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Peace Building and its Components – the State of the Art

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How has the peace building agenda evolved over the past two decades, and how does this affect the current international engagement in Afghanistan? And, how does the Afghan experience affect the larger peace building agenda? Rather than how Afghanistan fares today and in the years ahead, which will be capably discussed later during this seminar, this paper will pin down some of the larger implications for the peace building agenda. In the following three things will be dealt with: 1) Peace building and its evolution; 2) Outline of the 'conflictual' peace process of post-2001 Afghanistan; 3) The current state of peace building in three sectors: political; developmental and security.

Peace Building – the Broad View

The term was originally introduced in 1992 by the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his Agenda for Peace.¹ It was developed as a contrast to peacemaking, peacekeeping and preventative diplomacy. Hence, it was restricted to measures taken in the aftermath of conflict. Rather than starting out with a fundamental analysis of the problem at hand – the conflict dynamics - Boutros-Ghali's report was established as an inventory of existing international resources, and came to include any type of activity aimed at restoring normalcy in war-affected societies. The concept that followed was a broad one, yet it was too vague to offer much in terms of guidance for the implementation of complex operations in volatile environments.²

¹ Boutros Boutros-Ghali. 1992. 'An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping'. A/47/277-2/24111. New York: United Nations.

² Elizabeth M. Cousens. 2001. 'Introduction'. In *Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies*, edited by E.M. Cousens and C. Kumar. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner; Winrich Kühne. 1996. 'Winning the Peace: Concept and Lessons Learned of Post-Conflict Peacebuilding'. Ebenhausen, Germany: Research Institute for International Affairs.

Towards the late 1990s, the peace building concept had matured, drawing on experience from a number of international peace building engagements. There was a relative consensus as to what peace building entailed, although the definition that followed was not necessarily less vague than that of the early years of the decade. The main dimensions of the peace building concept, as it stood at the turn of the millennium, were:³

1. *The sectoral dimension:* Peace building must address issues within various domains, ultimately aiming at a fundamental transformation of society and its institutions. It became commonplace to operate with a threefold division between security, development and politics. It is the same division that we recognize in more recent concepts – such as ‘3D’ (development, diplomacy, defence). Yet, as we see in Afghanistan, there has been an ever increasing emphasis on the need to see these as closely intertwined, rather than separate, spheres.
2. *The temporal dimension:* Peace building may take place before, during or after the conflict, and is an enduring process rather than a time-limited event. Moving beyond Boutros-Ghali’s limitation to post-conflict contexts only, this also implies an ability to tackle both the full-scale setbacks and the low-intensity conflicts that follow many settlements. In response, interventions need to be sufficiently robust to be sustainable despite shocks and setbacks. In Afghanistan, this has been taken further, as heavy – and in part offensive – military operations has come to be seen as an essential part of the peace building toolbox.
3. *From activity to outcomes:* Peace building is the consequence of an activity (an outcome or process), not the activity in itself. All activities in conflict settings have the potential both to “do harm” and to “do good”, and it is only through appropriate and ongoing analysis of the situation and the likely effects of an intervention that the chances of “doing

³ I here draw on: Jonathan Goodhand and David Hulme. 1999. ‘From Wars to Complex Political Emergencies: Understanding Conflict and Peace-Building in the New World Disorder’. *Third World Quarterly* 20, 1, pp. 13-26.

harm” can be minimised.⁴ If we take stock today, looking at Afghanistan, it still seems the case that what is actually being done – and what is not – is to a large degree a reflection of what international capacities exist. The scarcity of resources to assist the building of a civil police force is only one example.

4. *Indigenous capacities:* Societies in conflict possess their own ‘capacities for peace’ – individuals, networks, organisations, values and norms – that are the key resources for peace building. Furthermore, under the right conditions, even apparently destructive forces may be converted into constructive forces for peace. This insight is reflected in terms we now hear a lot, such as ownership, capacity building. Yet, it seems that the higher the stakes for external actors – again Afghanistan is a case in point – the higher are the obstacles to local ownership. And, capacity building seems to be the forgotten stepchild: not only has it proven virtually impossible to invest in it during conflict (preparing for peace, when it breaks), in the Afghan case it has not been until recently that serious efforts at developing new competence for running the state have started getting off the ground.

What emerged, already by the late 1990s, is that the core focus of peace building is the building of workable political solutions. Peace building is first and foremost about defusing violent conflict or preventing its re-emergence, in large measure by building capacities and institutions for nonviolent conflict resolution. It follows that the issues that constitute the core of peace building are fundamentally political. That means that efforts that aim at contributing to peace are also potentially contentious – since the aim is to modify the ways in which politics is conducted – and will easily be understood by conflicting parties as altering the power relations that exist between them, and hence their opportunities for future influence. The peace building agenda is political at heart.

⁴ Mary B Anderson. 1999. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - or War*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Afghanistan – Conflictual Peace Building

The peace processes of the 1990s were basically of three kinds.⁵ There were the civil wars that ended in a compromise (this includes most of the wars in Central America and Southern Africa, as well as in Cambodia, Bosnia, and Sierra Leone).⁶ Secondly, there were those situations where new states that emerged as a result of the conflict (Kosovo, East Timor). Finally, there were the situations with weak or failed states – where the (re)constitution of national authority is the critical issue (Somalia in 1993). Afghanistan, while closest to the last category, the Somalian failed state, does not fit entirely into any of the categories. There was no compromise, as the loosing party – the Taliban – was left out of the settlement; it is certainly not a new state; and it is not really a failed state either, despite its severely eroded institutions.

The current 'peace process' in Afghanistan started with the 2001 intervention. The intervention was led by the US, but on the ground, it was mainly fought by proxy – a contrast to the main strategy later followed in Iraq. The main objective was to fight terrorism. The rebuilding of a stable Afghan state is a means to this end. A central challenge is that fighting terrorism and building a state may at times be contradictory aims. This is the starting point for what elsewhere – in work with the Norwegian colleagues Arne Strand and Astri Suhrke, has been defined as 'conflictual peace building':

- The defeated party – the Taliban or any associated force – is not included. Only the victors are party to the peace. Additionally, the winning party was an amalgamation of groups that have a history of fighting each other, fissures run deep also amongst the victors.

⁵ Astri Suhrke, Kristian Berg Harpviken and Arne Strand 2002. 'After Bonn: Conflictual Peacebuilding'. *Third World Quarterly* 23, 4, pp. 875-91; Astri Suhrke, Kristian Berg Harpviken and Arne Strand. 2004. 'Conflictual Peacebuilding: Afghanistan Two Years after Bonn'. Report, 4. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.

⁶ A related starting point is when there has been a civil war that ended in total victory (Rwanda 1994). Also here, reintegration is the primary challenge, but here of the loosing party.

- The Bonn peace agreement outlines a time plan for a political process, but leaves unaddressed the central contentious issues, including the role of religion; the main mechanisms of power sharing (both between institutions at the central level, and between the central and the local levels), and, critically, the agreement is largely mute on disarmament and demobilisation.
- Key regional actors, including Pakistan, Iran, and Russia, which have all played major roles in Afghanistan's wars, are only partially committed to the process. In the following years, the relationships with neighbouring states are largely dealt with on a one-to-one basis. The security interests of the neighbour states vary widely, and fostering a regionally concerted approach is very difficult.
- Ultimately, the dominant role played by external actors – notably the US – in defining the terms of settlement and in selecting the key power holders, threatens the legitimacy of the agreement, both domestically and internationally.

This general context is the starting point for what has been referred to as 'conflictual peace building'. It does raise one basic question with regard to the unfolding peace process in Afghanistan. A lot of attention, understandably, has gone into discussing the rights and wrongs after 2001.⁷ But, the arguments laid out above leads to the conclusion that the main challenges that the Afghan government and its international allies are struggling with today were built into the structure of the 2001 settlement.

The Evolving Peace Building Agenda

So how does Afghanistan's process of conflictual peace building reflect back on the larger agenda? In the following, it will be sketched what probably are some of the main trends, as they relate to Afghanistan, using the distinction between the political, developmental and security spheres as entry point.

⁷ Ahmed Rashid. 2008. *Descent into Chaos: How the War against Islamic Extremism is Being Lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia*. London: Allen Lane.

Politics

The renewed emphasis on the role of a strong state is perhaps the clearest trend we can detect in the peace building discourse over the past decade. The 1990s were characterised by a good deal of scepticism towards the state and its merits, driven by a concern for human rights and political liberties. At present, state building is such a central element in the debate on peace building that, at times, the two terms seem to be synonymous. There is a clear link here to the renewed focus on the role of robust institutions in securing peace. A problem with the new emphasis on the state is that it tends to neglect the intertwined relationship between state and society, captured so nicely by Joel Migdal in the term 'state-in-society'.⁸ States can be robust only if they mirror the major forces in society, and if that mirroring is linked to an ability to constructively mediate between various loci of power. This is not necessarily an argument against strong states, but it does imply that states can only be constructively strong if they are solidly rooted in the societies they are to govern.

The state-optimistic view is often linked to a prominent role of external actors. Indeed, in Afghanistan and Iraq, international agents have been the main drivers of state building. Historically, for example in the European experience, state building has been characterised by deep conflicts and regular set-backs, but have been going on for centuries. In present day post-conflict contexts, we seem to expect that robust accountable states can be built overnight, implemented by external actors. Externally driven state building, however, is fraught with problems. The staunchest critiques contend that this is a new form of colonialism, an effort by privileged states to exert their control. Less radical is the view that externally driven state building breeds dependency, which in turn constrains the ability of the state to formulate and implement policy, and, even more seriously, undermines the accountability of governments towards their constituent populations.

⁸ Kjell Erling Kjellman and Kristian Berg Harpviken. forthcoming 2009. 'Civil Society and the State: An Embedded Approach to Peacebuilding'. In *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: Concepts, Cases and Lessons*, edited by T. Paffenholz. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

A related issue is the willingness to sacrifice post-conflict justice in the interest of stability. Undoubtedly, a growing international lobby, as well as a practice that has been codified, particularly in the aftermath of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process, has placed post-conflict justice firmly on the agenda. Yet, the early formulation in an Afghan context of a direct tension between security on the one hand, and holding perpetrators responsible for their previous crimes on the other, is remarkably clear. This is an ethical problem in that one of the alternatives is to reward former perpetrators to keep them in check, whereas others do not get a similar share of the 'spoils of peace'. It also affects the nature of peace itself, as former perpetrators may continue to apply violence for political means, not necessarily directly, but perhaps more effectively, by using their reputation and capacity to exert violence in order to make others comply.

Development

On the development side, we have seen that the so-called neo-liberal model – where the ideal is a light-weight state in charge of security, but otherwise manages a strong regulatory framework within which major welfare sectors, including health and infrastructure, are subcontracted to private businesses and NGOs. In this, there is an inherent tension, as neoliberal competitive processes tend to favour certain sectors or certain geographic areas at the cost of others.

There has also been a proliferation in the types of actors involved in development, particularly in post-conflict studies. We have new actors, not least in the form of commercial companies, and we have old actors which have expanded their mandates to encompass development, international military forces being the clearest example. This has triggered considerable debate, but the debate has been driven largely by international actors.

Meanwhile, the critical question is probably about the role of domestic actors, not the least that of the state. There is an increasingly variegated population of actors engaged in peace building, and their mandates are increasingly overlapping, all of which upsets the traditional division of labour, making coordination increasingly difficult. The ultimate question here is

who should be implementing development initiatives, and what this means for local ownership.

Finally, the undisputable realization that development and security are interconnected has been operationalised. Whereas in the past, a common assumption has been that a minimum of security is needed for development assistance to take effect, the trend of the day is to use development aid as a tool to foster security in areas with open, armed conflict. The effects on security are not well proven. Yet, we also know that when external assistance is pumped into conflict areas, it is not unlikely to exacerbate conflict. We also know that the ability to monitor the distribution, as well as the impact, of assistance, is much more limited in areas of conflict, which increases the likelihood of doing more harm than good. Finally, the impetus to provide as much aid as possible as quickly as possible also runs contrary to the objective of building local sustainable capacities.

Security

This brings us to the third and final sector, which is security. Here, the most conspicuous trend is the growing emphasis on the role of robust military force in order to achieve peace. Unlike the situation of the 1990s, the present day debate has little to say about the role of non-violent means of conflict resolution. Counterinsurgency operations, on the contrary, seem now to have become a central element in the repertoire of peace building. In countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, armed force is used actively to bring political processes forward. The threat of B52 bombers is present when political deals are being brokered. The elimination of particular individuals - based on intelligence that not infrequently proves to be faulty - is the order of the day.

The general strategy of robust peace enforcement operations requires military capacities of a scope which the international society currently finds it very difficult to mobilise. Also, engagements such as the one in Afghanistan carry a level of risk which in itself makes them highly contested within the public of sending countries, and this may in itself make it impossible to pursue a similar military strategy in new contexts. Many of the international soldiers find it difficult to identify themselves with

Afghan civilians, even if they have the best intentions, as the combination of cultural distance and security-driven suspicions makes everyday interaction difficult. In this situation, it gets hard to expose a fellow soldier to the risk of death in order to save the life of an Afghan, even if a central objective is the protection of civilians.

But this poses a fundamental dilemma for future interventions where protecting civilians is part of the rationale. As to Afghanistan, for example, it is commonly held that military force is necessary, but that alone it is not sufficient. Willing international forces are in scarce supply. The war is fought in a way that exposes civilian Afghans to risk, even though they should have been the ones to be protected. If an increasing faith in robust force is part of the evolving peace building agenda, this is a component that cannot be sustained without the building of new types of international capacities. Now, not everybody thinks that massive military force, as used in Afghanistan, has a net positive impact. But regardless of what one thinks of impact, the present day experience suggests that similar operations - for good reasons - may be difficult to get off the ground in the years ahead of us.

Conclusion

It is hard to pin down a moving target, which is what the peace building agenda is. Not only is it moving, it is also increasingly diversified, as the concept has become part of mainstream international politics, and has been appropriated by new types of actors, in different parts of the world, and to an increasingly variegated list of issues. Nonetheless, as a conclusion three main trends will be pointed at:

- Focus on a strong - at times centralistic - state, playing down the importance of rooting the state in indigenous civil society and building other forms of checks and balances. This entails a paradox, since it may easily lead to a weak - and, as a result, instinctively authoritarian - state.
- Development efforts streamlined to contribute to security by addressing the population's needs, seeking to build confidence in the state and its international backers. As of

now, the results seem to be mixed, and there is little evidence of impact.

- Robust military means are increasingly seen as important, but there is an unresolved tension between keeping risks to international soldiers low on the one hand, while avoiding civilian casualties and offering effective protection to members of the local population on the other hand. This tension poses a severe challenge to the future of humanitarian interventions, as it undermines their primary justification.

Looking Back