

International operations in post-conflict countries

# Building peace, states and hybrids

International missions that aim to support stability, peace- and state-building in crisis areas are often unsure of how to move forward. The idea is gaining ground that a 'revisioning' of such interventions is needed. Hybrid is the new buzzword.

International organizations are playing an ever-increasing role in processes of reconstruction, peace- and state-building following civil wars. These efforts have produced mixed results. The number of armed conflicts has fallen substantially since the end of the Cold War, partly as a result of UN peace missions. But the strength of these operations lies in terminating or mitigating the violence, while ambitions to achieve sustainable peace by introducing reforms often run aground. In many post-conflict countries, after peace operations come to an end, the risk of a crisis or a resumption of violence remains.

Over the past two decades, there have been important changes in the ideas about and practices of international involvement in states in crisis. Mandates and missions have been constantly reviewed, and international strategies have shifted from peacekeeping to peacebuilding to state-building. UN diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi has provided a good synthesis of this evolution: 'The concept of state-building is becoming more and more accepted within the international community and is actually far more apt as a description of exactly what it is that we should be trying to do in post-conflict countries – building effective systems and institutions of government'.

Reflecting this ambition, the new UN strategy document for peacebuilding, presented on 22 July 2009 by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, identifies a range of areas in which the international community should respond. These include addressing security priorities such as rebuilding the army and police, strengthening the rule of law, supporting political processes, building the civil sector, establishing tax and

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## summary

- In all international peace- and state-building interventions, a key issue is the problematic relationship between the models, strategies and assumptions of international policies, and the local political and social realities.
- Ideas on how to move forward range from complete withdrawal to stepping up international efforts with increased resources, or 'revisioning' to find a new balance between existing strategies and local realities.
- Local social and political life is much more complex than is often believed, requiring fresh ideas about the involvement, objectives and room for manoeuvre of international actors.
- International actors need not abandon their 'liberal' agendas, but should realize that the outcome of their interventions will be a hybrid order that may differ from the Western ideal.

public administration systems, and promoting stronger economies through job creation.

International state-building strategies are based on the premise that without state institutions it is not possible to organize social reconstruction, deliver services, develop economically and establish the rule of law. But in reality, building states is a Herculean task and, according to some analysts, an impossible mission. In the fast-growing literature, the practices and the future of these operations are hotly debated. A key issue is the problematic relationship between the models, strategies and underlying assumptions of international policies on the one hand, and the local political and social realities and processes in crisis areas on the other.

## Liberal peace

A growing criticism of the dominant peace- and state-building paradigms is that they do not take into account the political



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*Men of peace? US marines praying before the invasion of Iraq, March 2003.*

realities in countries that are the object of interventions. In the most complex cases, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq, state-centred analyses are flawed because the local political orders differ fundamentally from the Western ideal type of states. In a recent article, Volker Boege and colleagues at the Berghof Research Center, Berlin, challenge the mainstream discourses on state failure, arguing that 'instead of adopting the narrow state-centric view that is currently guiding the fragile state discourse, we suggest going beyond it and trying to comprehend what truly constitutes political order in those regions of apparent fragility'. They propose using the concept of hybrid political order to emphasize that there are 'diverse and competing claims to power and logics of order that overlap and intertwine'.

This proposal ties in with the growing recognition that the use of violence and the nature of war have to be understood in their specific contexts. Signing peace agreements and building state institutions do not necessarily end violence and war. This is generally recognized for cases like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where (regional) subsystems of power are still strong and a situation of 'neither war nor peace' exists. It is, however, also true for cases regarded as success stories of peacebuilding, like Mozambique and El Salvador. In those cases, new forms of violence that came up after the civil wars had come to an end, according to Dennis Rodgers of the University of Manchester, UK, can 'in many ways be seen as representing a structural continuation of past political conflicts'. Thus, the current

international prescriptions for 'liberal peace' are not necessarily the answer to local wars and endemic violence.

The idea of the 'liberal peace' has informed most peace operations so far. But its assumptions – that the best way to build peace is by introducing a model of free markets and liberal democracy – are problematic for at least two reasons. First, as Håvard Hegre of the University of Oslo has argued, the idea originated in the developed world, where economic development was a crucial precondition for the liberal peace. Second, due to the built-in tensions of state-building and democratization.

The political and economic reforms that are considered to make peace sustainable can themselves generate new social tensions, thus producing a 'liberal peacebuilding paradox'. Oliver Richmond of the University of St Andrews in Scotland has criticized this 'belief' in a liberal peace. He argues that there is a lack of involvement of local stakeholders in the discussion of what peace entails in different contexts. Most peace operations are rather top-down undertakings in which 'peace that is implemented is merely a product of multiple intervener objectives with perhaps only a marginal renegotiation with its local recipients'.

### **'Revisoning' peace- and state-building**

The problems encountered in international peace operations have led to a wide range of ideas on 'how to move forward'. The most radical option is that external actors should keep



their hands off violent conflicts and let local actors have their own wars or create their own peace and political order. These arguments refer to the role of war in state-building and the strength of a victor's peace as opposed to a negotiated peace. At the other extreme is the idea that the current model is right, but that more resources or more 'local ownership' are needed for successful implementation. This is the case, for instance, in some of the explanations of why things went wrong in Afghanistan after 2001. President Barack Obama's decision to increase the number of US troops in Afghanistan is in line with the idea of the need for more resources.

However, a diverse but growing group of scholars is engaged in 'revisiting' to try to find a new balance between the assumptions and strategies of current international peace- and state-building interventions, and the local realities. In these discussions, two kinds of revisiting can be distinguished. The first approach takes into account the problems and perils of current strategies, and concludes that this is as good as it gets. This might be called 'good enough peace- and state-building'. The second approach searches for more emancipatory or participatory perspectives, and explicitly questions the assumptions of the interveners.

#### **'Good enough peace- and state-building'**

The 'good enough' approach sees peace- and state-building as an elite-driven process between international actors and

#### **From peacekeeping, to peacebuilding to state-building**

Since the early 1990s, peacekeeping operations originally designed for short-term assignments (such as ceasefire verification) have become longer-term and more ambitious peacebuilding missions. Staff became involved in implementing peace agreements, processes of demilitarization and political reform. Multi-dimensional peacekeeping had already entered the field of state-building, since it sought to contribute to the transformation of state functions (such as the monopoly on violence) and political arrangements (electoral democracy). But since the late 1990s, even more comprehensive rebuilding of state institutions and structures is being called for, leading to a focus on state structures, implying longer time frames and deeper international involvement.

Bilateral donors and NGOs are also active in (post-)conflict zones, thus widening the range of international actors involved in peace operations. Today, a simplified model of international intervention would start with a military-civilian peace operation to stabilize the situation, continue with a peacebuilding plan and end with a state-building process. In this continuum, leadership would move from external actors (UN troops, international or regional powers) to local actors (government and its institutions).

But the idea that peace- and state-building are complementary has been criticized. While one defining feature of peacebuilding is the ending of armed conflict, state-building is often a conflictive and even violent process. This has been the reason to propose downscaling the level of ambition of international operations to the task of creating 'mechanisms that keep limits on the use of violence'.

local elites. In most cases, these negotiations lead to a hybrid political order. The core argument, as David Roberts of the University of Ulster puts it, is that external actors 'cannot substitute for or replace political behaviours derived from needs, experiences, histories and evolutions quite different from those from which Western democracy is derived'.

However, Michael Barnett and Christoph Zürcher argue that the interests of local and external actors are fundamentally opposed. Using game theory, and assuming that local and international actors interact strategically with each other, they create a 'peacebuilding game' that can lead to different outcomes. In their view, compromised peacebuilding, which strikes a balance between the interests of the various actors, is the most likely outcome of this process.

This compromise means that the liberal political ideals of external agents are not fully realized. Instead of transferring new institutions, these agents 'mainly transfer the ceremonies and symbols of the liberal-democratic state' – the end product being a hybrid political arrangement. The assumption of this theory – that local society is homogeneous and that local actors have similar interests – is problematic, however. One of the striking characteristics of war-torn societies like Afghanistan, Guatemala or Algeria is the wide diversity of affinities and interests of different national sectors. Interestingly, Barnett and Zürcher argue that these limits of state-building and democratization 'may not be such a terrible result'. The end result may still be that local political mechanisms are created that do not fully resemble the ideal of the liberal state, but that promote more accountability and 'compel individuals to consult, deliberate, and negotiate with one another as they decide what they consider to be the good life'.

In sum, international actors should 'be real' and realize that this is as good as it gets. The policy implications of this option are that international actors do not necessarily have to change their 'liberal' agendas, but should accept that the outcome of their interventions will be a hybrid form that is different from their ideal.

#### **Hybrid orders**

The second revisiting approach is more critical of the liberal peacebuilding project, since it pleads for new international strategies that focus on local realities, local institutions, local knowledge and local agency. In a recent article in *The Broker*, Seth Kaplan argued that international actors should emphasize 'facilitating local processes, leveraging local capacities and complementing local actions so that local citizens can create governance systems appropriate to their surroundings'. Other authors have called for a revision of the practices and assumptions of international interventions, and for a more emancipatory model. Their criticisms focus on:

- The neocolonial role played by international actors, particularly in the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, where state-building followed international military actions.
- The problem that the global economic system exacerbates the subordinate status of war-torn societies. The lack of



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A hybrid kind of peace. NATO military officials and Afghan elders discuss the security situation in Kandahar, Afghanistan, November 2007.

integration of ‘fragile states’ into the global financial, economic and trade systems makes it impossible for them to fulfil the tasks specified by the international community.

- The failure to recognize the history, culture, ownership and forms of community organization. State-building should not (only) focus on central state institutions, but promote local political arrangements and social networks that can provide protection and services.
- The fact that liberalism is not the only normative construct that informs local peacebuilding and thus seeks to raze the ideological walls that separate liberal peacebuilders from their subjects.
- The weakness of state boundaries and structures, plus the myth of enduring state sovereignty. The international system has difficulties accepting the reality of statelessness and blocks possible new departures in state formation.

These critiques of ‘top-down’ models take issue with the liberal assumptions of international interventions because they are not grounded in local political and social realities. A change of strategy may require different concepts.

The pros and cons of using the concept of ‘hybrid political order’ as a possible alternative to the concept of state weakness is discussed in a recent publication by the Berghof Research Center. A hybrid entity may have pre-eminent customary law, traditional societal structures and traditional authorities. Informal indigenous societal institutions with their own logic and rules may function ‘within the (incomplete) state structures’, as Volker Boege and colleagues explain. Most contributors to this discussion agree that the concept can be helpful, although the implications for the strategy of international actors are unclear.

Oliver Richmond recently observed that it is ‘through the antagonistic political contact between liberal peacebuilding and local dynamics, not the virtual states and dependencies that have sprung up through neoliberal forms of state-

building, that a more sustainable, everyday peace, developing more locally resonant forms of peacebuilding, has actually emerged’. It is in and through this encounter that a ‘post-liberal peace’ can emerge, one that is ‘less encumbered by idealistic prescriptions’. The outcome will therefore not be a copy of a blueprint, but rather a ‘local-liberal form of hybridity’.

## Negotiation

This emphasis on the local grounding of external interventions, processes of negotiation between local and external actors, and the creation of hybrid order, raises a series of new questions. To what extent are hybrid political orders able to build peace? Should international actors let local actors develop their own arrangements, even when these models resemble the political systems that previously gave rise to war and crisis? Should external actors seek to rebuild or influence hybrid political orders? And what room for manoeuvre do international actors have in this regard? And, isn’t there a risk of relativism by assuming that non-liberal orders are for the benefit of the local citizens?

These questions can, however, not hide the fact that the nature of local social and political life is much more complex than the templates and prescriptions of current international interveners seem to assume. This complexity emphasizes the need for fresh ideas about the involvement, strategic objectives and room for manoeuvre of international actors in such environments. But while mainstream peacebuilding theory has to face the problem of promoting a model that does not work in many contexts, critiques of the liberal peace critiques should not romanticize the hybrid orders in ‘the South’. ■

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