministries of Foreign Affairs or the Cabinet Office. This risks an excessive focus on tactical military objectives, to the detriment of overarching strategic (political) goals. Joint planning for the transition is required from the moment the intervention starts, with appropriate input from interested parties such as police and the NGO sector.
- 4. Light versus heavy footprint** A 'light footprint' with no boots on the ground will minimise risks of entanglement and maximise local ownership, but similarly limit the ability of the international community to provide security during the transition.

A strong and decisive host-nation government can compensate for this, but post-intervention Libya has illustrated how insecurity tends to be self-perpetuating, and Afghanistan suffered greatly from the failure to expand ISAF beyond Kabul in early 2002. Without establishing a basic level of human security in key areas, attempts at state-building, implementing basic humanitarian programmes or launching economic development will be stifled.

5. **End date or end state** A mission can be mandated for a fixed period of time or made conditional on certain achievements or criteria. The choice is an important one and determines the leeway for the political debate on an eventual prolongation of the mission. An 'end-date' mission provides a fixed timetable to exit and necessitates a re-negotiation of the mandate if any kind of further involvement is deemed desirable, while an 'end state' mission offers more room for manoeuvre to adapt the mission to domestic or local circumstances. An 'end-date' model, if it proves overly optimistic, can create real dilemmas over how properly to respond to unanticipated threats to an orderly transition.
6. **Collateral damage** Precise targeting to avoid collateral damage and civilian casualties is a *conditio sine qua non* for military interventions. This is not only dictated by the laws of war; it is also essential for retaining public support. While civilian infrastructure such as power stations and media centres can in certain cases form legitimate military targets, their destruction will complicate matters in later phases. During Operation Unified Protector in Libya, the oil and gas sector were wisely spared destruction as it would provide the state, when no longer threatened by non-state actors, with essential income.
7. **Structuring intelligence cooperation** Sharing of intelligence is based on trust. The 'Five Eyes' intelligence community (Echelon) has institutionalised sharing to a large extent, and during NATO's mission in Afghanistan much effort was devoted to changing mentalities from 'need to know' to 'need to share'. Intelligence sharing within NATO but outside the 'Five Eyes' is often still *ad hoc*, and much can be gained by setting up a new intelligence hub at the start of the mission. While the Dutch were temporarily admitted to the 'Five Eyes' community during their tenure as lead nation for Uruzgan (Afghanistan), French requests to accede during the Libya operation were rebuffed. Once the decision has been taken by a coalition to intervene, direct covenants and agreements between participating intelligence entities would greatly facilitate the exchange of data and information. Fusion cells and a focus that is not solely limited to 'enemy forces' would greatly increase the value of intelligence for decision-makers.
8. **Arming rebels** Arming factions on the ground, even when part of a seemingly secular opposition to a regime in Africa/the Middle East, entails both short and long-term risks. The choice for a light footprint intervention, such as the initial American overthrow of the Taliban regime and NATO's campaign in Libya, implies that local rebel forces must do the fighting and need arms and ammunition to succeed. In Libya, different rebel factions were armed covertly in order to avoid directly contravening the international arms embargo that had been imposed at the start of the conflict. Most importantly, the weapons – whether classified as 'light' or not – can end up in the wrong hands, or be turned on the wrong people as allied rebels become Islamist opponents.

- 9. Addressing critical shortages** Since NATO's 1999 Operation Allied Force (Kosovo), several critical shortfalls in capacity, specifically on the European side, have been identified. These include Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) platforms and capacity, aerial refuelling, precision munitions and strategic transport. These shortages have still not been alleviated. France's Operation Serval illustrated how national combat capacity proved sufficient to tackle the jihadist groups in Mali; but it was completely dependent on Allied logistical support to enable the operations. Addressing the shortages in Allied capacity will reduce the fragile foundations of intervention capacity, and allow for more efficient military operations.
- 10. Analysing regional fallout** Before the intervention and during the transition, implications for the wider region need to be analysed. This can best be done through intra-interdepartmental task forces in Ministries of Foreign Affairs, that transcend organisational divides such as the MENA and Sub-Saharan categorisations. Interconnected relationship between countries, ethnic groups/tribes and regions need to be considered. The possible responses of regional 'spoilers' need to be taken very seriously: the continuing availability of operating sanctuaries in Pakistan for the Afghan Taliban gravely complicated efforts to stabilise Afghanistan.

## C. Transition phase: towards local ownership

- 1. Maintain momentum** After a successful entry phase, high-level decision-makers can easily be distracted by other crises and lose interest in the slow process of transition. Libya provides the textbook example of a united front organising an intervention, and dissolving the moment that the military objective was met, with multiple problems left unsolved that could potentially prove very damaging to the interests of the coalition's members.
- 2. Ensuring the provision of security** Once the main combat phase is over, the authorities are expected to facilitate a quick return to normalcy and provide a modicum of security. A state that cannot manage this risks losing legitimacy in the eyes of the population. Without assistance from intervening powers, or an international security force, this can be an insurmountable challenge for the incoming government, as the case study of Libya illustrated. The stated NATO objective of protecting civilians effectively ceased once Gaddafi was killed, and while both the intervening powers and the host-nation state were adamant in not wanting 'foreign' boots on the ground, the security situation deteriorated rapidly as a result.
- 3. Do not hasten elections** The international community has indicated a strong preference for rapidly organising national elections in the host-nation state after the military intervention. This is to confer legitimacy on their new governmental partners, and to fulfil essential criteria allowing the transfer of aid and donor money. It is, however, folly to expect an inexperienced government, devoid of a functioning bureaucracy or a capable security force, to perform even elementary governmental functions in a complex post-conflict situation. While the newly elected might enjoy international legitimacy, they will have none at home if they cannot provide basic security and state services to the local population. In hindsight, the elections in Libya were held too early, with the government lacking

essential capacity even to have a chance of success. Elections and election campaigns are divisive events that create losers as well as winners; as rule-governed activities they can lose all credibility if the key rules on candidature, voting and scrutiny cannot be dispassionately enforced.

- 4. Whole of government approach** During the Libya intervention, the United Kingdom dispatched an “International Stabilisation Response Team” (ISRT) to the country, consisting of different experts in the fields of security, economy and justice. This concept of sending a multi-disciplinary team to take stock of the local situation, meet stakeholders and set out a transition plan deserves follow-up in future crises. Ideally, the focus should not just be on the short term and there should have to be some follow-up. Integrating the approaches of diplomacy, development and defence (3D) combines the necessary skills-sets and ensures that policy is aligned between the involved government departments. Such a comprehensive approach, which the Netherlands and Canada sought to follow in Afghanistan, is not a panacea, but it can improve the quality of performance on the ground.
- 5. Counter-terrorism versus counter-insurgency** It is important to distinguish between insurgents, terrorists and criminals, as the designated label channels a policy reaction that is anchored in the very different fields of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency (COIN) or law enforcement, each centred around its own principles, dogmas and common practices. The COIN approach as conducted in Afghanistan became very military-centric, and more sequential (shape, clear, hold and build) than for instance the comprehensive approach, which could see simultaneous efforts of diplomats, aid workers and the military. A CT approach that focuses on removing the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism should ideally be civilian-led.
- 6. Focus on good governance** In the long run, good governance probably matters more than infrastructural development, although it may be much harder to deliver. To the extent that international actors have any capacity to influence the form that governance takes in the aftermath of an intervention, they will need to show their hands early. There is typically only one chance to get things right, and if the structure and functioning of government prove dysfunctional, there are likely to be plenty of beneficiaries of the dysfunctional system who will fight hard to retain it. Afghanistan after 2001 provides an unhappily clear example of this.
- 7. Security Sector Reform** It is important to start early and commit resources for the long run where SSR is concerned, building partnerships with key institutions and figures. An inclusive approach through a national dialogue campaign is essential. Failure on this front is likely to blight endeavours on many others, as the case of Libya clearly illustrates. Effort should focus not just on the technical capacity of the soldier or police officer, but also the organisation behind him or her. Without a sound HR policy, a clear command and control structure and effective administrative and logistical procedures, trained units cannot be deployed or sustained.
- 8. Strengthen human security not just state-apparatus security** Much capacity building in the security sector is state-centric and focused on institutions and security organisations. In many conflict areas, including areas in Afghanistan and

Mali, the police and military are the cause of insecurity and are distrusted by parts of the population. This needs to be recognised as a problem, since misbehaviour by agencies of the state will ultimately contaminate the state's reputation and legitimacy. The intervening powers will need to be aware of power structures and networks within the politico-security establishment, to prevent vested interests trumping human security in the country.

- 9. Bottom-up approach** In deeply tribal societies, once institutional deadlock has occurred, a top-down approach will not resolve the problem. Local stakeholders will need to be stimulated to cooperate and contribute to conflict resolution at the micro-level. To the extent that they can, international actors should resist the temptation to see a strong central state as 'the' solution to a country's problems. In any transition, there are troubling questions to be asked about the appropriate scope, strength, and structure of the state for the future. Rather than rushing discussion of these questions, it is better if possible to address them through inclusive dialogue between many different social forces, with special attention to groups that might otherwise be marginalised, including women and ethnic and religious minorities.
- 10. Beware of militias** Militias can provide local security where government capacity is lacking, but the solution is short-term. Militias are only accountable to the local strong-man, their interests do not align with those of the national government and their *modus operandi* often entails violation of basic human rights. In Libya, the militias refused the government's instruction to disarm, and there was neither capacity nor political will to enforce the order. They were subsequently integrated into the security structures, initially formalising their position and strengthening their capacity, and later causing the fracturing of the security apparatus along factional lines. In Afghanistan, similar problems were encountered, partly because international actors were not particularly skilled at distinguishing local power holders with some degree of legitimacy from local power holders who were mainly coercive and extractive.
- 11. Provision of basic state services** A population in a conflict area does not judge the government on its CT strategy, but on the provision of basic state services such as electricity, drinking water, health care and education. If these are non-existent or seriously lacking, government legitimacy will suffer. In the north of Mali, two years after the French intervention, the state is still struggling to deliver these basic services. As a result, certain elements of the population are developing some nostalgia for the time that the jihadists were in control, who actually managed to ensure more consistent electricity provision than the state.
- 12. Becoming a battlefield for regional powers** Weak states unwittingly invite strong neighbours to safeguard their own interests on their territory. This can take benign forms, but can also fuel local conflicts when foreign powers actively support their own proxies or allies. In Libya, both Qatar and Turkey have supported Islamist factions that oppose the elected government in Tobruk. In Afghanistan, Pakistan has played a nefarious role in consistently providing a safe-haven to the strategic leadership of the Taliban. While in the latter case, the US and NATO have deliberately chosen not to confront their ally, strong international diplomacy could have limited external involvement in Libya. Addressing this challenge can require frank and difficult conversations with close allies.

- 13. Metrics for progress** Quality data can be very useful for appraising aspects of a transition process, especially if they are gathered with sensitivity to local complexity, and can be analysed in a statistically-sophisticated fashion. At the same time, over-reliance on rigidly-structured metrics, such as the number of enemy forces killed in action or the size of the territory nominally under control of the government, risks neglecting important factors that may not lend themselves easily to quantification, such as patron-client relationships within elites. The best data are likely to be those gathered after careful consultation with specialists on the countries or areas under discussion. The right metrics need to be determined at the beginning of the deployment, as changing criteria will pollute databases and render comparisons difficult.
- 14. Military exit is not the end of involvement** Public discourse revolves around ‘exit strategies’, ‘entanglement’ and ‘bringing the boys home’. This frame is misleading, as involvement in, and engagement, with the host-nation typically does not end, but takes on a different, civilian-dominated shape. The earlier the civilian effort has been part of the intervention, the easier it will be to reduce the military element and maintain continuity. An integrated approach from the outset has more to offer than an attempt to mount a sudden ‘civilian surge’; appropriate personnel may not be available for the latter, and expectations of what can result may be unrealistically high.
- 15. The problem of narcotics** The drug trade can play an enormous role in fuelling local conflict and increasing insecurity. Drugs, however, are not the most significant part in the revenue model of the salafi-jihadist groups in Mali (hostage ransoms), Afghanistan (funds from religious endowments [*awqaf*] and wealthy donors in the Gulf) or Libya (arms smuggling, crime and human trafficking). Local governments play a more important role in the drug trade, often promoting or facilitating the traffic of drugs or preventing the prosecution of smugglers. Approaching the drug trade through the prism of counter-terrorism is therefore counterproductive, as the primary effort must be focused on reforming government institutions and cultures. The Afghanistan case suggests that at a certain point it can become very difficult to crack down on narcotics because of the risk that large numbers of small producers and labourers might be driven straight into the arms of the armed opposition.
- 16. Managing expectations** Too often, interventions lead to unrealistically high expectations which are then disappointed. Rather than fuelling such expectations, it is better to try to create low expectations, and then exceed them. Interventions create their own momentum, and can result in unintended consequences that are greater than the envisaged ones. Avoiding rigidity, the intervening powers and host-nation state will need to navigate crises while continuing to work towards a politically inclusive settlement. Both the tasks of rebuilding conflict-stricken societies and addressing the causes that contribute to terrorism are long-term efforts, requiring time, perseverance and a dose of good fortune.

## Concluding Remarks

The outcome of the research and the policy recommendations were presented and discussed at a final meeting with NATO experts and representatives of NATO member states at NATO's headquarters in Brussels. Many of the participants agreed on the idea that politicians, policy-makers and planners should have a better understanding of the situation in a given country before final plans are made or decisions taken. According to the participants of the meeting and the authors of this study, the chance of a successful transition from military interventions towards sustainable long-term CT policies depends on better insights into the complex conflict dynamics in a given country and better-defined strategies that fit with the local and regional context. This requires building or investing in networks of experts – both inside and outside governmental organisations – that can help authorities to be better prepared in the pre-intervention phase so as to prevent some of the mistakes that have been made in the past and improve decision-making at the earliest possible stage.

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Edwin Bakker, William Maley and Sergei Boeke  
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The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) is an independent think and do tank providing multidisciplinary policy advice and practical, solution-oriented implementation support on prevention and the rule of law, two vital pillars of effective counter-terrorism.

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## Contact ICCT

ICCT  
Zeestraat 100  
2518 AD The Hague  
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)70 763 0050  
E [info@icct.nl](mailto:info@icct.nl)