



The Changing Terrain For Peacebuilding

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I. Overview

1. This briefing note is built around two well-known maxims: The first is that generals always prepare to fight the last war. Peacebuilding must not only be able to address the lessons of the past decade but also to respond to a wide array of new challenges. The second is that every problem is an opportunity. The United Nations is privileged to play a role in supporting people who strive for peace. As much as adapting to the shifting terrain outlined here will be difficult, if it can do so, the United Nations has an opportunity to make a signal contribution.
2. The note describes a number of changes in the nature of conflict itself (Context); changes in the expectations of host countries and their relationship to the United Nations and peacebuilding (Demand); and changes in the international aid architecture and what it offers to the United Nations (Supply). For each of these categories it outlines how peacebuilding may need to adapt.

II. Context – changes in the nature of peace and conflictⁱ

3. After declining for much of the 1990s and early 2000s, major civil wars have almost tripled from four in 2007 to eleven in 2014.ⁱⁱ Roughly two-thirds of United Nations peacekeepers and almost 90% of its personnel in Special Political Missions are working in and on countries experiencing high-intensity conflict. This means that peacebuilding is being asked to begin in situations where there is barely a peace. The perceived risk of violence against UN staff is also leading to a situation where the UN is increasingly “hunkered-down” and less able to implement its mandates.
4. This violence is not limited to combatants or peacekeepers. Rebel groups have become responsible for the majority of civilian deaths – and state forces for the majority of sexual violence. The number of displaced people (at minimum 53.2 million at the end of 2014) coupled with the average length of displacement in conflict-affected countries reaching almost 20 years, is a grave concern.

Displacement from Iraq and Syria, for example, threatens states that are recovering from conflict (Lebanon), places pressure on stable states (Jordan, Turkey) and will present long-term difficulties for building an inclusive peace in Syria.

5. Compounding this surge in violence are indications that conflicts themselves are becoming more intractable and less conducive to traditional political settlements. We see four main drivers of this change:
 - a. Rebel access to illicit markets makes wars more intractable. Access to contraband lowers their incentives to enter into peace agreements. With transnational arms supply lines, communications technologies, and illicit finance streams it is easier than ever for a potentially violent group to obtain guns, cash, and recruits.
 - b. Illicit markets and organized crime also make post-conflict states less stable. They can corrupt state and security institutions and empower non-state actors. During transitions powerful informal wartime elites, relying on ill-gotten wealth, wartime networks and coercive power, can extend their influence over formal state institutions, especially during the political and economic liberalization processes that tend to accompany a peace agreement.
 - c. The increasing internationalization of civil wars, where other states are intervening militarily on one or both sides, tends to make them deadlier and longer.
 - d. The growing presence of “maximalist groups”, in particular extremist Islamist groups, in UN mission areas, that have limited or no interest in political settlement.
6. The increasing intractability of conflicts is linked to a broader crisis of legitimacy for states. The last few years have seen a number of countries falter – from Libya to Mali to South Sudan. Challenges to state authority, with varying degrees of intensity and success, are continuing, particularly in the Middle East and in post-colonial African states. It appears that people are less and less willing to tolerate enduring inequality and repression, or more generally, non-performing state institutions across the globe. Yet there are few models emerging that can offer states assistance in engaging with these challenges to their legitimacy, and limited work around the role of international actors in supporting legitimacy.
7. There are also a wide array of new, poorly understood issues that will further challenge countries emerging from conflict, including:
 - a. The effects of climate change and the increased risk of natural disasters that can overwhelm struggling states;
 - b. The risks of infectious epidemics, which as we have seen with Ebola, can easily push weak public health infrastructures to the breaking point.
 - c. Rapid urbanization, and the problems of services and increased risks of disasters, disease and crime that accompany urban sprawl
 - d. Cyber-insecurity.
8. This is a difficult combination for peacebuilding. To be effective over the medium-term, it suggests that peacebuilding actors should:
 - a. **Engage with the question of legitimacy:** Although many international actors have adopted definitions of peacebuilding or statebuilding that include legitimacy,ⁱⁱⁱ there is a serious need to understand both how international assistance can support legitimacy, and how governments can build their own legitimacy. Political settlements, and basic security – the work of the UN’s peace operations – are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the strength of legitimacy needed to buttress a sustainable peace.
 - b. **Provide long-term support:** Building resilient institutions that can deliver a stable peace is difficult and takes, at the bare minimum, decades.^{iv} In the face of an array of threats, coupled with a baseline struggle for legitimacy, states will need more than short-term

international support to remain peaceful.

- c. **Develop new tools for new threats:** As an example, there is a near-total absence of guidance or instruments for engaging with municipalities in peacebuilding processes. 15 of the top 30 most rapidly urbanizing countries either host, or have hosted peacekeeping operations.^v These cities will both be at the greatest risk in struggling to cope with and provide services to a huge influx of citizens, manage organized crime, epidemics, or natural disasters. For each new threat, peacebuilding will have to develop tools to understand the risks, and support national efforts to manage and mitigate threats.

III. Demand – changes in the expectations of countries recovering from conflict

9. The work of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and the g7+, through the New Deal, has begun to change the nature of the relationship between suppliers of aid and technical expertise and recipients. The New Deal establishes Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals; lays out a pathway for implementing these (FOCUS); and calls for greater transparency, better risk-sharing, the use of country systems, timely and predictable aid, and investment in national capacities and institutions (TRUST).
10. Early research has suggested that in Somalia, for example, the “New Deal Compact...[has] enabled a paradigm shift in international development rhetoric...And some actors...have introduced new, risk tolerant practices”.^{vi} The work on Somalia also highlights tensions between linear technical processes, and non-linear political processes and between realigning external priorities to national objectives and maintaining existing commitments. There is not a sufficient body of work on other countries’ experiences, however, to draw many firm conclusions.
11. What does emerge from conversations with g7+ countries, and with donors, is a significant tension between the expectations that the New Deal represents, and the level of accountability that is increasingly demanded by parliaments in donor nations. This does not appear to be a problem of corruption, or leakages, but rather a problem of differing expectations and of unrealistic domestic donor budgetary time-frames colliding with the slow and uncertain realities of peacebuilding.
12. There is also a broader tension highlighted by a number of countries on the peacebuilding agenda declaring the UN’s Special or Executive Representatives *persona non grata*. As peacebuilding becomes the primary tool for UN engagement, the absence of a clear normative basis makes it difficult for countries to accept when the UN takes a normative position. This is in part a gross oversimplification of what are always complicated situations. The reality is that peacebuilding is more a form of engagement that lacks clear principles, than a model that has a clear link to the Charter, or to any other UN standards. And in the absence of these principles, managing the tension between the intrusive nature of international assistance, and the national urge to sovereignty becomes more difficult than it needs to be.
13. To manage these tensions, peacebuilding needs to find ways to:
- a. **Establish its normative basis and boundaries:** The United Nations remains a normative institution, grounded in the Charter. In certain areas of its assistance, such as its work on democratic governance, it has managed to articulate where it stands and why. At some point, peacebuilding in the United Nations must clearly articulate its normative basis, in order to enter into partnerships with clear expectations on all sides.
 - b. **Find an operational balance between accountability and partnership:** The opportunities for the Peacebuilding Commission to

develop instruments of longer-term mutual may be critical here. The work of the Security Council focuses primarily on the political settlements and provision of basic security through Peace Operations. Delivering institution-building support in challenging periods will require understanding how and when to support a government in crisis, and when – if ever – to walk away.

IV. Supply – changes in the provision of assistance

14. In countries affected by conflict, the sources and types of assistance on offer are rapidly changing. From the potential BRICS Bank, to the reality of Chinese and Indian support, through the emergence of the Gulf as a formal donor and an influential actor, through the rise of Turkey and Indonesia and Singapore, to the increasing role of remittances and migration – the array of options facing a country emerging from conflict is broad. The potential for telecommunications license revenue has led to a generation of global companies willing to move rapidly to invest in countries that open up. And, as highlighted earlier, both formal corporate and illicit actors are always eager to exploit natural resources.
15. Three particular factors matter to peacebuilding:
 - a. **New sources of assistance:** whether corporate, diaspora, or new countries that do not operate within existing donor frameworks, there is a wide array of resources available, with limits and conditions of their own that often differ from traditional donors, to a government seeking project financing.
 - b. **New models of assistance:** It is not just about the money. Regional countries are engaging in new forms of partnership – such as the IGAD initiative to support South Sudan, or the Indian civil service partnerships with Afghanistan;
 - c. **Limited resources from traditional donors:** The global financial crisis has significantly shrunk the pool of resources available from major western
16. A further factor that matters is the context-specific legitimacy of certain actors. In some countries, the United States and the United Nations might be seen as partners in a global imperial project; in others, the United Nations might be perceived as a bulwark against encroaching regional powers. The welcome given to Kenya in South Sudan is quite different from the experience of Kenya in Somalia.
17. Given these three factors, and the reality that perceptions of legitimacy evolve, peacebuilding needs to **develop frameworks that are truly open to global participation**. Traditional donor groupings, such as the OECD, may have much to offer in terms of experience. But effective peacebuilding needs to be able to build coalitions of the able – those with the available resources, the right types of assistance demanded by the country, and the legitimacy to actually operate.

donors. Japan, for example, has seen its bilateral budgetary allocation for development drop in half since 1997. At the same time, a decade of unsuccessful US-led intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan has also produced peace- and statebuilding fatigue. It is simply unclear what resources will be available to peacebuilders from traditional donors.

V. Conclusions

18. The threats are new and evolving. The demands have changed, and will continue to change. The actors are different in each context. Against this fluid backdrop, a model of peacebuilding must emerge that is:
- a. Supportive of national institutions and priorities
 - b. Adaptable to its specific context, and to new challenges
 - c. Long-term
 - d. Mutual, and capable of enabling accountability in all directions
 - e. Open to new actors and new contributions
 - f. Normative, with confidence in itself.
19. All these elements work together. But arguably the first among equals is the need to be long-term. For peacebuilding actors and the peacebuilding architecture of the United Nations to stay engaged with countries over the duration of their need, peacebuilding will have to encompass these six attributes.
20. Ultimately, the only exit strategy for international assistance remains a robust peace, where national institutions deliver national priorities. Therefore, the question may simply be: how will peacebuilding evolve? And how can the United Nations ensure that this happens quickly, and yet sustainably, enough?

ENDNOTES

- i This section draws extensively on UNU-CPR's paper for the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, "Major Recent Trends in Violent Conflict".
- ii It is too early to determine if this is a medium-term trend, or a short-term blip.
- iii See Chandran and Jones, "From Fragility to Resilience." Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009; Whaites, A. "[Dfid SB paper].
- iv See Chandran and Jones, "From Fragility to Resilience." Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009; Alan Whaites, "States in Development: Understanding Statebuilding" Dfid, London, 2008.
- v Haiti, Guinea, DRC, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Guinea-Bissau, Solomon Islands, Ethiopia, Angola, South Sudan, Mali, Eritrea, Burundi, and Rwanda form 15 of the top 30 countries with the most rapid rates of urbanization between 2010-2015. Data from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2014). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, CD-ROM Edition.
- vi Hearn and Zimmerman, "A New Deal for Somalia: The Somali Compact and its Implications for Peacebuilding." Center on International Cooperation, New York, July, 2014. See also Hughes et al, "Implementing the New Deal for Fragile States." The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., July 2014.