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## **Constructive alternatives to counter-terror and stabilization**

### Saferworld

#### Lessons from counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding

Saferworld takes a deep look at what lessons can be learnt from Western counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding efforts in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen

Terrorism is at the top of the political agenda across the world and Western countries face genuine dilemmas in deciding how to respond to security threats and impending atrocities. However, current counter-terror approaches have yielded only mixed results at best. While all options have pitfalls of their own, more constructive alternatives to counter-terror and stabilisation, which take a peacebuilding approach, could help to identify paths to long-term peace.

#### Overview:

Western governments have placed responding to 'terrorism', 'violent extremism' and instability among their foremost priorities. They have led international military interventions into Iraq and Afghanistan, targeted militant groups directly in Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere, and provided significant support to regional allies to confront these threats to international security and build more stable states. Yet, despite the investment of huge resources – human, financial, military and political – the results of these actions have been mixed at best. This is illustrated by the long-term instability of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the vulnerability of Iraq and the wider Arab region to ongoing violence and insurgency from the likes of Islamic State (IS), the spread of Somali violence into Kenya, and the spread of Al Qaeda into multiple new regions.

Visible violence is not the only sign of the shortcomings of current approaches. The stabilisation and statebuilding efforts that have been undertaken to work towards long-term solutions in unstable contexts appear in many cases to be reinforcing rather than addressing drivers of conflict, making lasting peace more remote. In particular, pragmatic partnerships with questionable regimes have served to reinforce bad governance, lessen the prospects for genuine reform, and multiply popular discontent. Likewise, there is significant evidence that the use of aid to reinforce military action and stabilisation efforts may be ineffective at best – and actively driving further conflict at worst.

While decision makers face grave dilemmas in deciding how to respond to serious security threats and impending atrocities, there has not been sufficiently full and frank public debate about the lessons of past responses, nor about how future engagement could be improved in the interests of building lasting and positive peace. Failure to recognise and pursue effective peacebuilding alternatives to these approaches could condemn Western – and indeed all – governments to a vicious circle that they can ill afford – with instability growing wherever they attempt to reduce it, with their responses becoming ever more belligerent, and with their values of democracy, justice and human rights becoming compromised as part of the process.