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Editors' Foreword

Robert Muggah, Steven A. Zyck
and Mark Downes

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Editors' Foreword

Robert Muggah, Steven A. Zyck and Mark Downes*

The international policy community is pre-occupied by a purported rise in fragility, conflict, and violence around the world. The World Bank's 2011 *World Development Report* cast a spotlight on the many ways collective violence undermines governance and socio-economic development. Likewise, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has been working closely with the so-called g7+, a constellation of 19 fragile countries, to re-evaluate the terms by which security and development assistance is issued. Yet amidst all this focus on instability, there is less critical reflection on practical policies and applied practices to promote stability. In other words, we are starting to appreciate the factors that induce fragility but know rather less about how to engender safety and security on the ground.

Now is an opportune moment to critically reflect and interrogate concepts such as stability. Most United Nations member states have acknowledged the interplay of security and development and are searching for new ideas and innovations to ensure that they are mutually reinforcing. The Arab Spring also providing a historic and turbulent critique of the many ways in which factors such as social and economic exclusion, weak governance, and geo-strategic interests are shaping the security and development environment. Indeed, the 'authoritarian bargain' that denied human rights and political participation at the expense of 'stability' has lost much of its

luster in the Middle East, North Africa, and elsewhere.

The West's engagement with stabilization emerged in the wake of experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. As is well rehearsed in the global media, both countries have long been graveyards for empires as well as hastily rendered approaches to counterinsurgency, recovery, reconstruction, and state-building. In spite of massive aid allocations, the security outlook in both countries remains bleak. Indeed, there are some signs that development assistance may have actually exacerbated local tensions and entrenched conflict. These and other experiences have given 'stability' and 'stabilization' something of a black eye – and rightly so. A narrow range of coercive interventions combining military force with dubious civilian assistance was never likely to work. Indeed, many proponents of stabilization in Afghanistan and Iraq failed to appreciate that security comes not from 'winning hearts and minds' through self-serving quick-impact projects but by prioritizing justice, economic opportunity, political rights, and access to non-violent means of pursuing dignity, equality, and change over the long term.

And while some commentators in the West believe that stabilization – as a set of ideals, practices, and outcomes – is dead or dying, there is ample evidence to the contrary. Indeed, it is flourishing – albeit under different guises and labels – in many parts of the world. Global economic uncertainty has also generated a crucial change in the calculations of some governments. The era of

* info@stabilityjournal.org

large-scale military interventions is coming to a close. Meanwhile, public agencies, multilateral organizations, non-governmental entities and the private sector are forced to cut-back, re-prioritize, and figure out how to do more with less. In the process, many institutions have sought to forge linkages across defense, development, and diplomacy – the so-called 3Ds – and establish whole-of-government, whole-of-system, and 'comprehensive' approaches. All of this has given rise to a new alphabet soup of multi-agency institutions such as Canada's Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) to the UK's Stabilisation Unit and the US State Department's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization.

Meanwhile, the real and potential sources of instability are also evolving quickly. Indeed, ours is a world where a thirty-second cyber-attack on a stock exchange can prove more destructive, at least in certain respects, than a conventional terrorist attack. Likewise, new forms of transnational organized crime and urbanized armed groups are also forcing their way on to the international agenda. More conventional actors such as pirates roam the oceans, wreaking havoc on sophisticated maritime security arrangements. Deep-seated sectarian and ethnic tensions continue to periodically flare up while land and water rights continue to trigger highly localized and urbanized forms of disorder. Throughout the world, persistent sexual and gender-based violence, discrimination, and other forms of inequality continue to generate thousands of deaths that seldom generate meaningful responses or the levels of public attention and condemnation they deserve. Indeed, violence is increasingly integrated, simultaneous and overlapping, forcing many in the security and development establishments to rethink their normative and practical frameworks of engagement.

This journal – *Stability* – was launched precisely to engage with these critical debates. *Stability* is not like any other journal, attempting to carve out a specialized niche in the academic market place. Rather, *Stabil-*

ity intends to challenge the artificial distinctions between conflict, crime, and violence. While accounting for political and economic approaches, *Stability* also endeavors to deepen the dialogue across disciplines, pulling in sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, psychologists, criminologists, historians, lawyers, and others involved in trying to understand what works and what does not when it comes to the business of security and development. Technical specialists in engineering, agronomy, public health, public administration, policing, and other 'applied' topics will also be solicited to contribute in order to extend and amplify the practitioner voice. Too often complex subjects such as corruption, aid financing, and civil service reform are treated simplistically and not by experts that have conducted an audit, overseen a procurement process, or grappled with human resource procedures.

A comparative advantage of *Stability* is the way it assembles voices from academic, policy, and practice communities in a single venue. Scholarly research can usefully inform policies and practices, and the knowledge and experience gathered by 'doers' – from elected officials to civil servants, aid workers, diplomats, entrepreneurs, and military officers – can in turn shape research agendas and dissemination strategies. *Stability* thus seeks to meld a practical focus with the academic excellence of a top-rated and peer-reviewed journal. Hence, submissions from professional researchers are welcome alongside contributions from experienced practitioners, whether as full research articles, shorter practice notes or poignant commentaries (the specifications for which are outlined in the 'Call for Papers'). Research articles will be peer reviewed to ensure that they genuinely advance theory and understanding regarding stability and related issues, though reviewers will particularly comprise scholar-practitioners who can understand that evidence can take many forms and that the perfect need not be the enemy of the good.

This journal explicitly tackles one addition-

al barrier — that which prevents researchers and experts in developing and fragile settings countries from contributing to and accessing international publishing outlets. *Stability* therefore is actively reaching out to Southern contributors, particularly those in war-torn and violence-affected societies. It is deliberately tailored to this audience and intends to facilitate inputs from non-native English speakers and those who find it difficult to have their work recognized in traditional journals. We feel that it is by engaging with and promoting these voices that new and effective approaches to stability will emerge. Overcoming barriers to ensure Southern contributions is a signal objective of this journal. We are pleased already to have attracted interest from authors in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, whose pieces appear in this inaugural issue and whose work will feature in future issues.

Stability is fully and formally registered as an academic publication in the same way as any respected print journal. But we will not be printing issues. Instead, articles will be released electronically, as webpages and PDF files. Doing so is environmentally responsible and cost effective while also reflecting the basic fact that few people access bound editions of print journals. Unlike a 'traditional' journal, all content published in *Stability* will be free of charge and available to all without a subscription. We do not charge readers, and we do not charge authors unless funds specifically for publishing have already been allocated by a generous research sponsor. Furthermore, after this first issue, articles will not generally be released at one

time. Instead, each article will be published electronically as soon as it has been finalized, thus ensuring that information is accessible as quickly as possible. However, every four months — with *Stability* being published three times per year — articles will be packaged into a full issue and labeled as such. Accordingly, this journal aims to comply with the principles and practices of open-access publishing, a movement which is thankfully gaining speed as the grasp of for-profit publishers over journals is rightly being questioned and loosened.

Finally, we are delighted that this inaugural issue reflects the energy and creativity of a number of individuals. First and foremost are the article authors, who contributed to this issue and embraced its themes and publishing model. In addition, the founding Editorial Board members, each of whom has a distinguished record as a scholar-practitioner, helped to steer the journal to its launch. Their inputs, from the journal's early conceptualization to its delivery, have been instrumental. Ubiquity Press, an innovative publisher working to promote open-access scholarship, has provided technical support for the website and for the design and formatting of the journal itself. Its commitment to open-access principles bodes well for its future and the future of academic publishing.

We hope you find this inaugural issue informative regardless of whether you are an academic, a policymaker or a practitioner. All of us at *Stability* look forward to your thoughts on our work and your contributions to future issues. 