

CICR EXPERTS RETREAT

Spring 2011

OVERVIEW

In March 2011, the Center for International Conflict Resolution (CICR) at Columbia University, with the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, brought together forty leading academics and practitioners to reflect upon the changing nature of conflict and the strategic areas where more research on international responses to conflict are needed. The two-day Experts Retreat was an opportunity for participants to analyze the international community's engagement in fragile states, and to deliberate on potential strategies for improving the coordination of international actors, drawing upon the ideas and insights of those present. CICR would like to sincerely thank all participants¹ for their active engagement and generous contributions to the discussion.



The Evolution of Conflict and its Implications for Peacemaking Summary, Spring 2011

Rapporteur, Josie Lianna Kaye²

Conflict in the 21st Century: An Era of Increasing Complexity?

The nature and causes of conflict underwent a profound transformation during the first decade of the 21st century. In the post-Cold War era, the risk of a major interstate clash receded significantly, leading to a decline in the overall number of conflicts, especially those of high intensity³. Since 1945 the world has not experienced one full-scale war involving the major powers; wars of de-colonization are almost non-existent and wars between proxies, so common during the Cold War, have become few and far between.

This assertion is largely supported by the latest figures from the Human Security Report⁴: the number of civil wars with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths has decreased by 78% since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, international wars, including wars of national liberation have decreased by around 80% since the 1950s. While interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq are both international and deadly, they are now the exception, rather than the norm. The decline is attributed in part to increased trade and interdependence, rising incomes,

and the belief that the growth of inclusive democracies has led to a decrease in violence, both within and between states⁵.

While conflict may be in decline, it is far from obsolete; the period between 2003 and 2008 saw a 25 per cent increase in conflicts, most of them intrastate and low in intensity⁶, but diverse in form and impact. Insurgencies in Southern Thailand and the Philippines, for example, undermine the authority of state institutions and create hardship for local populations, but they do not represent an immediate

“If managed carefully, the democratization process can help balance and integrate centrifugal forces into a shared vision for the nation”.

-Ghassan Salamé

existential threat. The same cannot be said of the situations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan or Yemen, where sub-state conflicts have caused immense suffering and pose a more fundamental challenge to state institutions and to the stability of neighboring states. So far, all these conflicts have defied extensive efforts at sustainable settlement.

Recent major international interventions, whether under the United Nations (UN) flag in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or under the NATO flag in Afghanistan or Libya, are faltering, raising doubts about the effectiveness of the conflict-

management toolbox deployed by the international community. Events unfolding in the context of the Arab Spring, furthermore, pose significant challenges for the field of mediation specifically, and the

international community more broadly. As Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Director of CICR highlighted, “traditional diplomatic strategies, led by states and in some circumstances reflected through the UN, tend to be dominated by the perspectives and preferences of the major powers, several of which balk at engagement with non-state actors or disagree on what is permissible intervention in the affairs of others”. The multilateral architecture is struggling to articulate – let alone implement – a coherent response.

The Rise of Political and Quasi-Political Violence

Conflict today, which tends to take the form of armed conflict or political/quasi-political violence can be understood through three lenses of analysis, according to Ghassan Salamé, former Lebanese Minister of Culture. The first category is linked to the inability of states to impose order over their territory; this enables and encourages gangs, rebel groups or militias to operate in what we call - for lack of a better expression - “failed states.” The conflicts endemic to failed states are driven by a combination of identity politics, class conflicts and, often,

natural resources. Identity politics is used to mobilize; class is used in terms of direct economic motivation; and, resources help explain why some non-local actors often

join the conflict.

The second category of conflict can be grouped around the American-led and anti-American-led wars taking place predominantly in Iraq and Afghanistan, but increasingly spreading across the sub-Saharan ring from Mauritania to Somalia. These conflicts are, Salamé insisted, “characterized by asymmetric warfare between local groups opposing large, well-equipped conventional armies; they display a mix of terrorism and insurgency on the one hand,

and counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency on the other – with the link between the two being frequently blurred.” Nationalism in these conflicts is fueled and strengthened by the discourse of anti-interventionism, anti-globalism and, frequently, anti-westernization.

The third category of conflicts is tied to processes associated with democratization, brought into focus by the ‘fourth wave of democracy’ currently making its way across the Middle East and North Africa. Democratic transitions, according to Salamé, “can be extremely eventful, and, if badly managed, also quite violent - because centrifugal forces go hand in hand with democratization processes”. Centrifugal forces are often seen as a threat to those who have traditionally held power, shaking the foundations that sustain stability and the status quo, and threatening to separate the carefully maintained, anti-democratic fusion between regime and state. “If managed carefully, however”, Salamé continued, “the democratization process can help balance and integrate such forces into a shared vision for the nation.”

Democracies, Elections and Conflict: Cause or Cure?

Literature on the potentially destructive nature of democratization processes was prevalent in the 1980s⁷; since then, such research has been marginalized by an increasing focus on democratization processes as not only the cure - rather than the cause - of conflict, but at the

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- Salim Salim

nourishing and actively promoting a form of *democracy without democracy*⁸. The role of the international community in brokering, and sometimes imposing such agreements, needs to be assessed.

In light of the emphasis on democratization as the irreplaceable motor for the state-building agenda, Salim Salim, former president of Tanzania and Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), underlined the way in which elections are invariably seen as the test case for countries emerging from conflict. Any electoral process, however, imposed upon a country without a deep culture of democratic engagement or, as is more commonly the case, without regard for cultural sensitivities, is likely to be explosive. As the world witnessed in Côte d'Ivoire, the outcome of elections is too often perceived as an indivisible prize or a zero-sum game: by winning elections, you win not only power but also economic means, as well as the ability to deprive your 'enemies' of access to both.

While the international community is unlikely to abandon its democratization

very heart of international engagements in fragile states. This is most evident in the emphasis on power-sharing agreements as the default arrangement to bring a civil war to end,

agenda, it can and should pay much more attention to the context in which elections take place, as well as the quality and timing of the electoral process. In instances of very close or potentially fraught elections, the availability of an accepted domestic, legal, moral authority that can undertake certification after the election, and who can play the role as facilitator for the defeated party to accept the results, is absolutely crucial⁹. In cases where a national body of that nature is lacking, regional organizations can play a pivotal role in setting certain standards for acceptable conduct; as underscored by Salim, “the African Union has played a vital role in strengthening democratic institutions and in laying down the lines of no-go areas; it has often taken a stance on unconstitutional change, and is in a position to take effective action when peace and security is threatened”.

When assessing the quality of elections, however, the international community has had a tendency to focus heavily on procedural elements, holding countries emerging from conflict to unrealistic “free and fair” standards, rather than seeing the process itself as part of the transition to democracy, not an end in itself. The emphasis on such issues as technical transparency, the nature of opposition parties, levels of participation, education through social media, and the extent to which authoritarian leaders are able to manipulate the results is evidenced by the growing body of election monitoring bodies, often present in-country prior to, during and after elections. While not problematic in and of itself, these bodies

Salim Salim, president of Tanzania (left); Ghassan Salamé, former Minister of Culture, Lebanon (right).



can create an environment where international expectations are out of line with local cultures, creating a schism in what should be a local-international partnership towards a shared goal.

Increasingly attention is also being paid to the type of electoral system used in countries emerging from conflict, but the temptation to engineer the process to suit the pre-decided and preferred outcomes of the international community remains high¹⁰. Majoritarian systems are now understood to have a tendency to compound and exacerbate divisions in fragile situations; a civil war in Algeria, as highlighted by Salamé for example, might well have been prevented had the government selected a system of proportional representation, rather than adopting the French majoritarian system. Proportional representation helps ensure that all parties are represented in the National Assembly, creating buy-in from a much broader sector of society in the early transitional phases¹¹. The outcomes of a proportional system, however, are hostage to the numerical calculations of its designer; the international community should be wary of creating processes which seem to undermine the democratic process, rather than supporting it.

The timing of elections must also be a top consideration. Elections need to be timed in accordance with certain realities on the ground and will only be a spring-board for state-building - rather than the cause of conflict - in situations where a certain level of societal integration is already present. Current examples from the 'Arab Spring' demonstrate this point: we are, for example, more optimistic about finding long-lasting solutions in Tunisia and Egypt than in Libya, Yemen or Bahrain precisely because the former have a much higher level of social integration than the latter, where society is divided along tribal or sectarian lines¹². As many countries

across the Arab world begin to grapple with the transition to democracy, any engagement by the international community with regards to elections should pay close attention to the lessons learnt from Algeria, Iraq and Afghanistan, amongst others.

Objectives of Peacemaking: Are We Asking Too Much?

Years of military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan have provided many lessons for the international community; one of the most glaring - and costly - is that force alone will not bring peace. The combination of troops on the one hand, and negotiations on the other, presents a whole host of challenges for the field of mediation, forcing policy-makers to strike an uneasy balance between the principles and objectives of counter-insurgency, with those of conflict resolution. The recent move towards negotiations in these high stakes conflicts, combined with the increasing use of mediation as a tool for ending conflicts in Africa, predominantly, presents some interesting statistics. Andrew Mack, Director of the Human Security Report, presented participants with findings from the latest report: while in the 1980s seven times as many conflicts ended in victories than peace settlements, in the new millennium around five times as many conflicts have ended in peace settlements than in victories. Furthermore, in the 1990s, 70% of peace settlements collapsed within five years, while today around 18% of peace agreements collapse within five years.

Beyond the complex relationship between military and political figures, the field of mediation is also challenged by two incremental developments: the first is the over-ambitious peace agenda pursued, ironically and unfortunately, in a context unfavorable to successful mediation. Peace

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- Jean Arnault

‘normal’ process of mediating between two positions has been taken over by a third process: the imposition of the will of the international community.

The well-intentioned international actor may need to think again; the failures and challenges faced in Afghanistan –

processes are no longer expected to simply end the violence, but also to address the social, economic, cultural, political and sometimes religious causes of the conflict in a way that will create sustainable peace, economic growth and reconciliation. As Jean Arnault, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General so accurately stated, “the immensely complex social and political engineering challenge raises the costs and expectations of peace settlements, and also increases the chances of them being perceived as failures. This added pressure for mediation to ‘deliver the goods’ contributes, paradoxically, to it being unable to do so.”

Based on the ‘Kosovo-Bosnia-East Timor model, the state-building paradigm has marginalized the role of local actors in dealing with these issues; the accumulative knowledge of the international community is thought to outweigh the local knowledge, needs and preferences of those it seeks to assist.

This vast expansion of expectations is rooted, according to Arnault, in some of the perceived successes of the international community: the ‘Kosovo-Bosnia-East Timor model’. In the anthology of peacemaking, these tempered successes have become a template for the way statebuilding should be conducted, ignoring the fact that these cases presented very specific solutions at a very specific moment in time, under very particular circumstances. Based on this model, the state-building paradigm has marginalized the role of local actors in dealing with these issues; the accumulative knowledge of the international community is thought to outweigh the local knowledge, needs and preferences of those it seeks to assist. Put another way: the

which has been the focus of the international community for many years - may temper the belief that institutional engineering is in any way an easy task. This potential “retreat from hubris”¹³, will hopefully lead us to back to the essentials of mediation and peacebuilding: facilitating a discussion between parties of a conflict and trying to reach a compromise based on the interests and aspirations of those around the table, rather than attempting to impose any borrowed formulas.

The aims of mediation, as articulated by Jean Arnault and supported by Alvaro de Soto and Lahkdar Brahimi, should be much more modest: a re-composition of political leadership, a reduction in human rights’ violations as they relate to the conflict, a slow demilitarization of certain institutions, and the option of redirecting resources used for the war to social priorities. While these elements may fall short of good governance, democracy and justice, they do provide the basis for a successful transition.

Coordination: Are Too Many Peacemakers Good For Peace?

The second major challenge presented to the field of mediation can be attributed to the vast increase in the number of actors who pursue mediation activities; a positive recognition of the value of diplomacy, a crowded mediation field can, however, undermine its effectiveness. The increased engagement of regional organizations, NGOs, independent actors, and rising nations reflects the greater priority attached to peacemaking, but contributes to the perception that 'mediation amongst mediators' is a potentially bigger challenge than mediating amongst the parties to the conflict! Indeed, as if reaching an agreement was not difficult enough, mediators must now coordinate their efforts with a whole host of actors who wish to be a part of the 'action'.

There are some positive manifestations of this development. Different actors bring with them different types of leverage and legitimacy; if coordinated in the right way, a combination of actors can prove to be highly effective. Teresa Whitfield, from the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, pointed out, "regional and sub-regional organizations can be well placed to engage in cases of civil conflict

and cross-border disputes: they often have direct relationships with the parties, and know the history of the issues better than actors external to the region." Similarly, small states, such as Qatar for example, can sometimes succeed where others have failed: they have resources, political will and a high-level of legitimacy given their lack of stakes in the outcome of the conflict.

A negotiation process which has more mediators than parties, however, can give the impression that the 'industry of peacemaking' is more important than the objectives of peace, with disastrous effects on the process and prospects for securing an agreement. Parties can exploit the various alternatives open to them by engaging in

'mediator shopping', using the opportunity to buy more time; or, can provoke disastrous factionalization, as was the case in Darfur where a movement initially divided in two quickly splintered into one with around 20-25 factions. The international community is not, however, incapable of achieving coordination in this realm – it just has a tendency to choose when and how to do it. Drawing upon his work in Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi pointed out that during

"Although the international community knows that coordination is in the interests of peace, it often lacks discipline; but, when the stakes are high enough, it can find the political will to seek order amongst the diverse strategies and interests".

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the Bonn Process over twenty countries were represented and used strategically at different points during the course of negotiations; none of them were allowed into the meeting rooms where the discussions between the Afghan parties were taking place. "Although the international community knows that coordination is in the interests of peace, it often lacks discipline", he continued; "but, when the stakes are high enough, it can find the political will to seek order amongst the diverse strategies and interests".

Which 'International Community'? The Pathologies of International Peacemaking

The rarity of the instances when the international community speaks with one voice, however, has contributed to the perception that coordination is nothing but a fiction; rather than contributing to peace in fragile states, donors and international actors can actually undermine it. According to Ashraf Ghani, Head of the Institute on State Effectiveness, "the ineffectiveness of the international community's engagement in fragile states stems directly from the dysfunctionality of the structure of the international system". Composed of a series of competing organizations with different models, priorities and organizational cultures, the system is devoid of any overarching agreement on objectives, methods or processes for achieving peace. The problems which arise from the inability of the United Nations, for

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- David Harland

example, to reach agreement *within* its own system, is only compounded when there are attempts to coordinate *between* the United Nations, the World Bank and bilateral partners such as USAID and DfID, for example, not to mention local actors. As such, it is the dysfunctional nature of supply, rather than the pressing nature of demand which drives international aid.

Three patterns of behavior in the relationship between ‘fragile’ states and international partners, suggested Ghani, arise as a result of this dysfunctionality, and only one of them contains the seeds of potentially positive outcomes. The first is competition; UN agencies compete with national governments for funds, contributing to an environment which is not conducive to sustainable, constructive change. The second is the emergence of parallel systems; the international community is project-driven rather than systems focused, and therefore tends to focus on short-term visible change rather than long-term systemic change. In pursuit of

peacebuilding and statebuilding goals, the international community paradoxically succeeds in actually hollowing out national governments by attracting local staff with inflated wages to jobs for which they are over-qualified, undermining the broader, more important capacity-building endeavors.

The pathological effects of these two tendencies should not be understated. The arrival of a large international presence not only overwhelms already weak governments, but also creates a false economy based upon the spending of internationals and inflated property prices. As the economy shifts increasingly towards the needs and spending power of foreigners, so does the nexus of decision-making: in small countries especially, major decisions and political costs are born by international actors. As David Harland, Director of the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue pointed out, “the shift in the locus of accountability from domestic to international players creates an increasing disconnect

Security, rather than growth, is at the heart of international strategies in post-conflict environments

- James Dobbins

between the state and civil society – as evidenced in countries ranging from Bosnia to Haiti to Afghanistan”.

Security, rather than growth, is at the heart of international strategies in post-conflict environments, as was underscored by James Dobbins, Director, International Security and Defense Policy Center, RAND National Security and Research Division. Stability and security in the short-term, however, will not necessarily translate into justice and growth in the long-term. As such, the short-term objectives of the international community can prove to be counter-productive. Conversely and counter-intuitively, it is not clear that there is a direct link between security and growth, even in the short-term: Iraq grew by 48% in 2004, one of its most violence and unstable years, almost the fastest growing country since 1945; similarly, Afghanistan competes with China in terms of growth, despite the on-going conflict¹⁴. These dynamics necessitate more research.

A More Promising Future for International Aid? Towards a System of ‘Coproduction’ and Simultaneity

The pathological relationship between international actors and fragile states is often the result of a perception of being faced with a series of false dichotomies: the center versus the periphery, or a bottom up versus a top down approach to engagement. The third, positive relationship that can arise out of the international-national partnership presents a way of over-coming this perception: a relationship defined by ‘co-production’ as articulated by Ghani. In a system of co-production, national and international actors decide together on a set of objectives, how they can be achieved best and which actors are best suited to the task. It is a system designed according to needs, preferences and functions within a long-term

vision. This re-orientation, however, requires large-scale institutional change.

In order to implement strategies of coproduction, a culture of mutual accountability needs to emerge. This would demand the international community meeting the same 21st century standards of accountability and auditing that it demands of countries in transition; according to Ghani, currently the international community is lagging far behind its own expectations. Moreover, it would require a much more concerted focus on economics, as well as politics - not least through foreign investment. The positive/negative impact of foreign investment is a function of high/low state capacity; where that capacity is lacking, the international community has a vital role to play. And yet, in most instances of post-conflict transformation, the sequential model of state-building relied upon by the international community prevents a positive relationship between the private sector and the state from being established.

This sequential, ‘three stage model’ of international intervention – humanitarian, development, institutional - fosters an environment where predatory behavior becomes the norm rather than the exception. In the absence of institutional mechanisms, criminal networks flourish, and national assets are wasted, enabling non-state actors to exploit the vast funds associated with development work, in the absence of any institutional barriers. The skills and speed of criminals, who are experts in exploiting the realities of globalization to their own benefit, emerge in sharp comparison to the slow moving and often inefficient bureaucracies of the international community. Furthermore, while criminal networks use the ‘global community’ to enhance their transactions, the international community is yet to create a mechanism for tracking shifts in financial flows on a global level.

The case was made for simultaneity rather than sequencing in the provision of international aid. Simultaneity does not mean an absence of priorities, but deciding on those priorities and focusing on them in a more holistic manner. In fragile states, the priorities should be organized along three lines: first, the local population, not international actors, should drive the state-building process; second, mechanisms of control are essential; three, clear lines and methods of accountability should be established. One way of ensuring all of the above, is by having all agreements (and disagreements) take place around the budget table. This creates a sense of

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- Juan Gabriel Valdés

national ownership and decisions which are based on need in a realistic framework.

A general consensus was reached among the participants that the current system of international aid and intervention does not work; more to the point, many also argued that the current apparatus has actually exacerbated the problem. The separation of the peace-building from the state-building agenda should be avoided. As Juan Valdes, former United Nations Special Representative pointed out, “any international intervention which seeks to supplant, rather than support and strengthen the domestic architecture is likely to fail, and possibly fuel more not less conflict”. By undertaking reforms at the regional

and international level, the international community can begin to re-assert its effectiveness and shift towards realizing the essential goal of human security.

Endnotes

¹For a full list of those present, please see page 10, Annex One.

²Josie Lianna Kaye is the Assistant Director of the Center for International Conflict Resolution and a Staff Associate of Research at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

³Human Security Report 2005, *War and Peace in the 21st Century*, Human Security Report Project, University Press, December 2005

⁴Human Security Report 2009/2010, *The Causes of Peace and The Shrinking Costs of War*, Human Security Report Project at Simon, Oxford University Press, December 2010

⁵Cilliers, Jakkie, CICR Experts Retreat, Spring 2011

⁶Human Security Report 2009/2010, *The Causes of Peace and The Shrinking Costs of War*, Human Security Report Project at Simon, Oxford University Press, December 2010

⁷Del Rosso, Stephen, CICR Experts Retreat, Spring 2011.

⁸Salamé, Ghassan (ed), *Democracy without democrats?: the renewal of politics in the muslim world*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1994

⁹Salamé, Ghassan, CICR Experts Retreat, Spring 2011.

¹⁰ For a detailed example, please see: Smith, Scott Seward, *Afghanistan's Troubled Transition, Politics, Peacekeeping, and the 2004 Presidential Election*, First Forum Press, Boulder&London, 2011, Chapter 4

¹¹Salamé, Ghassan, CICR Experts Retreat, Spring 2011.

¹²Salamé, Ghassan, CICR Experts Retreat, Spring 2011.

¹³Arnault, Jean. CICR Experts Retreat, Spring 2011.

¹⁴Dobbins, James, CICR Experts Retreat, Spring 2011.

Juan Gabriel Valdés, Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (left); Lakhdar Brahimi, Chairman of CICR's Board of Advisors and Former Foreign Minister of Algeria (right).



Board of Advisors, CICR

Lakhdar Brahimi (Chair)

Former Foreign Minister of Algeria

Louise Arbour

President, International Crisis Group (not present)

Shlomo Ben-Ami

Vice President, Toledo International Centre for Peace (not present)

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ABOUT CICR

The Center for International Conflict Resolution (CICR) is housed within Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and led by an experienced practitioner, Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno. During his eight years as the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Mr. Guéhenno spearheaded the biggest expansion of peacekeeping operations the UN has yet seen. In addition to his position at CICR, he is Chairman of the Board of the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a leading organization in the field of private mediation.

From its base in New York, with an international outlook and a proximity to the UN headquarters, CICR is creating a platform to address these new challenges and realities in the conflict field; it aims to support the international peacemaking community, and to contribute to more effective conflict resolution through a combination of knowledge-sharing and networking, innovative research, and education integrated across all its activities.



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