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Peacebuilding in Crisis? Experience and New Perspectives

Abstract

The end of the Cold War was the starting point of renewed visions for a worldwide peace finding their expression in the Agenda for Peace (Boutros-Ghali) and other documents dedicated to the idea of creating a new world order. The 1990s and 2000s saw an enormous, hitherto unknown, engagement in international peace missions, predominantly led by the United Nations, whose mandates were more and more extended to implement societal and political transformations in post-conflict societies. However, in many cases these missions and other to peacebuilding related programmes did not meet the high expectations and did not acquire a sufficient legitimacy on the local level. This failure raised critical questions on the conceptual foundations, especially on the liberal blueprints, of peacebuilding practices. The international symposium "Peacebuilding in Crisis? Experience and New Perspectives" analyzes the international state of the art of peacebuilding processes and discusses innovative approaches opening up new research perspectives on questions of building sustainable peace orders. Finally, it asks for the consequences that have to be drawn for various fields of international peace policies.

Conference Outline and Key Questions

The crisis of peacebuilding involves at least three different but inter-related dimensions: At the conceptual-analytical level, scholars are questioning the rational of the concept as such and its underlying theoretical assumptions, in particular regarding to the assumed causal links between peace, democracy/democratization and socio-economic development ("do all good things really go together?"). Furthermore, the predominant peacebuilding paradigms are perceived as social engineering operations "from above" aiming at a substantial transformation of statehood and society. They create new power hierarchies with a particular "culture of intervention" that finally may even contradict the objective of stabilizing countries, ending violence, and building sustainable peace. From a normative point of view, voices, in particular from the Global South, are increasingly critical about the intervention of external "peacebuilders" trying to impose their norms with more or less paternalistic attitudes. Since they often lack a sufficient sensitivity for the local power structures and capacities for traditional or indigenous inspired potentials of conflict resolution und peacebuilding, they can only gain a limited amount of legitimacy and provoke at times even various forms of resistance to the "interveners" and their Western liberal traditions and values ("liberal peace"). From a political-operational perspective, critical questions are raised about the effectiveness of peacebuilding operations and the necessity to change and adapt the

methods and instruments of international activities ("lessons learned"-debate). The prospects of limited "success" may have also a negative influence on the homeland discourses on mobilizing political awareness and resources for such peacebuilding undertakings. Furthermore, the multi-level architecture of peacebuilding causes severe problems of coordination resulting from the different strategies, priorities and interests of external actors. A fundamental issue is the question of so-called "local ownership", how to achieve a relational approach between external and local actors and to embed civil conflict resolution and peacebuilding into the everyday social practices.

Thus, at the centre of all dimensions seem to be the thinking, perception and understanding of the complex interrelationships between the external peacebuilders (states, international organizations and NGOs) and various types local actors, power groups, clans, state and community-based peace initiatives etc. and the need to develop a more society-focused approach on peacebuilding.

Against this background, the objective of the Symposium is two-fold: Firstly, it shall analyse the causes of the alleged crisis of (international) peacebuilding regarding both theoretical and empirical aspects. Second, the participants are encouraged to think about alternative methods and approaches of promoting peace processes in war-torn societies and new ways of reframing peacebuilding. Accordingly, the Symposium is subdivided into four sections. In each section, we would like to debate a number of key questions and concerns. Speakers and participants are invited to refer to some of these issues and, of course, add other points.

Section 1: Peacebuilding Paradigms Revisited

In this section, the aim is to deconstruct the notion of peacebuilding as well as to discuss and assess the critiques of the concept from various perspectives (i.e. liberal/post-liberal peace theory, post-colonial studies, and gender theory).

Key questions: What are the underlying normative, political as well as practical implications of the concept of peacebuilding? What are the main shortcomings of the concept from a theoretical point of view? Is peacebuilding inherently a "(neo-)liberal" Western project? Is there one (hegemonic) peacebuilding paradigm? Where can we find different strands of thinking? How is peacebuilding related to statebuilding? What is the role of power in peacebuilding?

Section 2: Peacebuilding in Practice: Successes, Failures & Unintended Consequences

In this section, the focus will be on practical experiences made during the past two decades in peacebuilding activities. By addressing conventional peacebuilding issues such as democratization, transitional justice, security sector and rule of law as well as socio-economic questions, the speakers are asked to generalize the most important lessons learned, to highlight crucial factors for success and failure as well as to address typical unintended consequences of international involvement.

Key questions: To what extend does the over-all peacebuilding framework affect the various policy areas? How did international policies change in the past two decades and what are

key conclusions to be drawn from the experience? What are the achievements, constraints and limitations of external peacebuilding? What are factors of success and failure at various policy-making levels? What are typical unintended effects and how do external and local actors respond to them? What does the past experience tell us about the relationship between external and local actors?

Section 3: Alternative Approaches and Paths to Peacebuilding

In this section, the Conference will concentrate on aspects often neglected by international peacebuilding and on alternative approaches to mainstream top-down peacebuilding. In this regard, the so-called "local turn" of the peacebuilding debate is of key interest. The presentations therefore address the role, the involvement and the limitations of the "local" as well as questions of hybridity and informal ways of peacebuilding.

Key questions: What does the "local turn" imply for the concept of peacebuilding? Who are the "locals" and how are they related to "external" actors? When and how do external actors become "localized" and what may follow from this? What are appropriate methods and means to involve local actors and structures more into peacebuilding processes? What are the chances and limitations of bottom-up peacebuilding, hybrid institutions and informal ways of governance?

Section 4: The Way Forward: How to Reframe Peacebuilding

In the final section, we would like to conclude the Conference by looking ahead: What are the main issues to define a future framework for peacebuilding – conceptually as well as empirically? In the roundtable discussion the following issues and questions should be addressed: Does peacebuilding as a policy concept still make sense? And if so, how does it need to be reframed or re-conceptualized? Is it about new concepts (e.g. post-liberal peace?) or more about improving policies and strategies? What are the key issues we should look at for future research on post-conflict peace processes? To what extend do these academic debates relate to peacebuilding policies? What are the options left to external peacebuilding? What are perspectives for global and European peacebuilding? What are the future roles of the United Nations and the European Union? What does the debate on peacebuilding generally imply for reforms in the international system? How should a "new agenda" for peacebuilding look like?