



# FROM SWORDS TO PLOUGHSHARES: TIME FOR A CVE STEP-CHANGE?

A Review Essay by Paul Bell

*Don McCullin photographic retrospective*  
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## About the Author

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*The views expressed in this article are entirely those of the author and do not purport to represent those of any organisation.*

On a London Sunday in May, spring still struggling through, I took myself down to the Tate Britain gallery on the Embankment and joined the queue of people waiting to view the work of Don McCullin, the photographer whose dark imagery spans 60 years of conflict—martial and social—or as *The Guardian* described him, ‘the man who has seen too much’.

From his working-class roots in Finsbury Park to the destitution on the streets of London’s East End, to Vietnam, Northern Ireland, Biafra, Beirut, and the first Gulf War—McCullin’s 250-photograph exhibition captures a life spent observing more human misery than anyone should ever have to witness. His therapy is to photograph the tranquillity of the landscape around his home in rural Somerset: ‘I dream of this in battle, I dream of misty England’, says McCullin—these words blocked out on the wall above his pictures.

What I saw caused me to ask, as I have before on learning of the deaths in or after conflict of photographers I knew: What is it about this work that so compels a man such as McCullin, carrying only a camera, or a woman like Marie Colvin, armed only with a laptop, to continually expose themselves to immense danger? Both have spoken of being driven to bear witness, and indubitably they did—but is there a point along the way at which conscience is overtaken by the physical chemistry of living at the edge of death?

In the end, it seems, nothing McCullin photographed could escape the darkness that settled on him. Even splendid desert ruins—he went to Palmyra after the Islamic State dynamited it—appeared to him as ectoplasms of misery: these ancient buildings evoked, not the splendour of their former beauty, nor even rage at their destruction, but the cruelty and enslavement he imagined had been the physical engine of their construction. I watched the visitors—and myself—filing safe and solemn past these images of built and human ruin. It was ineffably depressing, the black of the photography almost stygian, the white offering the viewer little light. I could find no hope in his work. Even his photographs of Somerset looked like the Somme. Was it the same for him? In his career, he will have taken tens of thousands of pictures. And yet for this exhibition he had distilled his life’s work into 250 images of unremitting despair. Was that the sum of it? Was there no hope at all?

McCullin says the label ‘war photographer’ haunts him. ‘He has never been content with the impact made by images he has produced’, says the exhibition pamphlet. ‘He feels they have had an insufficient role in ending the suffering of

the people they depict. For McCullin, photography is about feeling. “If you can’t feel what you’re looking at”, he says, “then you’re never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures.”

Perhaps I have some idea of what he means. Late in my own (less illustrious) career as a practitioner of strategic communications in conflict, social and martial, I’ve come to ask similar questions about my own work. Questions about the relationship between imagery and experience, between messages and the lived reality of those who receive them. Questions about whether strategic communications aimed at ending conflict or reducing social tensions is not too often distanced, or even entirely divorced, from the most powerful and immediate concerns of those on which it is intended to have an effect—a gap into which its credibility can fatally fall when its messages too obviously reflect not the concerns of the receiver, but the fears and imperatives of the sender.

But to McCullin—how to situate his task in the grim, complex roil of conflict? His was to send a message via Western media to Western audiences about the horror and carnage for which their governments were responsible in one or another degree—be it prosecuting a war in Vietnam, or supplying arms and other assistance to one or another combatant in some foreign war, or failing to intervene—and, by bearing witness to the horror, shame or shock his audiences into action that would end a conflict or bring relief to the innocents caught up in it. He has his place in a partial success story; the American media’s nightly portrayal of the war in Vietnam and its divisive impact on political opinion at home helped nudge the United States towards its eventual withdrawal from a war its generals had long known was unwinnable. The first Chechen war happened at a time when pre-Putin Russia was still sufficiently anarchic to permit a momentarily free media to portray the brutality with which Chechnya’s bid for independence was being crushed, leading to protests and to public opinion turning against it. Chechnya wasn’t so lucky the second time around.

But with partial success there is also partial failure; the media doesn’t always get it right, sometimes with disastrous consequences. NATO’s badly judged intervention in Libya was preceded by hand-wringing in the Western media and the meretricious argument that ‘something must be done’—while displaying no appreciation of the underlying realities of social division and governance in the country. In the event, the Anglo-French-led intervention turned Libya into a battleground for rival militias, a playground for jihadists, an arsenal for the Sahel, a hell for civilians and refugees. (How many times have citizens who

have been caught up in internal war or regime change been heard to say, ‘It was better under Gaddafi’, or ‘Bring back Saddam?’) Did the almost weekly press coverage of military corteges from RAF Lyneham bearing the coffins of British dead through the picturesque Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett, serve to underline for the British government the risk of putting boots on the ground, therefore limiting the intervention in Libya to an air war that left the ground to the militia? Or in Iraq, did a war-weary American public, gorged on a media diet of failure and illegitimate war, persuade Barack Obama to withdraw before time—when with hindsight, 20,000 US troops might have prevented the ISIS rout of Iraqi forces two years later and the devastation that followed? Yes, the argument of legitimacy had been lost even before the invasion but even so, in the face of media hostility, were the consequences of premature withdrawal given insufficient weight?

All this to the point that media reportage on conflict is not an unalloyed good; its messages to its own audiences, largely remote from conflict, and received in a media environment that is open and free, can stir public emotions and political pressures that are not always conducive to good decision-making.

There are no easy answers. Democracies hold the freedom of their media as a bastion of the values and freedoms on which they depend. If there are questions, these can at best, and by implication, acknowledge that the pervasiveness and speed of modern communication throws up immense challenges and a concomitant responsibility, as conflict responses are calculated, to better understand and project context and complexity so as to better inform public opinion and the decision-making of the political class. In a world dominated now by still and moving imagery, whose emotive force and speed of impact so easily overwhelm the political senses, such responsibility is doubled and redoubled.

So much for McCullin. If his object was to influence audiences ‘at home’, which he fulfilled heroically, then the rather more prosaic job of strategic communications has been to influence the subjects of his photography, left ‘out there’, and the fragile, conflict-affected peoples they represent. If his job was to show the world the wounds of conflict by ripping off the bandage, ours has been to try to put one on, using communication plasters in the absence of political plaster of Paris.

I first became involved in this field 15 years ago, spending the years 2004–11 travelling back and forth to Iraq leading a large information operations team

whose purpose was to discredit al-Qaeda, discourage sectarian violence, stabilise the country, and promote an enduring political and constitutional settlement. We were ambitious then, and we had the budgets to back us. We had real operational power. We were availed of ground-breaking psychological insights into the nature of terrorism. We drove our comms within a framework based on building a new foundation for social and political order. We thought and worked in ‘long-arc’ 18-month cycles. We aimed in our messaging to make clear what was needed to achieve critical changes in specified target audiences and in the wider social system to support the settlement process. Of course, it was always going to be a work in progress.

After the US withdrawal from Iraq, I went on to work in seven more countries—Algeria and Egypt (which I just touched), Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Yemen. During that time a great deal changed. The internet had become pervasive, enabling populations to break through state-imposed barriers to access information but also exposing them to the dangers of disinformation and deception aimed at exacerbating multiple lines of social and political division. The Arab Spring came and went in a welter of violence and repression, leaving Libya chaotic, Syria a bloodied wreck, and economies weakened. Governments across the region—institutionally ossified, in thrall to national elites, incapable of responding to popular expectations—became fearfully skittish of civil society-based movements and campaigns for human rights and reform. In Europe, a flood of refugees from violence and economic stagnation in the Middle East and Africa, and a wave of terrorist attacks in France, Britain, and Germany, were major spurs to nationalist populism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism.

With warfare now largely a psychologically-based enterprise in which civilian populations were the centre of gravity, the ability to influence those populations once more became a preoccupation for governments globally, in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) and along major geopolitical fault lines such as Europe-Russia and US-China. Along the way a new government-controlled industry sprang up called, first, countering, then preventing, violent extremism—a subtle and not unimportant strategic shift from confronting extremist narratives (either a fool’s errand or something wickeder) to trying to get at and address the deeper grievances beneath them. But budgets were small and results were patchy, raising questions about their value, and if using counter-narratives was about winning the argument against violent extremism (VE), there’s little evidence to suggest that it did. At the risk of stating the

obvious, in the years before ISIS, counter-narratives seem to have done little to insulate significant numbers of young people in the Middle East, North Africa, or Europe against recruitment and the desire to fight in Syria.

Various factors have been at play. I would point to three, the first being an inordinate waste of time and money on efforts to re-engineer 'religious correctness' and re-indoctrinate Islamist extremists whose views depart from the orthodoxy of 'state religion'. It's no more than a truism that recruits to Islamist-inspired VE know little about religion and care even less. Religious belief has little to do with violent extremism; extreme doctrinal interpretations may provide it with a political language and moral justification, but they are not its primary drivers. Yet many governments determinedly characterise it as a perniciously twisted strand of Islam, an 'alien import' like a weed blown across the border from some foreign state of mind, and the reason young people turn to violence. They prescribe state-approved doctrine, control mosques, license imams, and provide guidance on Friday sermons. They do it because religious extremism is a metaphor for political resistance and dissatisfaction with the status quo and it's easier to blame terrorism on distorted religious ideas than to account for breakdowns in the social contract. Which is why some countries so firmly insist on religious re-indoctrination in their countering violent extremism (CVE) programming.

The second factor is that VE is the preoccupation of governments—governments facing security threats and struggling to contain the discontent and disaffection that arise in the gap between popular expectations and societal means. But for young people, the bulk fodder for radicalisers of any political hue, it is not. They are far more worried about finding jobs, or putting their degrees to work in meaningful employment, earning money, having sex, affording a wife, getting out from under the heel of domineering fathers. Across the Middle East and North Africa, all significant analysis suggests this; the same demographics and behavioural patterns appear everywhere: struggling economies; a youth bulge; poverty and (quite particularly) relative deprivation; joblessness, especially among young people; corruption, the entrenchment of elites, a casual contempt for the views of young people; institutional weakness; deep fractures between citizens and the national security apparatus; the exploitation of sectarian division for political advantage; and high levels of societal violence. In Europe the dynamics of Islamist extremism centre on the impacts on immigrant minorities of cultural displacement, economic and social exclusion, and Islamophobia. These are the

real preoccupations of young people, who struggle daily under the weight of it all, and which provide the space in which extremist ideology exploits grievances, nurtures the sense of victimhood, identifies ‘the enemy’, encourages the fantasy of ‘striking back’, and legitimises violence.

And this is where the old-fashioned counter-narrative approach to CVE programming was, and remains, flawed. It has *not* focused on young people’s preoccupations. Instead it stigmatises. It tells its young target audiences that they are perceived, not as the future of their nation, but as a threat to its national security. This makes counter-narrative programming very hard to deliver. In many target communities it is difficult, even dangerous, and often counterproductive, to speak openly about CVE. Young people feel targeted, misunderstood, threatened, suspicious, resentful—and do not engage. These failures translate into disappointing, limited, unverifiable outcomes that call into question the value of CVE programming in general. I have watched diplomats responsible for overseeing such programmes quietly shake their heads and dismiss it all as mumbo jumbo. They’d switch it off if they could, but what to (affordably) replace it with? And yet they’re disappointed when the evidence of success is so threadbare—because it makes it that much harder to account to the suit upstairs, who may understand it even less but is holding the budget. Change on the cheap gets cheap results.

A third factor is that governments that host CVE programmes sponsored by international (largely Western) agencies are very sensitive about how these actors engage with their fractured, struggling, and restless young populations. They don’t want them stomping around in this space unsupervised because it’s a political and ideological minefield. After 9/11 they watched with alarm as donor organisations poured billions of dollars into civil society movements and human rights programming designed to drive social change and democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. Instead, as they see it, it unleashed chaos. That’s hard to argue with. Today, following the post-2011 crackdown, civil society and government across the region fear and distrust each other deeply. There is a strong host-state-driven emphasis on security and religion—especially in states whose leaders derive their legitimacy from the latter—and governments are drawing parameters around internationally financed CVE programming ever more tightly. They grasp the need for ‘youth engagement’, even if only in the *appearance* of ‘consultation’. However, approaches continue to be dominated by the top-down nature of national power; approaches that appear to challenge it



by focusing on bottom-up initiatives and greater collaboration with civil society quickly butt up against bad memories. For international actors, therefore, progress is tentative at best. It's a sort of buzz-wire game; to operate credibly, responsibly, and effectively while not triggering domestic sensibilities, they need a steady hand to thread the wire while not touching it.

As for output, this remains largely confined to messaging, increasingly through social media where you've got 10 seconds to grab consumers who 'snack' on product. Subject matter deals with the dangers of radicalism and discrediting extremist groups or in hopes and promises that do not resonate with their experience of daily life. The messaging is repetitive, it lacks credibility, and it is tired. An Iraqi colleague recently described to me the foreign-sponsored CVE content currently focused on communities battling to recover from the depredations of ISIS. He called them 'Botox stories'. Viewers don't relate to 'success stories' and 'happy talk' that bear no resemblance to their lived reality, or to exhortations to 'patriotism and unity' when their experience at the hands of a sectarian-majoritarian authority is the opposite. That Botox image said it: it's become a 'good' version of 'fake news', puffed up by its own idea of what makes a message effective, and audiences have stopped listening. Good news was always a hard sell; this is even harder.

It stands in contrast to how FCAS governments that can afford CVE programming and control the media environment, might be playing it. In May 2019, as the start of Ramadan initiated the annual peak for television soap opera viewing across the Middle East and North Africa, the *Times of London* reported that of 24 soaps planned for this period in Egypt, 15 were made by a company linked to the intelligence services. 'Programme makers [had] been ordered to produce scripts that glorify the military and promote conservative family values.' This is powerful influence programming but it's a no-go area for foreign CVE actors unless they are prepared to underwrite the political imperatives of the host government.

We need to rethink this. A step-change is needed.

One step might be to pay more attention to the dual nature of the effects of the socio-economic aid and development programming that donor governments have undertaken on a vast scale, and to learn to capitalise on that duality. Value here resides in both the material impact that programmes can deliver to their beneficiaries, and on their ability to *influence* those beneficiaries—through the

experience of engagement—and encourage in them the thought processes and behaviours that are more conducive to sustainable societal and political development. In this sense, aid and development programming is also *influence* programming—with a message that is both implicit yet also inherently stickier than current CVE programming, because it involves issues and experiences that are more directly relevant to beneficiaries. Aid and development programming is endlessly diverse, its budgets are massive in comparison to strategic communications or CVE, and its impacts, even if not specifically targeted at young people, include them anyway because the latter are so large a proportion of target communities. Such programmes are also a source of rich experience in how to engage beneficiaries, enabling them to make a difference in their lives, ensuring that difference is sustainable, and to build—at both the individual and community levels—the human and social resilience and capital that enables progress. Strategic communications has a great deal to learn from this richness, if only it can find its way past the thicket of government security imperatives. Aid and development programmes should be the carthorse on which strategic communications can ride to market—and yet, with some exceptions, strategic communications is an afterthought in these programmes.

Another step—self-evident, I would suggest, in the context of the psychological war that is the chief battle space of modern conflict—would be to place due weight on the psychological significance of experience itself. As we recognise it in trauma, so we recognise it in healing. If we compare the sense of engagement and accomplishment derived from the experience of participating in and benefiting from a socio-economic programme to the brief enjoyment of watching and liking videos on a mobile phone, surely the former is more likely to induce attitudinal and behavioural changes conducive to positive social change and transformation? Surely a message of change and hope is more likely to be received through the experience of change, and of its material effects and benefits?

It is through experience that an alternative pathway is opened up to people, especially young people vulnerable to the attraction, glamour, sense of belonging and purpose, and economic incentives offered by VE groups that operate at the most immediate levels of community life. Along this experiential pathway comes that crucial psychological shift from negative to positive emotion and makes an alternative, more positive option or opportunity, and even an alternative future, more plausible to the young mind searching for meaning, purpose, support, and a way out.

People arrive at their place in life and society by the pathway of their experience—and can be encouraged by further experience towards an alternative pathway. A new and better experience generates the emotions that make the alternative pathway visible and possible. A new narrative flows naturally from here. In this way, experience becomes a new pathway, and that pathway becomes a changing narrative.

A third step would be to accelerate the emphasis on ‘resilience programming’. Resilience—at both the individual and community levels—is about being braced for shock, able to absorb, adapt to, and overcome challenges and obstacles. Where conflict and development conjoin, the resilience theme has come increasingly to define the European Union’s strategy and desired outcomes for its aid and engagement among its near neighbours in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Its support is focused on enabling its neighbouring states, communities, and even individuals, to adapt to social, economic, and political pressure; to grow sustainably; to maintain cohesion; to improve security; and to manage risks and opportunities peacefully and stably. We also see resilience now becoming the theme of other major aid packages; in 2018, for example, USAID made \$50m available for a five-year package for Tunisia.

Why might resilience do better? Is there a better chance of preventing young people from becoming violent extremists if, rather than force-feed them a prescribed religion or press-gang their loyalty to a state they believe is failing them, they are provided with experiences and skills that enable them to see themselves and their life-chances more positively?

First, it would help assuage the acute sensitivity of host governments towards foreign CVE interventions. Indeed, CVE’s licence to operate is coming increasingly to depend on it being repositioned *away from* the overtly securitised space it has hitherto occupied, and towards the youth development space, which is politically more anodyne and supported by new global/multilateral policy frameworks such as those of the EU and the United Nations. As an approach to influence programming, resilience easily accomplishes this repositioning and, in my experience, FCAS governments are a great deal more comfortable with it.

Second, resilience is a *state of mind*. Its core psychological elements are meaning and purpose, confidence, adaptability, and the ability to secure the support of others. These elements are the stock-in-trade of recruiters on every side; they are the same psychological buttons that violent extremist recruiters push, while

also acting to plug service gaps that governments cannot fill, as they win the hearts and minds of young people.

In the context of CVE, the key to the effective application of resilience-based methodology in aid and development programming would be to provide an experience that enables young people to find a positive alternative pathway, rather than choose a negative one through frustration and desperation. It would enable them to experience through action the impact of particular behavioural and attitudinal values such as tolerance, openness, and the willingness to negotiate—values that also happen to provide the glue of well regulated, responsive, and functioning polities. Moreover, properly formulated, resilience programming can support the development of improved relations between civil society and government without appearing to overtly challenge established centres of authority, which is where foreign aid prior to the Arab Spring may have overlapped its hand.

I have worked on resilience programming in two different settings. From 2015 to 2018 I was involved in programming across five countries in the Middle East and North Africa. And since 2010 I have been privileged to work with one of the world's leading non-formal education brands, The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award for Young People, which has more than 1.3 million participants entering its programmes each year across 130 countries.

The Award, an education programme, has been running for 61 years, and about 30 years ago it began to internationalise. Delivered through schools and youth organisations, it provides a direct and individual experience for each participant. Like any good resilience programme, the Award allows young people aged 14–24 to choose their own pathway to progress, builds their confidence in themselves, imbues their lives and pursuits with greater purpose, teaches them to adapt to and overcome challenges, and improves their links to, and relationships with, the communities in which they live. It does this, not by 'delivering a message' but by providing an *experience* that engages its participants, enabling them to improve their skills, often with very little to hand, and helping them discover they are capable of things they couldn't imagine before they began. Its impact is highly significant, indeed for countless thousands of participants, even transformative. Where the Award reaches into marginalised communities, that effect is more than merely enhancing, its impact can be exponential.

In general terms, government-aided socio-economic development work will always offer a scope and scale that far outreaches anything conventional CVE

programming could aspire to, which suggests that this is where the future of CVE and resilience programming might lie. CVE can make that strategic shift to aid and development work, and specifically youth development, using its activity base to generate the stories that amplify its impact to that wider audience beyond the immediate reach of the programmes themselves, providing evidence that change, improvement, and hope really are possible, rather than a Botox distortion of their lived reality. Moreover, such programming can bring to life for young people those small-d democratic and civic values and collaborative behaviours on which social harmony, progress, and order depend.

What does good resilience programming look like? The following would probably be useful departure points.

1. Identify areas where levels of radicalisation, recruitment to VE groups, or for that matter other forms of political violence, have been notably high.
2. Keep focus local where effects and impacts are more easily discernible.
3. Build relationships with credible local civil society actors, engage target audiences through them, and work through them to understand local upstream drivers of recruitment.
4. Create programme spaces in which participants are supported in identifying for themselves the issues and obstacles they confront, working out solutions, and drawing in other local stakeholders who can help.
5. Encourage participants to build more collaborative relationships with local civic and security authorities, or with people of other ethnic or sectarian backgrounds.
6. Keep local authorities informed and encourage civil society participants to do the same. The aim is to build those relationships, break down mutual antagonism and distrust, and replace these with greater trust. This is about seeking to shift existing terms of exchange between civil society actors and local authorities; to shift these from mutual antagonism towards the mutual advantage that is to be discovered

in getting something done locally that makes a positive difference in the immediate community.

7. Use strategic communications to reach parts of the target audience that programmes cannot reach directly. It amplifies the effects being delivered, showcasing the work of the programme and its effects on individual participants and projecting their stories of self-discovery and accomplishment to a wider audience—with the implicit message: ‘See, change is possible *if we do what we can, where we are, with what we have.*’

We do what we can, where we are, with what we have: I developed that phrase early on in my recent work and it came to capture the spirit of the programme’s intent. It’s a take-out, really; what one would want one’s participants and target audiences to feel and think about their engagement and its outcomes. It draws together ingredients that are key to programme success: the pride of self-reliance (rather than reliance on a state that cannot provide); a greater sense of self-worth (especially in societies that generally talk down to young people and regard them as a problem); a greater sense of realism about what it actually takes to achieve longer-term change; and a determination to use what is to hand (which is often very little) in order to make a difference to their own lives and those of their communities.

To be effective as a youth-development methodology, resilience programming needs only to serve CVE purposes *simultaneously*, as opposed to specifically. It’s the *effect* of the programming that is important—an effect that is *not* served by slavishly pandering to, and reinforcing, what has been a persistent failure in strategic communications practice—a common, indeed dominant confusion that messages and effects are the same thing; they are not. Persuading young people away from violent extremism should not have to rely so heavily on subject-specific ‘education’ and exhortation. Indeed, such over-reliance can engender radicalising effects that are precisely the opposite of those intended. The extent to which this confusion is maintained among security-minded officials who fail to grasp how youth development and resilience work at the social and psychological levels is quite remarkable.

Resilience programming avoids this trap. To give its methodology due heft in CVE strategic communications, governments might consider reviewing their aid and development packages with a view to understanding and enhancing

their parallel potential as implicit CVE instruments. At least part of such enhancement would derive from drawing further from resilience methodology and communicating more effectively around those packages. That would be a major fillip to resilience, whose budgets are still relatively small and whose practitioners must (usefully) learn to do more with less. Gathering evidence of change is challenging—data emerges slowly and sample sizes are often small—but an early, sharp, and localised focus on research, measurement, and evaluation should provide a better understanding of where to look for indices of success.

Given the things programme commissioners might start, there is also something they should stop, i.e. insisting, in the face of its impossibility, that outcomes should prove a negative. *How many young people didn't become violent extremists because you opened up an alternative pathway to them?* It's a question that will never be answered. Give it up, learn to ask different questions.

I began with Don McCullin; let me end with him. In pursuit of peace he gives us images of violence—humanity at its worst. His exhibition is a howl of savagery, fear, pain, destruction, and death. Connected for that instant with his subjects, he leaves them frozen forever in the horror and hopelessness of the images they inhabit. Yet, beyond that frozen moment, life goes on; so much more is still demanded. Including hope.

It calls to mind the words of Margaret Schlegel, heroine of EM Forster's *Howards End*: 'Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted...?.'

In here somewhere is how I might express an ambition for strategic communications. The imagery is no longer enough; neither the pictures of the war photographer nor the war-of-ideas audiovisual content being pumped into the digital ether by techno-savvy desk jockeys. No, beyond combat operations, strategic communications is at its best when, through depiction of *the real*, of *action on the ground* by actors in contexts of conflict or fragility, we can connect audiences with people who, given the chance and some support, are taking it, running with it, trying to make that difference in their own lives and those of the embattled, marginalised communities in which they survive. It is propaganda of the deed, but with swords beaten to ploughshares. Outcomes may be uncertain, success precarious, failure always threatening. But for wider audiences it's the slog, the do-learn-do, the trial-and-error, the little wins and setbacks, the up-and-down-and-up-again of human effort—that gritty reality with which they themselves are vitally connected—which is the real stuff of hope and influence.

It is available to us across a universe of aid and development, and through the flexibility of resilience-based interventions. Better yet, it means we need no longer tell young people that the only reason we are doing this is because they might be a security threat. No, we are doing it because they deserve our support. Because we need them to succeed. Because that, in its own right, is work worth doing.