



Chapter 6

Political Capabilities to Stabilize Fragile or Post-Conflict States

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The world has seen a shift from the Cold War era, in which two opposing ideological blocs vied for power, to a period in which multifarious, substate and transnational security threats rooted in weak or failed states pose the principal challenge to world order. To address this challenge, the United States must improve the capability of its political instruments of power, particularly to catalyze constructive internal political development within countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. This might be characterized as developing greater capability to engage in expeditionary political entrepreneurship in fragile or post-conflict states.

The problem set confronting U.S. leaders involves the transformation of the local political context. In these settings, political power is typically personalized, factionalized, and underwritten by nonstate armed groups, some of which are supported by neighboring countries. The desired transformation entails a political effort to enable local leaders and social groups to arrive at a national compact—an agreement on power sharing and the rules of the game—and to jump-start local institutional building and economic development, while managing the policies of neighboring powers to prevent destabilizing interventions. Success requires an intensive engagement—both in terms of leadership time and resources—and therefore should be undertaken selectively in the service of genuine strategic priorities.

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The U.S. needs to focus on five lines of action in such political transformations. The first is to position the United States as a trusted political intermediary among internal factions. The second is to use this position to catalyze negotiations to forge a national compact among key actors and communities on the initial sharing of power, the political structure of the state, and the rules for future political competition. The third is to develop a political process to transition from a period in which armed groups are the coin of the realm for acquiring political power to one in which participatory politics is the path to achieving influence. The fourth is to build up local state institutions, including not only security forces but also those that secure popular legitimacy by delivering services and fostering economic growth. In post-conflict settings, opportunities need to be effectively created to demobilize and reintegrate former combatants, giving them constructive options to avoid their evolution into criminal organizations. The fifth is to engage diplomatically with neighboring states to secure their tacit or active support for stability and progress.

New Needed Capabilities

The United States needs to develop or improve its capabilities in six areas:

1. Making and signaling enduring commitments: Even though the duration of U.S. involvement in Europe, Japan, South Korea, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq demonstrates an ability to fulfill long-term and expensive commitments, the United States is profoundly hampered by a reputation for abandoning allies or curtailing interventions when difficulties arise. Yet, the willingness of local actors to compromise among themselves—and to take risks in doing so—depends on convincing them of U.S. staying power, often including a third-party guarantee of power sharing arrangements. At one level, this means political leaders should ensure that U.S. interventions have broad-based domestic support. However, more generally, the U.S. must become more effective in signaling, through its actions and words to local and regional actors, that it is irrevocably committed to success.
2. Developing diplomats, military, and intelligence officers skilled at mediation and shaping local politics: It is vital that the U.S. embrace the need to take a “hands-on” approach in shaping the local political context. This mediation and shaping role should seek not to impose American-made solutions but rather to use U.S. influence to help local leaders agree on local solutions to local challenges. Though American history has many

examples of politically skilled expeditionary diplomats and officers, the dominant cultures of the State Department, the military services, and the operational branches of intelligence agencies focus on managing government-to-government or multilateral relations, kinetic operations, and intelligence collection, respectively. Consequently, these departments and agencies must develop cadres of officials and officers with deep area expertise and a talent for political action to shape the orientation and conduct of local leaders and communities. In addition, the U.S. government must develop mechanisms to hire such talent laterally from the private sector as needed.

3. Catalyzing progress in the domestic politics of foreign societies: U.S. civilian and military institutions, as well as agencies of the international community, need to develop a general doctrine or concept of operations for helping local leaders in fragile and post-conflict societies develop a process to achieve stable power sharing arrangements, build trust and confidence in order to rise above zero-sum struggles for power, and crafting inclusive constitutional orders that produce stability and enable effective collective decision making. Among the skills U.S. diplomats and officers must possess are abilities to assess the political culture and landscape of host nations to craft realistic goals and strategies, to manage and marginalize political spoilers, to shape and enforce compromises on core political questions among local actors, to strengthen politically local individuals and groups whose success is integral to U.S. political strategy, and to develop networks and coalitions among constructive political actors and international partners. It is vital that the United States have mechanisms to strengthen good political actors, particularly if spoilers or extremists are receiving external support.
4. Demobilizing and reintegrating nonstate armed groups and developing new legitimate security forces: The instruments of the U.S. and the international community to demobilize and reintegrate armed groups are weak and the capabilities to build new and legitimate security forces are slow and uneven in their effectiveness. Key political aspects of these challenges are to find positive political and economic roles for former militia leaders and members, to reform or create security ministries that all political groups and communities view as trustworthy and reliable, and to develop strategies in partnership with local actors to isolate and defeat those armed groups that cannot be reconciled to the new political order. A major weakness that the United States must overcome is the ineffectiveness of approaches to reintegrate fighters meaningfully into civilian life.

5. Delivering results in service delivery and economic development in the “golden hour” after an intervention or major political transition: Unless a new government can start delivering positive results to the people quickly, it is likely that negative trends—such as the rise of organized crime or the disillusionment of the public—will set in. U.S. civilian and military institutions are not well designed to beat the clock. A key and missing ingredient is the ability to field expeditionary development organizations, whether civilian or military, and to deliver timely results, through local institutions whenever possible. This means the United States must develop mechanisms to engage in integrated development planning, to field organizations and personnel along military timelines, to access flexible operational and contingency funding, to streamline contracting, and to embed advisers and accountability processes within host country institutions.
6. Fielding diplomatic capabilities to manage regional political dynamics: Apart from the U.S. regional military combatant commanders, U.S. foreign policy departments and agencies are principally focused on country-specific policies. However, in fragile and post-conflict states, the success of U.S. policies depends on managing actions by a variety of regional actors, many of which have abilities to undermine U.S. initiatives. Bureaucratically, while assistant secretaries of state would be the logical focus of action, they generally spend most of their time in interagency processes and have enormously diverse and demanding responsibilities. As a result, ad hoc solutions—such as the Bonn Process for Afghanistan or improvised special envoys—are the dominant current approach. Consequently, the United States needs to develop diplomatic structures tailored to sustained regional engagement to support major interventions in fragile and post-conflict states if it hopes to be successful over time.

Resources and Costs

The most significant resource and cost is to develop cadres of politically skilled personnel, rapidly deployable diplomatic and development capabilities, and funding for stabilization programs in fragile and post-conflict states. Because these efforts are personnel- and program-intensive, it is not a matter of simply reallocating resources from the current structures and processes in the Department of State and USAID. While the civilian response corps is a good initiative, the longer-term solution lies in dedicated and elite civilian organizations, formed and trained as units, that are a separate part of or separate from the Foreign Service. Also, these organizations need to be sup-

ported with standby or contingency budget accounts for operations that enable immediate responses to events, perhaps done in consultation with relevant congressional committees but not reliant on supplemental appropriations bills or new authorizations/appropriations through the two-year budget cycle.

POLITICAL CAPABILITIES TO STABILIZE FRAGILE OR POST-CONFLICT STATES

There is an increasing recognition that conflict and war in the 21st century differ considerably, and will continue to do so, from the ways in which the United States thought about and safeguarded its security during most of the 20th century. During the Cold War, U.S. national security interests were focused on the containment of the Soviet Union and the future of Europe. American political entrepreneurs of that era—national political leaders, senior diplomats, and military commanders—carried out the careful execution of tactical strategies, successfully utilizing the skills and capabilities required to deal with the global security challenges of that daunting period. Though some were more skilled than others, the deft actions of successive generations of American political entrepreneurs were a central cause of the West's victory in the Cold War.

Today's global security environment looks markedly different from that of the 20th century. In the beginning of the 20th century, there were approximately 55 countries in the world. Today, the United States recognizes 194 independent countries. Of these countries, more than 60 are weak, and 10 to 20 are failing or failed states. These weak and failing countries cannot—to varying degrees—perform the traditional functions of a state, such as providing internal security and the infrastructure for health, food, education, and safety of the population. In this environment, the power and influence of nonstate actors has increased.

More importantly, local and regional powerful armed groups, transnational political movements, and super-empowered individuals and groups have become a potent force able to affect fundamental security. One need not be reminded of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the deadliest attack on U.S. soil in the history of our country. The large-scale attack was carried out not by a large industrialized country, but by a network of regional, transnational, and nonstate actors, emanating from a weak state, and intent on disrupting the global security environment. More recently, in November of 2008, India's financial capital and its largest city, Mumbai, was effectively taken hostage for three days by a small band of nonstate actors who had been trained

and financed in Pakistan, another weak state. Then there are the attacks on large cargo ships off the eastern coast of Africa, which reached a peak this spring with the seizure of a U.S. vessel, but that still continue to this day. These attacks, carried out by pirates from the failed state of Somalia, are yet another example of the transformation that has taken place.

The world has seen a shift from the Cold War era of two opposing ideological blocs vying for power to an era of multifarious, transnational security threats that act to shake the global security environment and which typically emerge from weak or failed states. This transformation, in turn, imposes new demands on the American political entrepreneurs who are tasked with advancing U.S. interests and values in a much more turbulent and disordered world. In the Cold War, managing state-to-state relations was the coin of the realm. Today, using political entrepreneurship to deal with weak or failed states is the dominant preoccupation.

To succeed, the American political entrepreneurs must shape the politics within states in ways that enable the creation of a political foundation for progress and the building of new institutions. They must be able to

- **catalyze a national compact** among key political actors and communities on the fundamental political structure of the state;
- **develop a political process** to transition from a period in which armed groups dominate politics to one in which the society has agreed rules of the game and legitimate avenues for achieving influence;
- **work with local leaders** to strengthen weak or non-existent state institutions;
- **position the United States** as a trusted political player among internal factions; and
- **manage the actions** of neighboring states and factions who disagree about the future of the state in question.

1. Catalyzing a National Compact

The United States operates under the belief that the ideals of democracy, popular sovereignty, individual rights, and the rule of law are universal. These form the basis of the national compacts of virtually all successful modern states. My experience in both Iraq and Afghanistan validates the view that all people aspire to live in political orders characterized by these values. In following this conviction, the United States must pursue an enlightened, hands-on approach that responds to the deep aspirations of the

local people for normalcy, development, and democracy. It is oftentimes up to political entrepreneurs in the United States and other allied countries to enable such internal change.

As U.S. Ambassador to both Afghanistan and Iraq, I witnessed firsthand the debilitating effects that the features of a weak state can impose on all aspects of a society. In Iraq, no national compact existed after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and this was our greatest challenge going forward. Though progress has been made, there still exists a fundamental disagreement along ethnic and sectarian lines regarding key issues essential to Iraq's future. In Afghanistan, the disastrous civil war of the 1990s—out of which the Taliban/al Qaeda alliance emerged—was emblematic of what results from the failure to develop a national compact after the defeat of the Soviet Union. Today, extremist factions continue to exist that work to reverse the progress being made by the Afghan government. These groups see failure of the new regime as their top priority. Through chaos and unrest these armed groups hope to dismantle the institutions that are vital to Afghanistan's future.

At the same time, my experience as Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq also showed me that the political forces in a weak state can come to terms with each other to lay the foundation upon which a democratic society can be constructed. The key to this process is forging a national compact—an agreed political vision and the basic rules of the road for political competition—and oftentimes it is the influence, resources, and effort of the United States that is necessary to forge such a compact.

During the Cold War and other periods, U.S. statecraft was characterized by imaginative political entrepreneurs in this context—and these individuals will be even more important in the current period. Today's political entrepreneurs must be leaders who can employ political and diplomatic skills to successfully take advantage of opportunities that will lead to the establishment of a successful country that can provide fundamental services to its people. Specifically, contemporary political entrepreneurs must be able: (1) to identify the opportunities and bring the appropriate local leaders together to achieve a compact; (2) to find, create, and strengthen groups and individuals who share the interests of building a successful country; and (3) to build a network and coalition of these players with the U.S. and its allies. If political entrepreneurs are capable of executing these basic functions with diplomatic poise and diligence, weak and failing states can be politically and economically strengthened, thereby extinguishing some of the breeding-grounds and safe-havens of the nonstate actors intent on disrupting the contemporary global security environment.