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Policy Coherence in International Responses to State Failure:
The role of the United Kingdom in Sierra Leone

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Abbreviations

ACPP	Africa Conflict Prevention Pool (United Kingdom)
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (United Kingdom)
IDA	International Development Association (World Bank)
MoD	Ministry of Defence (United Kingdom)
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (United Kingdom), or
	Official Development Assistance (category used by OECD for aid statistics)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SSR	Security sector (or system) reform
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

1 Introduction

With the dismantling of Cold War allegiances that had provided a crutch for many repressive or weak regimes and continuing pressures on the role of the state in the context of increasing global interdependence, the 1990s saw an increase in the incidence of civil conflict and state failure as well as changes in international responses to them (Chesterman 2004; Duffield 2001:14). While humanitarian aid increased significantly during the 1990s, major powers were reluctant to engage more intensively in internal conflicts, often out of a concern for risking troop losses in regions of little strategic importance (Macrae and Leader 2000:15). A recognition that more effective engagement may have prevented much of the suffering in conflicts such as Rwanda, combined with increasingly conditional views of state sovereignty, led to a more interventionist approach in the late 1990s exemplified by large-scale military and aid deployments in Kosovo and East Timor (Macrae and Leader 2000:12).

Sierra Leone provides an illustration of both types of international response in the context of state failure. In the early years of the civil conflict that ran from 1991 to 2002, humanitarian aid served as a substitute for substantial international commitment to help resolve the protracted crisis. It was not until 2000 – with British military intervention and a strengthened UN peacekeeping force – that international political will was sufficient to make a positive impact. Once a sizeable and sufficiently well-equipped peacekeeping presence was on the ground, the end of hostilities followed fairly rapidly, and a wide-ranging reconstruction program commenced which has been considered relatively successful despite the immense challenges that continue to face one of the world's poorest countries.

International involvement in situations of state failure may engage a wide variety of actors ranging across aid, diplomatic and military fields. Ensuring that those actors' policies and their results are complementary rather than in conflict with one another

– often referred to as the idea of 'policy coherence' – is a particularly difficult challenge in situations of state failure given the particular exigencies of violent conflict and the inability of the failed state to help coordinate conflicting objectives. It is a concept that is yet to be authoritatively defined, let alone researched in depth. Moreover, its applicability in the context of situations of conflict and state weakness is contested, with some publications advocating somewhat uncritically for an expansive use of the concept and others rejecting its use altogether. However, I will argue that policy coherence is useful as a concept[1] and may also be worth pursuing as a policy goal, provided that in each case the scope of coherence is clearly defined. Distinguishing coherence from other related concepts such as coordination, integration and effectiveness may help to dispel some of the misunderstandings on which these divergent positions appear to be based. I will do so in part by drawing on literature on coherence emerging from domestic policy debates, which is often neglected in development policy discussions of coherence. Delineating the scope of coherence highlights its relevance, but also serves to underscore its limitations as a concept and the reasons why it should not be treated uncritically as an overarching policy goal.

In order to advance this argument, I will consider coherence from both theoretical and applied perspectives. In section 2, I critically analyse different understandings of coherence and outline a conceptual approach to coherence that will be used in the paper. I explain the relevance of policy coherence for contexts of state failure, in particularly highlighting three important dilemmas that arise in situations where international actors engage in failed states, namely tensions between: humanitarian and conflict resolution objectives; domestic and international security; and state-

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[1] In this paper I use the terms 'policy coherence' and 'coherence' interchangeably. While the shorter term is used for convenience, and while (as discussed below) 'policy' coherence is as much about policy *outcomes* as policies *per se*, the expanded term helps to distinguish it from other types of coherence referred to in other disciplines (such as logical or physical coherence). It is also consistent with the terminology in existing literature.

building and peace-building. Following a brief outline in section 3 of political contexts in Sierra Leone and the UK, I apply the conceptual framework to a case study of the role of the United Kingdom in Sierra Leone in section 4. Focusing on three key stages in the UK's engagement – before, during and after the UK's May 2000 military intervention – I highlight respectively the three dilemmas outlined in the previous section. In using a case study, I hope first to illustrate how the concept of policy coherence can be used to clarify some contested issues about the UK's engagement in Sierra Leone, which have often been debated outside a coherence framework. Second, a case study approach helps to provide concrete examples of where the concept of coherence diverges from other concepts, in particular by showing that achieving coherent outcomes may not necessarily require coherent policy from the outset or institutional integration.

I have limited the focus of my case study to a single donor partly because it allows for a finer-grained analysis than an overview of donors as a collective, but also because of the distinctive role of bilateral donors compared to other international actors, owing in part to the influence of domestic political interests and institutions. To date, studies of policy coherence have more commonly looked at coherence around particular sectors such as conflict or trade in their intersections with development (Picciotto 2004; OECD 1999), whereas few have considered coherence from the perspective of an individual donor,[2] let alone an individual recipient country. While it is often difficult to disentangle the impact of a single donor in a country, the role of the UK in Sierra Leone was unquestionably prominent – particularly from the time of its intervention onwards – and in some cases was at odds with other donors. While a number of studies have considered individual aspects of the UK's role in Sierra Leone (e.g. Williams 2001) or the overall role of the UK or its aid program at an earlier stage of the conflict (Ero 2000), I did not

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[2] Some exceptions are Weston and Pierre-Antoine (2003) and some of the case studies in Stokke and Forster (1999).

encounter during the course of my research of any study that has considered the role of the UK or any other donor in Sierra Leone from a policy coherence perspective.

2 Policy coherence and state failure: conceptual approaches

2.1 Policy coherence: overview and relevance

In this section I trace the rise of the idea of policy coherence in policy debates and the emergence of different literatures around these debates, critically analyse its usefulness as a concept and a policy goal, and outline a working definition of coherence that I will apply in the paper.

Emergence of the concept

The term 'policy coherence' has emerged in domestic and international policy debates principally since the mid–1990s (OECD 2005a:27). Notable examples include British New Labour's push for "joined-up government", which was underpinned by a concern for coherence (Bogdanor 2005:17), and international declarations seeking to promote coherence between key components of international policy and institutions (Winters 2001). Early literature on coherence argued that increasing global interdependence have resulted in a fragmentation of the state's authority and an increasingly complex range of tasks facing government, and that consequently larger and more differentiated governments produce a greater risk that different policy areas may come into conflict or fail to coordinate with one another (Rhodes 1997; Picciotto 2005a:313). Results-oriented approaches to government such as the New Public Management emphasised the efficiency gains of reducing sources of duplication and tension that could otherwise undermine results.

In the context of development policy, coherence has attained particular salience not only via the influence of these broader trends but also through changing understandings of how developed countries may influence global development. While aid has traditionally been seen as the primary vehicle for development policy, there

has been an increasing recognition within and beyond government that different government policy areas such as trade, macroeconomic policy, defence and immigration may have a significant bearing (both positive and negative) on the development of other countries (OECD 2005a:22). While implicit problems of coherence have arisen in public debate via NGOs' criticisms of governments' 'double standards' on development, intergovernmental organisations (notably the OECD), have been instrumental in advancing the idea of 'policy coherence for development'. Among various sub-branches of the coherence literature, the issue of coherence between development and security concerns, or the so-called 'security-development nexus', has become a particularly vigorous area for discussions of coherence, particularly since the expansion of the global security agenda post-11 September 2001 (Picciotto 2004).

Towards a definition

Despite this increasing interest, the question remains as to whether the idea of coherence is merely a re-packaging of existing concepts such as 'coordination', which has occupied governments for centuries (Hood 2005), or whether it has value as a concept in its own right. The OECD acknowledges that there is no universal agreement on the definition of coherence (OECD 2005a:27). It cites a range of existing definitions, some of which could be applied to any policy area, while others are specific to the context of development policy:

> [P]olicy coherence refers to the consistency of policy objectives and instruments applied by OECD countries individually or collectively in the light of their combined effects on developing countries. (Fukasaku and Hirata 1995)

> Policy coherence … involves the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policies across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the defined objective. (OECD Development Assistance Committee 2001)

> Policy Coherence for Development means working to ensure that the objectives and results of a government's (or institution's) development policies are not undermined by other policies of that government (or institution), which impact on developing countries, and that these other policies support development objectives, where feasible. (OECD 2005a:28)

Despite the different wordings, we can discern several common elements which provide the foundations for a definition. First, policy coherence can be assessed along different dimensions, including different *functions* (both policies themselves and also the 'instruments' used to implement them), *actors* (including states individually and collectively) and *objectives* (whether development or other objectives). Second, coherence describes a certain relationship of *complementarity* among policies or instruments. In the third definition, 'weak' and 'strong' versions of that relationship may be distinguished. The weak version of coherence requires that policies or instruments simply do not undermine one another, which the OECD describes as '*doing no harm*' (OECD 2005a:23; compare Anderson 1999). The strong version means that policies and instruments are additionally mutually reinforcing. Domestic policy literature also appears to distinguish a third degree of coherence as *comprehensiveness*, that is the absence of 'gaps' in policy coverage or more strongly a 'holistic' approach to governance (6 2005). Possible reasons why this has been neglected in the development literature include the limited capacity of aid and foreign policy compared to domestic policy as a means of bringing about policy change in a given country, and the absence of a social contract between aid donor governments and aid recipients as a basis for a comprehensive and enforceable set of rights.

Coherence as a descriptive term and a policy goal

A key distinction that is not expressed in the definitions above is the idea that policy coherence can be both a descriptive term (e.g. in the first definition) and a normative policy goal (e.g. in the third). Failure to distinguish these two uses has, I believe, tainted some earlier debates about coherence. Thus the rejection of coherence as a concept by some humanitarian aid commentators appears to have resulted in part from a perception that it had been co-opted by a specific political agenda (see further below). By contrast, some views of coherence appear to assume fairly uncritically that policy coherence is a 'good thing' or at least say little about its potential limitations as a goal.

On its own, the idea of policy coherence may have little normative content, which also limits its relevance as an analytical tool in the abstract (Winters 2001:7). The value of coherence as a policy goal becomes clearer where it is framed in terms of other concrete policy objectives (Picciotto 2005b:10). Thus if promoting development is seen as a valid policy goal, promoting policy coherence *for development* likewise has value, since less conflict among specific policies and their outcomes is likely to translate into more success in furthering the overarching policy goal.

However, where there appear to be inherent conflicts between different policy objectives, the limitations of coherence as a goal become apparent. Thus, to use the example of one of the dilemmas discussed further below, incoherence between humanitarian and conflict resolution objectives may arise where aid serves to fuel conflict. In some cases, *not* providing aid may reduce incoherence in the application of the two objectives, but this does not necessarily mean that inaction is the better option, particularly where the conflict-exacerbating effects may be outweighed by other benefits. Thus 'doing no harm' may not always better than 'doing less harm than good'. Whereas the former principle is more closely related to the *coherence* of policy outcomes, the latter is more concerned with their *net effectiveness*. While they may coincide in many circumstances, they are conceptually distinct (contra Hydén 1999) and in some cases may diverge. Thus policy may be effective in achieving its objectives, but only at the cost of considerable duplication of effort and setbacks caused by tensions within the system. On the other hand, critics of coherence have argued that policy effectiveness may be enhanced by contestability between different government agencies (Hood 2005:36).

Given the inevitable multiplicity of interests in large societies and the messiness of political compromise, it is not surprising that such trade-offs between objectives should be common. Accordingly, commentators have emphasised the need to

consider coherence as a matter of degree (OECD 2005a:28). In particular, a measure of intended incoherence may be politically necessary, but the more important issue is reducing the degree of unintended and unnecessary incoherence, for which having adequate information about causes of and alternatives to incoherence is vital (Forster and Stokke 1999:25; Picciotto et al. 2005:43).

Coherence, coordination and integration

Debates about coherence have also been affected by the blurring of coherence with other terms such as 'coordination' and 'integration'. Indeed some authors have argued that coherence is primarily concerned about processes over outcomes (Di Francesco 2001:112–13), or is in itself a process rather than an outcome (Macrae and Leader 2000:55). However, I would argue that one of the main advantages of coherence is that it encompasses consistency of *outcomes* as well as of objectives (OECD 2005a:29; Picciotto 2005b:14), and that coherence needs to be distinguished from terms such as 'coordination' and 'integration', which refer more to the means or processes of implementation that may contribute to coherence. Six 2002, for example, writing from within a domestic policy context, distinguishes consistency of means and objectives from both *coordination* ('the development of ideas about joint and holistic working, joint information systems, dialogue between agencies, processes of planning [and] making decisions') and *integration* ('actual execution or implementation [of those ideas], through the development of common organizational structures and merged professional practices and interventions' (33).

Distinguishing processes and outcomes enables us to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the two. While in many cases coordinated or integrated processes may be necessary to yield coherent outcomes, I will seek to show in the case study that this relationship may not always hold, and that sometimes the achievement of coherent outcomes may be compatible with a partial or complete absence of coordination.

If coherence does not necessarily imply coordination, equally coherence along one of the dimensions outlined above may not necessarily yield coherence along the others. Importantly, the inclusion of outcomes as well as objectives in the scope of coherence makes it more useful for evaluating real-world situations where coherent policies may not always guarantee coherent outcomes (Picciotto 2005a:324).

Synthesis and outline of approach

In order to synthesise the elements of coherence and incorporate the critiques outlined above, I will propose a working definition of coherence to be used in this paper. Given that the normative values of coherence as a policy goal will depend on the dimensions along which it is considered, I retain a descriptive focus in this generic definition:

> The term 'policy coherence' refers to the extent of complementarity within (i) a set or sets of policy objectives established by one or more actors, or (ii) the outcomes of those policies, measured against their objectives. *Incoherence* arises whenever one objective or outcome undermines another. *Coherence* is a matter of degree, and may be distinguished as follows: (i) *Weak* coherence exists where policies and outcomes are complementary (in that they do not undermine each other) but may still be fragmented; (ii) *Strong* coherence exists when they are mutually reinforcing but may still be selective; and (iii) *Holistic* coherence exists where they are mutually reinforcing and comprehensive.

Picciotto notes the value of qualitative as well as quantitative methods to help assess often complex relationships of coherence (Picciotto 2005a:324). In my case study, I will primarily use a qualitative methodology, focusing mainly on coherence in policy outcomes, which has received comparatively less attention in the literature to date than coherence in policies themselves (Picciotto et al. 2005:29).

2.2 Challenges of coherence in failed states: key dilemmas

Coherence in the context of state failure

State failure presents a range of ethical, political and practical dilemmas for the international community, and with it particular challenges of coherence. Although attention to issues of state *formation* and *capacity* in research and policy is by no means new, analysis of the causes and consequences of state *failure* was surprisingly limited until the end of the Cold War (Rotberg 2003:1; François and Sud 2006:142). As noted in the introduction, attention to problems of state failure increased due to a range of developments in the 1990s, and heightened further after 2001 with the concern that weak or failed states (such as Afghanistan) could provide safe havens for terrorist activity (Rosser 2006:1).

This emerging research and policy agenda has coalesced around the idea of 'fragile states' (François and Sud 2006:145). But since the concept of fragility frequently covers many degrees and forms of state incapacity or unwillingness to govern effectively (see e.g. OECD 2005b), the idea of state *failure* remains useful as identifying a particularly severe form of fragility. LSE's Crisis States Research Centre, for example, defines a failed state as 'a condition of "state collapse" – eg a state that can no longer perform its basic security and development functions and that has no effective control over its territory and borders' (Putzel and van der Zwan 2006:4). Causes of state failure may vary widely, and debate continues about the extent to which those internal or external to the state are more influential. Causes may include the legacy of extractive institutions established during a period of colonisation, predation by elites, and the influence of global patterns of trade and economic shocks, but violent intrastate conflict is almost always a key ingredient that catalyses failure (Rotberg 2003:27-30). Similarly, consequences of state failure vary too, but a common element is the existence of widespread suffering and poverty (Rotberg 2003:6-9).

State failure represents a particularly important concern for international actors, not only for humanitarian concern for populations in failed states, but also because of the potential for failed states to threaten domestic interests via spillover effects on other countries (see further below). These concerns may be pursued via a number of objectives – including providing humanitarian assistance, protecting its own citizens or other domestic interests, resolving conflict, maintaining stability, peace-building, state-building and promoting long-term development – which may in turn involve a range of diplomatic, aid and defence. While even engagement in more stable developing states may involve multiple interests, objectives and actors (and consequently considerable challenges of coherence), the risks of incoherence are arguably greater in fragile and failed states (Lockhart 2005:1). First, failed states lack the capacity to undertake national planning and donor coordination roles which could otherwise encourage coherence. Second, since state failure is generally accompanied by civil conflict, security objectives generally come into play, raising additional potential for incoherence between security and development objectives (Picciotto 2004).

The following subsections outline several dilemmas between different policy objectives that may arise for international actors in situations of state failure. While there is a range of other dilemmas that could be considered in such contexts, I have chosen ones that I consider to be particularly relevant for the case study (focusing on security as a common theme given its relevance for coherence in failed states).

Humanitarian and conflict resolution objectives

The international humanitarian aid system has traditionally been committed to principles such as impartiality (aiding according to need), neutrality (not siding with one warring party over another) and independence (from specific political interests), which have in many cases safeguarded the ability to deliver aid in crisis situations (Smillie and Minear 2004). However, a range of developments since the 1990s have challenged these principles, including: increased attention to the political economy

functions of aid and their potential not only to alleviate suffering but exacerbate conflict (Keen 1994); difficulties of securing reliable humanitarian access or using conventional tools of diplomatic pressure due to the factionalisation of armed movements; and concerns that humanitarian aid was being used as a 'palliative' in protracted crises despite prospects for longer-term development (Macrae and Leader 2000:14).

These developments led to calls – primarily by donor governments and the UN – for greater 'coherence' in humanitarian aid, both between relief and development objectives, and between humanitarian and 'political' responses to crisis (Macrae and Leader 2000:9). For reasons of space and the thematic focus on security, I will focus on the second type of coherence, but it is important to note that common to both was their assumption that humanitarian aid could be used for a range of other purposes than purely alleviating immediate needs, which thus presented challenges of coherence with humanitarian principles.

The call for coherence between humanitarian and 'political' responses to crises relied in part on assumption that humanitarian aid was something other than political. An influential evaluation of the international response to the Rwandan genocide, for example, criticised the use of humanitarian aid as a substitute for political resolution of crises, and a tool for avoiding engagement with belligerent states (see Macrae and Leader 2001:291). However, as political economy analyses of aid were already demonstrating, humanitarian aid was inherently political (Duffield 2001:87). Rather, the problems related more to the *way* in which aid's political functions were being channelled (via conditionality, which traditionally had only been applied to ensure minimum security conditions for the safety of humanitarian personnel) despite the lack of clear evidence that such action would produce the desired results; and, perhaps more fundamentally, the reliance on this type of political action to the *exclusion* of other political strategies (e.g. targeted sanctions or peacekeeping) that

may have provided a more effective resolution of conflict (Macrae and Leader 2000:55).

Macrae and Leader (2000:10) are highly critical of the way that coherence has been used as what they see as a cloak for co-opting humanitarian aid to other agendas. But they do indicate that they see a 'complementarity model' of coherence – where aid and politics take account of one another but remain clearly delineated – as slightly less problematic than an 'integrationist model' that results in the merging of the two. Their critique suggests that coherence may be *misused* as a policy goal, particularly where a power imbalance exists between the institutional interests behind each objective. However, the authors' scepticism about the idea of coherence as a concept as such appears to derive in part from the conclusions they make about its use as a specific policy goal (compare White and Cliffe 2000:323-24).

Domestic and international security

As indicated above, state failure may engage a range of domestic[3] and international objectives, particularly in the area of security. The extent to which domestic and international security objectives can be pursued coherently depends in part on the nature of the security threats posed by failed states and the available measures to address them. Much recent discussion has made expansive claims about the international threats that failed states pose (e.g. United States Government 2002), with the implication that addressing state failure is in developed states' own security interests. However, there is considerable disagreement about the nature and extent of those threats, with some analysis indicating that many fragile states pose fewer spillover threats than some stronger states (Patrick 2006). In many cases, moreover, engagement in failed states (as well as in some conflicts in other states) does pose considerable dilemmas for the coherent pursuit of domestic and international security interests. One of the most familiar is the so-called 'Mogadishu factor': countries' reluctance to intervene militarily derives due to concerns that a small

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[3] Here I use 'domestic' and 'international' from the perspective of the intervening state.

number of their own troops may be killed, even if a large number of lives could thereby be saved. While this may often be considered a necessary incoherence from the point of view of domestic politics, it becomes incoherent as a strategy if the conflict becomes worse and the pressure for international intervention becomes irresistible, in which case both domestic and international casualties may be higher than if intervention had taken place earlier (Power 2003:449). Other dilemmas relate to the priorities that should be pursued once a country intervenes. Thus a sole focus on protecting one's own citizens or promoting border security is unlikely to address fundamental sources of insecurity in a country and thus may undermine long-term domestic security interests in any case.

State-building and peace-building

The task of state-building[4] frequently becomes internationalised in failed states as a result of transitional administration or a substantial program of reconstruction assistance. A key rationale for international involvement in state-building is that a short-term crisis response alone is unlikely to prevent future relapses into crisis; thus an effective state is required to provide internal guarantees of stability (Chesterman 2004). Even if debates continue about the mechanisms by which the state may promote peace, stability and growth, there is little argument that the state has an important role to play in promoting those objectives. At the same time, since local non-state actors may have stepped in during a crisis to fill the gap resulting from state failure, transition may involve a *rebalancing* of broader state-society relations as much as the *building* of state functions as such (Smith 2004:159). Since global and regional security trends may often have a decisive influence on state fragility, a broader perspective than that of the state alone may be required.

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[4] Following Chesterman, I use the term 'state-building' ('extended international involvement … directed at constructing or reconstructing institutions of governance capable of providing citizens with physical and economy security') in preference to 'nation-building', which has taken on particular associations with recent US policies implemented via interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq (2004:3-4).

Potential for incoherence between state-building and peace-building efforts arises from the fact that as well as acting as a source of stability, the state may itself be a barrier to peace. This is perhaps most apparent in cases where the state has become a mechanism for inflicting violence on its own civilians, for example in the cases of Rwanda and Sierra Leone (Milliken and Krause 2002). In these situations, it is important that state-building does not merely reproduce the state structures that led to conflict (Keen 2005:298). Thus state-building in post-conflict situations will generally involve a more substantial element of reform, and in early stages may involve working outside state structures to advance peace and fill gaps in the provision of basic services.

The provision of security is one of the most critical dimensions of state functioning, and one on which other functions such as health, education and markets depend (Rotberg 2003:3). Understandably therefore, restoring the state's capacity to ensure security is a key focus for reconstruction programs.[5] However, some approaches that advocate a 'security first' approach to reconstruction often equate this with a focus on security sector reform (SSR) (e.g. Ottaway and Mair 2004:6) – the reform and strengthening of defence and police forces and the administration of justice. This is undoubtedly an important priority, but it poses a number of risks of incoherence. Thus where defence forces have contributed to conflict, simply re-building this arm of the state may create risks of further instability (Smith 2005:160). Furthermore, failure of reconstruction efforts to focus adequately on broader factors that underpin security – such as the existence of alternative employment opportunities for ex-combatants or those who may in future be drawn into violence – can undermine any gains made within the security sector itself. Lack of empirical evidence on the extent

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[5] Other dilemmas of state-building and peace-building not explored here arise in situations such as the use of elections as a transition strategy (Goldstone et al. 2005:20) and a focus on 'quick wins' (or 'nation-building lite') without necessarily a long-term commitment to engagement (Ignatieff 2003; Rotberg 2003:31).

to which security and development may support or undermine one another more generally (Waddell and Macrae 2006) also impedes prospects of coherence.

3 Political contexts: Sierra Leone and the UK

3.1 Conflict and state failure in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone had long been a 'fragile state' in the sense of the state having weak capacity and will to provide security and deliver services to its population. Inheriting an extractive economy on independence in 1961, development was highly unequal across the country, and state functioning was marred by neo-patrimonial politics (Keen 2005:8-9). Sierra Leone was characterised even before the war as a 'shadow state', where rulers had hollowed out state institutions and their real political power rested in control over resources in informal markets (Reno 1995:3-4). Economic crisis and structural adjustment put extreme pressure on patronage systems and further undermined state institutions (Keen 2005:26, 30).

Undoubtedly the civil war from 1991 to 2002 further eroded this capacity: 'In a sense, war completed an already serious retraction of the state from its welfare responsibilities' (Keen 2005:175). The rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) forces relied upon control of mineral resources and looting of civilian assets rather than garnering civilian support. For its own part, the government not only failed to protect its civilians from RUF attacks, but was itself complicit in serious abuses against civilians and often colluded with the RUF (Keen 2005:121-22). However, the view that the state (or the society as a whole) merely 'collapsed' can tend to obscure the fact that the war produced alternative systems of power and resource distribution (Keen 2005:296-97). Correspondingly, the task for Sierra Leone and the international community was not merely to 'reconstruct' the state from the rubble, but to re-work the economic and social relations of war into a system – albeit underpinned by a viable state – that would nurture peace.

At a broader level, while the fragility of the state was a symptom and in part a cause of the complex problems facing Sierra Leone, there were other fundamental causes of the conflict that lay beyond the state. As Keen (2005) has argued, the conflict stemmed from a mix of economic, social, political and psychological motivations that were as much based on 'grievance' as on 'greed'. Economic disadvantage was certainly a factor, and the state had clearly failed to capture and equitably redistribute natural resource revenues, much less provide wider employment opportunities (Keen 2005). Equally, however, the conflict was also spurred by persistent experiences of neglect and humiliation, particularly among young people. State neglect was part of the problem, but broader social relations also played an important role, with oppressive local structures entrenching the social exclusion of young people and women (Keen 2005:20). Equally, there was an important regional dimension to the war, with the RUF receiving considerable support from Charles Taylor's forces in Liberia (Nugent 2004:471), as well as global dimensions such as the debilitating effects of structural adjustment (Hanlon 2005). Since the state was only part of the problem, it could also only ever be part of the solution to the conflict.

3.2 UK international policy on development, conflict and coherence

Since the conflict in Sierra Leone began, the UK's policy environment has undergone considerable change, both in the rhetoric and arguably also the practice of areas such as development, coherence, conflict and engagement in Sub–Saharan Africa. During the later years of Conservative government under Major (1990–97), the UK's aid budget was small by subsequent standards and its aid program operated more openly in the service of foreign policy and commercial interests, not least through the subordination of the UK's aid agency (at that time the Overseas Development Administration) to FCO control.

With a change of government in 1997, New Labour sought to differentiate its foreign and development policy from that of its predecessors, which it saw as discredited by issues such as arms sales to conflict-prone countries and broader international failures to intervene effectively in conflict. Labour's policy included a commitment to a more 'ethical' UK foreign policy (Porteous 2005:284), which, though admirable as a sentiment, rendered the government vulnerable to the slightest hint of incoherence with that goal. Major implications of this approach were an increased focus on development and poverty reduction (which in turn led to a greater focus on Africa as the world's poorest continent), and a more interventionist approach to addressing conflict internationally (Porteous 2005:287–88).

A key step in implementing this new agenda was the creation in 1997 of the Department for International Development (DFID), a body operating autonomously from the FCO with a dedicated Secretary who had a seat in Cabinet. A 1997 White Paper on International Development placed poverty reduction at the centre of DFID's mandate over other interests (DFID 1997). While this may have appeared to introduce a greater separation of aid from politics, Macrae and Leader (2001) argue that aid and politics remained linked, albeit in a different policy and institutional configuration. Almost a third of the White Paper was devoted to the issue of 'consistency of policies', including a specific commitment to improve coherence in the UK's role in conflict prevention (DFID 1997:69). DFID came to play an important role not only in aid, but in some cases shaping the UK's overall relations with developing countries, so that DFID effectively became the 'Ministry for International Policy in Non-strategic Countries' (Macrae and Leader 2001:297). The coherent pursuit of foreign policy objectives by separate departments was made possible by a shared purpose of promoting a 'liberal peace' (peace through the expansion of liberal market democracy), while other 'joined-up' government initiatives encouraged coordination between DFID and other departments (Macrae and Leader 2001:297).

# 4 From incoherence to coherence? The UK's involvement in Sierra Leone

4.1 Engagement prior to intervention

Early engagement: aid as a substitute for effective political action

The UK's engagement in the conflict prior to intervention has been subject to considerable criticism, to the extent that Porter sums up the UK's role in Sierra Leone somewhat provocatively as 'villain of the conflict and hero of the peace' (Porter 2003:73). I will deal briefly with a first criticism that the UK (like most other donors) did little at first to address the conflict and largely sided with a government that was implicated in serious human rights abuses. I will then consider in more detail the principal criticism of the UK relating to its response to the 1997–98 junta, when the elected government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was ousted in a coup by a group of disaffected soldiers known as the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), who almost immediately entered into a joint government agreement with the RUF. During this period, it is claimed, the UK used humanitarian aid for political purposes in order to push for the restoration of the Kabbah government.

Sierra Leone and the UK were associated by colonial ties and membership in the Commonwealth, but by and large Sierra Leone was a 'non-strategic country' for the UK since it had relatively few current investments or any other substantial domestic interests in the country (Smillie and Minear 2004:35). Although aid from all donors represented a large part of Sierra Leone's budget, the UK's aid contribution between the beginning of the conflict and the junta was relatively small compared to that of the World Bank and the EC (Keen 2005:160; see figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Sierra Leone by major donors, 1988-2004 (source: OECD DAC online database)
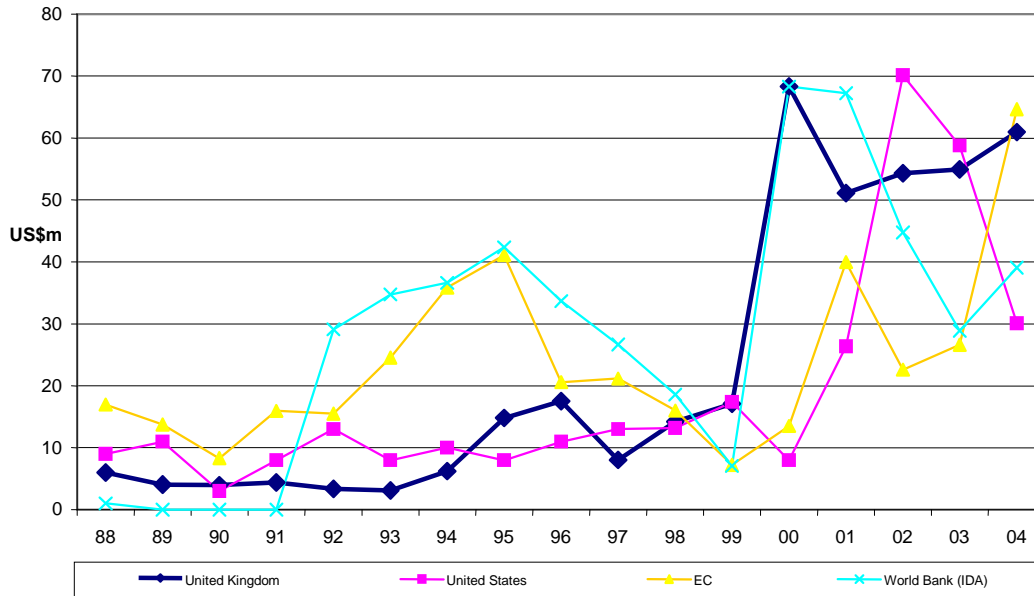
In the period prior to the May 1997 coup, donors collectively failed to formulate a coherent response to the conflict. Indeed, Keen argues that aid helped to prop up the coffers and consequently the legitimacy of the government, showing a misguided 'institutional optimism' despite a deteriorating security situation and increasing evidence of abuses by government troops (Keen 2005:163). Indeed a UK government report in 1995 recommended opposing calls for the UN to declare the situation to be "complex emergency"', citing arguments by some UN representatives and the Sierra Leone government that 'it would create the impression that Sierra Leone is a "failed country" … and undermine confidence-building efforts' (Kapila 1995, cited in Smillie and Minear 2004:27).

Responding to the 1997 junta: aid conditionality as a vehicle for political action?

Donors' reluctance to alter their aid spending in light of government abuses was starkly contrasted by their response to the 1997 coup. Following the coup, the Kabbah government and diplomatic missions relocated from Freetown to Conakry, Guinea, with only a handful of aid agencies continuing to operate in the country.

While the EU and the US continued to fund NGO activities inside Sierra Leone during the junta, DFID suspended most of its funding for NGO activities, citing the absence of sufficient security to enable delivery of humanitarian assistance. This gave rise to public claims by British NGOs that the UK was withdrawing aid in order to isolate the junta (Keen 2005:213–15). Subsequent UN sanctions on Sierra Leone imposed as a result of the coup provided for an exemption to allow humanitarian supplies into the country, but in practice the failure of the regional ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group) peacekeeping force to conduct border inspections meant that much aid was prevented from entering the country, and there were reports that shipments were being held up deliberately for political reasons (Porter 2003:19). As a result of these developments, the level of humanitarian assistance reaching populations declined considerably, and the humanitarian situation deteriorated (Porter 2003:17, 20).

In order to evaluate the coherence between humanitarian and conflict resolution objectives in this situation, an initial question was whether the UK was applying a minimal security-based conditionality – which is more generally recognised as consistent with humanitarian principles – or a politically motivated conditionality intended to bring about regime change even at the cost of violating the principle of impartiality. It appears that there was room for disagreement about the security situation depending on whether the focus was on rural or urban insecurity. To the extent that the UK government emphasised insecurity in Freetown while NGOs stressed improved security in rural areas, both may have been correct up to a point (Keen 2005:213; Porter 2003:16). However, perhaps the most telling argument supporting a hypothesis of politically motivated conditionality is that, with the repulsion of RUF/AFRC forces from Freetown in February 1998, international funding for humanitarian assistance increased, even though the overall security situation in the country had not improved significantly (Porter 2003:30).

Even if conditionality was used for political purposes, the question remains as to whether the result of this compromise of humanitarian principles was justified as an intended degree of incoherence necessary to help resolve the conflict. Ultimately, it appears that the conditionality did little to affect the junta – which had other sources of income from natural resources – and any effects it may have had on increasing the RUF's willingness to make concessions are likely to have been due to pressures resulting from the broader sanctions. Ultimately it was the work of ECOMOG forces with a strengthened mandate that drove the junta out of Freetown (Keen 2005:216). While the UK's espousal of a 'new humanitarianism' in 1998 initially included an openness to using humanitarian conditionality (thus clothing the Sierra Leone position ex-post with some policy coverage), this was significantly attenuated in subsequent statements, presumably in part as a result of the criticisms that this position received, including from one of the UK's own Parliamentary Committees (Macrae and Leader 2000:23-25).

But incoherence in this context was perhaps of less decisive importance than the UK's unwillingness to make a substantial commitment to other forms of conflict resolution, which reveals a broader context of incoherence in its approach to conflict resolution and humanitarian need in Sierra Leone. First, while the UK pushed for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force, neither it nor any other developed country initially supplied any troops to the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), whose deployment commenced in October 1999 (Porter 2003:33).[6] As a result, both UNAMSIL and ECOMOG[7] remained sorely under-equipped prior to British intervention and failed to pose a credible threat to the RUF. This lack of funding was incoherent from a range of longer-term policy objectives. First, materially supporting those forces at an earlier stage could arguably have prevented the need for a much more expensive UN and UK presence at a later stage. Second, in the absence of political

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[6] The UK only supplied a handful of military advisers.

[7] The UK did not fund ECOMOG in part due to its reluctance to fund the Nigerian military regime that had supplied most of the force's troops (Williams 2001:153).

will for a military solution, major powers (primarily the US and to a lesser extent the UK) pushed for a peace agreement that made major and arguably unconscionable concessions to the rebels. The Lomé agreement, signed in July 1999, provided the RUF with key power-sharing roles in government and a wide amnesty for acts committed during the conflict, and moreover did little to bring a conclusion to hostilities. While officials argued at the time that there was 'no alternative' to an agreement since the RUF was not a spent force, the absence of alternatives was mainly due to the lack of a credible military threat which the powers pushing for the agreement could have provided (compare Williams 2001:148-50).

4.2 The May 2000 intervention

The intervention of around 1,300 British troops in early May 2000 was a first step in a series of events that decisively changed the course of the conflict. Originally aimed at evacuating British nationals and non-essential staff from Freetown and securing the capital's airport as an ancillary objective, the role of the British force rapidly expanded into selective direct engagement with RUF forces and later provided protection and reinforcement for UN troops (Williams 2001). Although largely focused on Freetown the UK presence, combined with the threat of further 'over-the-horizon' deployments, sent a strong signal to the RUF (Keen 2005:265).[8] A number of factors eventually led to the decline of the RUF and the signing of two further peace agreements in 2000 and 2001 which ultimately brought an end to the conflict, including: attacks on the RUF from neighbouring Guinea; reduced RUF revenue as a result of its losing control over diamond areas; and a substantial increase in the size and capacity of UNAMSIL (Keen 2005:267-74). Nevertheless, there is little doubt that British intervention was – in itself and also as a catalyst for other developments – a contributing factor to the end of the conflict (Porter 2003:39, 41).

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[8] As Ottaway and Mair (2004):5 note, the ease with which a relatively small force could make a substantial difference perhaps said more about the weakness of the Sierra Leonean state than the strength of RUF.

On this basis the intervention could be seen as having achieved a coherent outcome from the point of view of the security of Sierra Leoneans as well as British nationals, but was this matched by coherent formulation of policy objectives from the outset? The most common justification for intervention that the British government initially cited was simply to evacuate around 500 citizens entitled to Britain's consular protection (Williams 2001:156), but this does not sufficiently explain why the mission's mandate later expanded to comprise a range of other objectives, and has led to considerable discussion about the nature of the UK's motivations and the way in which the UK's policy around the intervention developed.

The UK clearly had a range of other political and security motivations during the course of the intervention. The government no doubt saw an opportunity to restore the damage that had been inflicted on its public credibility by the 1998 'Arms to Africa' affair, an embarrassing instance of incoherence in which a UK company (Sandline) shipped arms into Sierra Leone with FCO endorsement in circumvention of the UN sanctions (Keen 2005:216–17).[9] But more importantly we must look to the broader context of the UK's international relations and international peacekeeping efforts. British intervention came only days after reports in international media emerged that over 500 UNAMSIL troops had been captured by the RUF at the beginning of May. This incident shockingly highlighted the inability of UNAMSIL to act as a credible guarantor of security in Sierra Leone (Porter 2003:41). It thus fell to the UK, as the major power with the closest ties to Sierra Leone, to protect a UN mission for which it had strongly advocated and whose failure would implicate the UK as much as the UN for neglecting to do more.

Even if these motivations played a role, they were not all immediately communicated at the outset. This may be due in part to a view that protection of citizens was an

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[9] Blair dismissed accusations of incoherence on the basis that the arms were supporting a democratically elected government (Kampfner 2003:68–69), but this overlooked the fact that government troops were also committing abuses.

easier message to convey to domestic audiences as a reason for intervention (Williams 2001:161). However, a more fundamental reason may have been that the mission's policy objectives were not coherently formulated until some time after the initial intervention. Williams (2001:159) has suggested that while the initial intervention may have been decided with only a short-term domestic objective in mind, the government may have recognised once its troops were on the ground that it could not withdraw quickly without risking a further dent in its 'ethical' foreign policy. Perhaps more seriously, it seems that there were also ongoing divisions between the MoD and FCO about what the objectives of the intervention should be and how it should be aligned with the UN (Ero 2001:57).

The UK's decision not to deploy its troops as part of UNAMSIL – which was condoned by the UN but opposed by some nations (Samuels 2003:335) – highlights the distinction made earlier between coherence and integration. In my view the UK's approach points to a pragmatic decision that a coherent and effective outcome was more likely to be achieved by a *lack of integration* with the UN in the first instance. Indeed the capture of UN troops was in many ways a symptom of broader problems relating to the mandate and management of UNAMSIL which were not likely to be resolved as quickly as a national contingent under separate command could deploy (see Williams 2001:161–62). Thus even though the UK arguably did some damage to the UN mission by not deploying under its command (Ero 2001:57), its approach is consistent with the view (which may ultimately have proved sound) that wrangling to develop an integrated UK–UN response could have further endangered the security situation, and that the overall failure of international engagement in the country was a greater threat to the UN.

This account of the motivations for intervention suggests that temporally the UK's domestic security objectives preceded the international security objectives that later became the central justification for sustained engagement. However, an initial lack of coherence in policy objectives and an absence of coordination did not prevent the

formulation of a coherent policy after the initial intervention or – despite some undermining of the UN's peacekeeping leadership in Sierra Leone – the effective and relatively coherent achievement of those objectives.

4.3 Reconstruction, 2001–2005

Overview

The UK's military intervention marked a turning point in its broader engagement with Sierra Leone, particularly with a considerable expansion in the size and scope of its aid program. Between 1999 and 2000, DFID's funding for Sierra Leone more than tripled from approximately £9 million to £30 million (DFID 2001:159). The post-crisis period saw the implementation of a wide-ranging package of reconstruction assistance, with many areas combining some measure of immediate emergency assistance with medium- to long-term objectives of peace-building and state-building. Much of this assistance was funded through the UK's Africa Conflict Prevention Pool (ACPP), funding and coordination mechanism established in 2001 to promote 'joined-up' approaches to conflict-related assistance among DFID, the FCO and the MoD (Austin et al. 2004). Areas funded through the ACPP included disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programs for ex-combatants and reintegration of others affected by the war; assistance to strengthen and reform the security sector; and some support for Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the UN-sponsored Special Court for Sierra Leone. Other assistance funded through DFID's bilateral program has included initiatives to promote food security and livelihoods; reconstruction of infrastructure; and public sector capacity building and anti-corruption initiatives (Ginifer 2004:10; DFID website).

Security, peace and state capacity in a longer-term perspective

The shift towards longer-term objectives of peace and security in the context of ongoing state weakness has presented considerable challenges and dilemmas, both within and beyond the formal security sector.

Given the inability of security forces to maintain stability during the conflict – and indeed their complicity in fuelling insecurity – security sector reform has understandably been a key focus for UK assistance. Even before the 2000 intervention, the UK had begun initiatives in the security sector, including training of Sierra Leone army officers (Keen 2005:199); and a capacity building program for the Ministry of Defence and associated defence and intelligence agencies (DFID 2004:38–39). Following 2000, this assistance was complemented by a major army training program undertaken by a team of over 100 mostly British personnel (Keen 2005:285), which for some years comprised the bulk of ACPP funding for Sierra Leone (Ginifer 2004:11). UK assistance to the security sector appears to have helped to reduce the possibility of attacks on civilians by soldiers and deterred the army from seeking to intervene in the political arena again (Keen 2005:273). However, building civilian trust in the military has remained difficult, and a recent evaluation acknowledged risks to security and the state that a capable but possibly rebellious army could pose (Ginifer 2004:15). Maintaining coherence between state-building and security objectives thus requires the UK to sustain its engagement in the security sector during such a potentially unstable transition, and to ensure that its support to the sector is monitored against progress in other areas of state capacity that could maintain democratic oversight of the military.

The range of programs listed above indicates that the UK's approach to security is clearly not limited to SSR alone. The emphasis on state-building in other areas of its program, for example, could be seen as mutually supportive of improved peace and security, but there remain areas of conflict between these objectives. A particularly controversial element of the UK's assistance has been a DFID-funded program to strengthen local governance through support to traditional chiefs. Fanthorpe explains that a primary motivation for the program on DFID's part was '[f]ear of the consequences of a post-war governance vacuum in rural areas', and that the program was supported by the government, which was 'keen to re-establish political control over the countryside' (Fanthorpe 2003:59). A key problem was that the

chiefs, whose roles were manipulated under colonial rule as well as independent government, have long played an ambivalent role towards their communities. While safeguarding some economic and political rights, chiefs have also contributed to the marginalisation of young people and women, leading to long-standing complaints about abuse of power (Fanthorpe 2003:58–59). Given the importance of social exclusion as a cause of the conflict, the restoration of chiefs has been a highly risky strategy. Internal DFID evaluations confirmed negative impacts of the program in recreating conditions of injustice (International Crisis Group 2004:14; see also Fanthorpe 2006:30).

The UK's response to security has not only focused on addressing internal sources of insecurity via state-building, but has also focused more broadly on regional and global sources of conflict as well as the role of non-state actors. Recognising that diamonds had played an important role in fuelling tensions and funding armed parties, donors also began to call for stricter regulation of the diamond trade (Keen 2005:281). Nevertheless, other elements of actual or potential incoherence remain, including the UK's continuing arms sales to Africa despite some progress in improved certification (see Ero 2001:62–63). Furthermore, it has been argued that donor support for improved security has to date failed to take into account adequately the role of non-state actors in fulfilling informal 'policing' or security roles in a country where the state's reach will inevitably remain limited (Baker 2006).

Evaluation: coherence and comprehensiveness

The transition to peace in Sierra Leone appears to have progressed relatively well thus far. To date the most recent peace agreement has held, the end of conflict has not been marked by a dramatic rise in crime (Baker 2006:31), and some economic growth has been recorded due to recovery in agriculture and mining. Nevertheless, huge economic and social challenges remain, with Sierra Leone languishing towards the very bottom of the UN Human Development Index. The state is perhaps emerging from failure to fragility, but political challenges of building effective and accountable

government also loom large. Moreover, Keen has observed that some of the economic and political phenomena that spurred the conflict are at risk of being revived (Keen 2005:298).

As the examples discussed above suggest, the UK's role has made a positive contribution to the transition to peace, but in some areas has run the risk of rebuilding structures that contributed to the conflict. Reducing this risk requires early attention to conflict assessment in designing overall country strategies and specific programs (Picciotto et al. :31-32), and explicitly weighing up the trade-offs between state-building and peace-building.

The UK also faces a range of other coherence challenges lying beyond specific intersections with security, including between sustaining partnership and pushing for reforms in the face of poor governance, and between maintaining strategic focus and adequate coverage in its overall program. This second issue may become particularly pressing in light of recent indications that aid to Sierra Leone relative to need is declining and the OECD now considers it to be 'marginalised' as an aid recipient (OECD Development Co-operation Directorate 2006:3), albeit due mainly to declines in funding from donors other than the UK. In one very obvious sense, UK assistance to Sierra Leone can and should never be 'holistic' given competing government priorities, the need for burden-sharing among other donors and the inherent limits upon the ability of aid to promote development. But an even stronger reason derives from the limited capacity of failed and fragile states to absorb aid and the potential risks of pushing through politically controversial reforms in such environments, which provide rationales focusing on restoring a set of core state functions rather than trying to rebuild the whole gamut at once (Ottaway and Mair 2004:3; DFID 2005:20). In this light, aiming for 'strong' coherence – by targeting key reform priorities relevant to a country's individual circumstances – may be preferable to seeking 'holistic' coherence, which may ultimately threaten rather than enhance state capacity.

5 Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to show that the idea of coherence may present a useful analytical tool for evaluating some key dilemmas of international engagement in cases of state failure. Its usefulness as a term and as a policy goal depends on distinguishing it from other concepts such as coordination, integration and effectiveness, and on circumscribing its application by reference to particular objectives. Coherence presents a particular challenge in failed states due to the range of actors involved and the limited ability of the state to mediate the incoherence of donors' policies, let alone that of its own. Key dilemmas of coherence that may arise in situations of state failure are between: humanitarian and conflict resolution objectives; domestic and international security; and state-building and peace-building.

Applying this conceptual approach to the UK's role in Sierra Leone, we see the encounter between a failed state with a history of conflict, and a state with at least a rhetorical commitment to coherence in its international engagement which had sought to promote coherence in development policy through the institutional separation of DFID rather than closer integration with the FCO. In each of the three phases of engagement analysed in the case study, the dynamics of coherence operated differently. First, the early phase of UK engagement was unnecessarily incoherent despite attempts to integrate multiple objectives into a single strategy of humanitarian conditionality. This was due on the one hand to the failure of the withdrawal of aid to yield any benefits that would offset the resulting unaddressed humanitarian needs; and on the other hand to the UK's failure to implement alternative strategies that might have prevented a more costly subsequent intervention or avoided compromising on the interests of justice for human rights violations. Second, while the intervention does not appear to have been planned in a coherent way, and indeed involved a deliberate decision not to pursue a coordinated

strategy with the UN, its eventual mandate was informed by a coherent policy ex-post, and produced an effective and mostly coherent result in supporting both domestic and international security objectives. Third, the UK's wide-ranging reconstruction program has shown a considerable degree of coherence between state-building and peace-building objectives, but at times the interests of peace and stability have been threatened by reconstructing former structures that contributed to the conflict.

It is tempting to see the shift in the UK's approach over time from more to less incoherence as causally linked with a transfer of power in the UK to a government for which coherence was a key plank of its overall strategy for governing the country. But it should be borne in mind that all three phases covered here occurred primarily under the Labour government, and while no doubt some instances of incoherence were due to the institutional legacies of the previous government (arguably a factor in the Arms to Africa affair), humanitarian conditionality during the junta appears to have been part of a newer trend later reflected in Labour's 'New Humanitarianism', albeit still in the name of pursuing coherence.

Given that all six objectives featuring in the three dilemmas highlighted in the paper are arguably important policy goals in themselves, it may be fair to say in general that the more coherent the UK's policies were in each phase, the 'better' the outcome overall for all parties affected. In this sense, coherence has value as a policy goal by virtue of its ability to consistently further other valid policy goals. Nevertheless, its value is more limited in situations where a government must consciously trade off goals that are inherently in conflict, or where the dividing line between necessary and unnecessary coherence cannot be easily established. Further research, particularly from a comparative perspective, could help to illuminate the range of situations where coherence may need to take a back seat to other values, and identify where coherence may have been misused as a policy goal, as well as the scope for its legitimate pursuit.

The findings of the case study suggest that while coherence may often be furthered by integration and coordination, it may often require doing the opposite, for example by institutional separation and selectivity. This does not mean completely replacing principle with pragmatism, but instead requires thinking beyond established institutional structures and conventions towards a more nuanced view of how principles can be translated into action.

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