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Peacebuilding as Security in 'Failing' and Conflict-Prone States

Edward Newman

Peacebuilding activities in conflict-prone and post-conflict countries are based upon the assumption that effective—preferably liberal—states form the greatest prospect for a stable international order, and that failing or conflict-prone states represent a threat to international security. Peacebuilding is therefore a part of the security agenda. This has brought obvious benefits, most obviously much-needed resources, aid and capacity-building to conflict-prone countries in the form of international assistance, which has contributed to a decline in intrastate conflicts. However, there are a number of negative implications to the securitization of peacebuilding. This article considers the implications of this, and concludes that it is difficult to mediate between conventional and 'critical' views of peacebuilding since they are premised upon quite different assumptions regarding what peacebuilding is and what it should be.

Keywords peacebuilding; statebuilding; state failure; securitization

Failing or weak states, civil war and low-intensity conflict are thought to represent a pressing global challenge, for two principal reasons. Firstly, these conditions are a direct and indirect source of human misery and human rights violations. Secondly, there is wide—although not uncontested—agreement that unstable and conflict-prone societies pose a threat to international security and stability. Indeed, many analysts—especially after 9/11—now consider these situations as the primary security challenge of the contemporary era. According to Fukuyama (2004, p. 92), 'weak and failing states have arguably become the single most important problem for international order'. It is debatable whether this view reflects 'reality' or is rather a political construction (Newman 2009a). Nevertheless, much effort and resources have been directed towards international peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction to resolve or contain conflict and instability, and these activities clearly have a security—and not just a humanitarian or development—rationale. One analyst has therefore suggested that addressing failing and conflict-prone states has 'become one of the critical all-consuming strategic and moral imperatives of our terrorized time' (Rotberg 2004, p. 42).

In recent years international peacebuilding activities in conflict-prone and post-conflict countries—aimed at preventing the resumption or escalation of violent conflict and establishing a durable peace—have increased in number and in complexity in line with this evolving security discourse. These activities have also become an exercise in statebuilding, based upon the assumption that effective—preferably liberal—states form the greatest prospect for a stable international order. Peacebuilding is therefore a part of the security agenda, insofar as the pathologies of conflict-prone and underdeveloped states have been subjectively constructed as international threats. This article considers the implications of this.

The securitization of peacebuilding has brought obvious benefits. Viewing conflict, weak statehood and underdevelopment as a threat to Western interests has brought much-needed resources, aid and capacity-building to conflict-prone countries in the form of international assistance. This has contributed to a reduction in the absolute numbers of civil wars and the consolidation of peace—or at least stability—in many countries. The securitization of peacebuilding also arguably reflects a shift, in both policy and academic circles, towards a more accurate understanding of the true nature of insecurity and violent conflict, characterized more by civil war and persecution rather than conventional patterns of inter-state war. Greater attention to the human security dimensions of stability therefore demonstrates the benefits of positive securitization.

However, there are a number of negative implications to the securitization of peacebuilding. This approach tends to externalize, demonize and contain problems in the developing—‘other’—world. This results in a lack of sensitivity to and understanding of problems elsewhere, a failure to appreciate that these problems are in some ways a consequence of pathologies inherent in the international system, and it can lead to peacebuilding policies which are not effective. According to some analysts, it also forms a part of a broader agenda to coercively reform ‘developing’ countries, something which is not regarded as legitimate by local stakeholders. In addition, linking international peacebuilding to international security may also result in selectivity: assistance will be concentrated in areas of strategic interest, to the detriment of other needy but less ‘important’ regions. This type of thinking also implies a politicization of assistance, prioritizing the needs of friendly countries, again to the neglect of humanitarian needs elsewhere. Moreover, since the rationale behind the securitization of peacebuilding is to prioritize stability, it results in an emphasis upon top-down approaches aimed at containing conflict, rather than bottom-up community-driven peacebuilding aimed at the resolution of the underlying sources of conflict or the promotion of social justice.

In considering these negative and positive consequences and implications, the paper concludes that the securitization of peacebuilding is an inevitable reflection of the evolving security agenda. It also reflects different models of peacebuilding and exposes a tension—seen in both scholarship and policy—between different, vying, conceptions of what peacebuilding should seek to accomplish. Approaching

peacebuilding as a part of the security agenda does not serve aspirations such as social transformation, justice or emancipation, but may service the needs of stability. The very notion of peacebuilding—drawing upon competing ideas of legitimacy—is therefore subjective and contested.

Failed States, International Security, and Post-Westphalia

Policy and scholarship related to international conflict and security—and the perception of empirical 'reality'—has traditionally reflected a 'Westphalian' orientation. According to this construction, the unit of analysis and referent object of security are states, and threats are conceived in state-centric military terms; international 'security' privileges the independence and territorial integrity of legally sovereign and (theoretically) equal states. The international system is characterized by cooperation and conflict amongst viable and rational states in an anarchic environment, reflecting pluralist norms of interaction in diplomacy, law and multilateralism. A Westphalian system is therefore said to rest upon the sovereignty of political units, territoriality, and non-intervention.

Reality never conformed to this ideal-type, and some parts of the world have arguably never fully reflected the Westphalian model. The historical accuracy of describing this model of international politics as 'Westphalian' has also been challenged (Krasner 2001). Yet prevailing norms of international law, foreign policy, diplomacy and multilateralism—and indeed scholarship—have generally upheld the Westphalian model. Despite differences in interpretation—between, for example, 'realist' and 'liberal' visions of world order—the manner in which security, conflict, and threats to security have been conceived and addressed has generally rested upon this statist, pluralist ontology.

In the twenty-first century there is wide belief, in certain circles, that threats to security are equally likely to come from conflict-prone, failing or weak states, or even non-state actors. In this context many scholars and policy analysts have drawn attention to the dangers inherent in weak or failed states (Hamre and Sullivan 2002, Rotberg 2002, Crocker 2003, Rice 2003). The phenomenon of 'weak states' refers here to a situation where central government has a poor capacity to control public order within its territory, is unable to consistently control its borders, cannot reliably maintain viable public institutions or services, and is vulnerable to extra-constitutional domestic challenges. Indications of this condition can be found in poor levels of economic performance, human welfare, economic distribution, and levels of conflict. 'State failure' suggests that the government—if one exists—is completely unable to maintain public services, institutions or authority, and that central control over territory does not exist (Newman 2007).

A range of pathologies have been associated with the condition of weak and failed states, and some of these are claimed to have an international or even global impact (Newman 2009a). These situations often involve violent conflict—either as a cause or a consequence of state failure or weakness. They

result in forced migration flows which can lead to the spread of insurgents, threatening regional stability on an ongoing basis and sometimes causing conflicts in neighbouring states. Weak and failing states are vulnerable to trafficking in small arms and light weapons through porous borders, and this is also a demonstrable source of regional insecurity. There has also been some suggestion that weak and failing states—either as a point of transit or origin—may be a site for the transfer of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons materials. There is also a more intuitively reliable claim that such states also provide an environment in which—due to the absence of orderly institutions and accountable governance—recalcitrant or aggressive governments can come to power, abuse the privileges of sovereign statehood or pose a threat to regional security. These states are also more likely to host war economies: the illegal commercial networks and activities which thrive in environments where there is no effective rule of law. As well as fuelling conflicts within these societies and across the region, the consequences can be found more broadly. An overwhelming proportion of cocaine and heroin originates from Colombia and Afghanistan and their production is arguably facilitated by the absence of government control in vast regions of those countries. The impact of the narcotic trade upon Western countries is clearly taken very seriously as a security threat and this is reflected in the policies and resources directed to this issue. Weak and failed states may have an adverse impact upon the natural environment, with transnational effects, because such countries are unlikely to have effective regulations to control environmental degradation. Weak and failed states may be a source of heightened health problems as such states are less able to control epidemics due to the incapacity of their health facilities, and the porous nature of their borders means that contagious health problems can spread uncontrolled to neighbouring regions or further afield. Finally, many studies—especially since 9/11—have argued that weak or failed states may provide an environment conducive to the emergence or operation of terrorist organizations which may target local or international interests. According to this argument, ‘Terrorists are strongest where states are weakest’ (Straw 2002, p. 98) and weak or failed states provide a ‘breeding ground’ or ‘sanctuary’ for terrorism (Hagel 2004, Lyman and Morrison 2004, Krasner and Pascual 2005, Van Evera 2006). According to Stephen van Evera (2006, p. 32), ‘Al-Qaeda and other terror groups grow and thrive in failed states, using them as havens in which they can establish secure bases to mass-produce trained, motivated killers’. Others have taken a more cautious approach to the relationship between failed states and terrorism (Hehir 2007, Newman 2007).

Constructing ‘New Threats’ in Discourse and Policy

During the Cold War weak states and civil war were generally seen in Western power centres as an ‘external’ phenomenon in peripheral, faraway places. There was an interest in influencing the outcomes of these events and intervention in

'proxy' conflicts followed from this, but the actual condition of state failure or conflict was generally not seen as a direct security threat. In contrast, in the post-Cold War era, and certainly after 9/11, situations of civil war and state failure are seen—or constructed—as a key threat. The US National Defense Strategy of 2008 suggests that:

The inability of many states to police themselves effectively or to work with their neighbors to ensure regional security represents a challenge to the international system. Armed sub-national groups, including but not limited to those inspired by violent extremism, threaten the stability and legitimacy of key states. If left unchecked, such instability can spread and threaten regions of interest to the United States, our allies, and friends. Insurgent groups and other non-state actors frequently exploit local geographical, political, or social conditions to establish safe havens from which they can operate with impunity. Ungoverned, undergoverned, misgoverned, and contested areas offer fertile ground for such groups to exploit the gaps in governance capacity of local regimes to undermine local stability and regional security. (US Department of Defense 2008, pp. 2–3)

The Millennium Challenge Account, established by the US with a commitment of \$4 billion in 2002, reflects the idea of promoting development as a means to promote stability. In February 2007, the US Department of Defense (2009) announced the creation of US Africa Command (AFRICOM), 'acknowledging the emerging strategic importance of Africa, and recognizing that peace and stability on the continent impacts not only Africans, but the interests of the U.S. and international community as well'. The establishment of AFRICOM represents a new US strategic focus upon developing countries, which in turn reflects changing perceptions of the nature of international threats to security. The US Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization was established in 2004 and its mission statement also provides a clear statement of the development–security–peace nexus:

Failing and post-conflict states pose one of the greatest national and international security challenges of our day, threatening vulnerable populations, their neighbors, our allies, and ourselves. Struggling states can provide breeding grounds for terrorism, crime, trafficking, and humanitarian catastrophes, and can destabilize an entire region. Experience shows that managing conflict, particularly internal conflict, is not a passing phenomenon. It has become a mainstream part of our foreign policy. (US Department of State 2008)

The first UK National Security Strategy (2008, p. 14) reflects similar thinking, arguing that a key driver of global insecurity in the contemporary world is poverty, inequality, and poor governance:

In the past, most violent conflicts and significant threats to global security came from strong states. Currently, most of the major threats and risks emanate from failed or fragile states . . . Failed and fragile states increase the risk of instability and conflict, and at the same time have a reduced capacity to deal with it, as we see in parts of Africa. They have the potential to destabilise the surrounding region. Many fragile states lack the capacity and, in some cases, the will adequately to address terrorism and organised crime, in some instances knowingly tolerating or directly sponsoring such activity.

The establishment of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) is a further example of this worldview. Before DFID, the Overseas Development Administration organized development assistance under the supervision of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. With the growing realization that underdevelopment, weak states and conflict affect UK interests—including its security—the political role of DFID has soared, often eclipsing the FCO itself. Funding for DFID has naturally increased in the area of governance and stabilization; its outlook, characterized in the White Paper ‘Making Governance Work for the Poor’ clearly sees a convergence between security, peacebuilding and development (DFID 2006). The underlying assumption to these policy developments is that: ‘Security and development are linked . . . Poverty, underdevelopment and fragile states create fertile conditions for conflict and the emergence of new security threats, including international crime and terrorism’ (DFID 2005, p. 5).

The UN Secretary-General, in his landmark report *In larger freedom* (2005, p. 25), argued that there must be a ‘new security consensus’: ‘Collective security today depends on accepting that the threats which each region of the world perceives as most urgent are in fact equally so for all. In our globalized world, the threats we face are interconnected. The rich are vulnerable to the threats that attack the poor and the strong are vulnerable to the weak, as well as vice versa’. Other international organizations have also embraced this evolving thinking. It is truly a sign of the times that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank both see their work as central to the international security—as well as the development—agenda. A High Level OECD Meeting presented ‘Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States’ with a ‘focus on state-building as the central objective’. As an OECD report suggested (2008a, p. 7):

Policy makers are increasingly concerned by what appears to be a growing body of ‘weak’, ‘fragile’, or ‘failing’ states. This is understandable, as few issues are so central to contemporary international politics—to questions of development, management of the global commons, and human and collective security—as the issue of well-organised co-operation between effective states.

An OECD government roundtable report observed that ‘In a globalised and interdependent world, situations of fragility and conflict need special attention because of the security, stability and poverty reduction challenges they present—to each country domestically, on their regional surroundings and in the broader international sphere’ (2008b, p. 4). The President of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick (World Bank 2008), similarly stressed that he sees his work—in development and poverty alleviation—as a part of the evolving *security* agenda:

Broken states can be the weak link in the global security chain if they are infiltrated by terrorists who recruit, train, and prosper amidst devastation. The trauma of fragile states and the interconnections of globalization require our generation to recognize anew the nexus among economics, governance, and security . . . The diseases, outflows of desperate people, criminality, and

terrorism that can spawn in the vacuum of fragile states can quickly become global threats.

Approaches to peacebuilding and stabilization have also evolved with this thinking since the end of the Cold War, now incorporating many aspects of 'state-building', as the next section illustrates. In a 'positive' sense, this results in an emphasis upon capacity-building. According to the US National Security Strategy (US Department of Defense 2008):

We will help build the internal capacities of countries at risk. We will work with and through like-minded states to help shrink the ungoverned areas of the world and thereby deny extremists and other hostile parties sanctuary. By helping others to police themselves and their regions, we will collectively address threats to the broader international system.

As the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (US Department of State 2008) indicates, the ambitions which lie behind this are hardly modest:

Until now, the international community has undertaken stabilization and reconstruction operations in an ad hoc fashion, recreating the tools and relationships each time a crisis arises. If we are going to ensure that countries are set on a sustainable path towards peace, democracy and a market economy, we need new, institutionalized foreign policy tools—tools that can influence the choices countries and people make about the nature of their economies, their political systems, their security, indeed, in some cases about the very social fabric of a nation.

There are clear interventionist connotations to this, even when dressed up in the façade of 'capacity-building': 'today, in an era when dozens of States are under stress or recovering from conflict, there is a clear international obligation to assist States in developing their capacity to perform their sovereign functions effectively and responsibly' (High Level Panel 2004, p. 83). In addition to this evolution, there is a broader normative shift that can also be interpreted more negatively. The state—and weak states—are at the heart of the security agenda and, as a corollary of this, some observers have suggested that the sovereignty of those states which are unable or unwilling to contain the pathologies of failed statehood can itself be forfeited. Krasner (2004, p. 85) thus argues that the rules of conventional sovereignty 'no longer work, and their inadequacies have had deleterious consequences for the strong as well as the weak. The policy tools that powerful and well-governed states have available to 'fix' badly governed or collapsed states ... are inadequate'. Keohane (2003, p. 276) comes to some similar conclusions: 'classical notions of sovereignty provide a poor basis for policy with respect to post-intervention political decisions in troubled societies'. Sovereignty should therefore be 'unbundled' into its different components, and those components which are not viable should be reconsidered.

Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding and International Peace and Security

Contemporary international peacebuilding must be seen within this evolving security agenda, and the policy elites which drive peacebuilding generally subscribe to the uncritical view that conflicted and failing states are the 'new' existential threat. International peacebuilding in conflict-prone and post-conflict societies—covering security, development, humanitarian assistance, governance and the rule of law—has developed rapidly in recent years in terms of the range of activities conducted, the number of operations deployed, and the number and variety of international actors involved in these missions. A key aspect of this renewed activism is a post-Cold War transformation of peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities, reflecting an evolution of norms, in particular the weakening of inviolable territorial integrity and a growing acceptance of certain forms of intervention. The evolution of peacebuilding also reflects these changing perceptions of threats to international security.

First-generation peacekeeping generally involved the interposition of UN military forces to monitor ceasefires, facilitate the withdrawal of troops and to act as a buffer between countries in volatile situations. This was a mechanism of great power management: it aimed to contain conflicts and prevent them from escalating, and maintain stability so that a political solution could be achieved between states. Almost all the major peacekeeping operations undertaken during the Cold War represented the classical model of inter-state conflict management and few deployed in civil war situations. They were aimed at containing—and not resolving—the sources of international instability, and even less so at preventing or resolving civil war. In contrast post-Cold War peacebuilding operations reflect a different—perhaps post-Westphalian—approach to conflict management and international security. Contemporary peacebuilding approaches reflect the idea that maintaining peace in post-conflict societies requires a multifaceted approach, with attention to a wide range of social, economic and institutional needs. They reflect a liberal project: not just managing instability between states, but seeking to build peace within and between states on the basis of liberal democracy, market economics and 'effective' state institutions. In line with this, the types of activities in peace operations have transformed and entail engagement with a wider range of actors including NGOs, humanitarian organizations, and commercial entities. These activities have involved tasks related to promoting domestic security, development, humanitarian assistance and strengthening governance and the rule of law. The key examples since the end of the Cold War are the UN operations in Cambodia, Angola, Burundi, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, East Timor, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eastern Slavonia, and Kosovo.

Responding to conflict-prone and weak states in the developing world as a security challenge is the context within which current thinking about peacebuilding must be seen. A great deal of effort and resources have been applied to

peacebuilding and post-conflict (re)construction and these activities clearly have a strategic as well as a humanitarian rationale in the context of evolving threat perceptions. The recent interest—and funding—directed towards peacebuilding can only be explained by the merging of underdevelopment, state failure and insecurity. If—as Heathershaw and Lambach (2008, p. 269) claim—post-conflict spaces represent ‘the purest empirical expression of a post-Westphalian world order’ then the response to such situations, in the form of international peacebuilding and reconstruction, must also be seen within broad strategic themes.

Peacebuilding—as far as it involves (re)building state institutions in failed or conflicted states—is viewed by powerful states as a strategic imperative for international action. Consequently, policies and funding—albeit selectively—target conflicted and weak states, not necessarily to bring true conflict resolution, but at least to stabilize and contain conflict in order to ameliorate the negative international consequences which are seen to flow from these situations. It is therefore interesting to consider if peacebuilding is an example of securitization—or partial securitization. Securitization studies ‘aims to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (i.e., what explains when securitization is successful)’ (Buzan *et al.* 1998, p. 32; see also Waeber 1995). It explores the processes by which issues are accorded ‘security’ status or seen as a ‘threat’ through political labelling, rather than as a result of their ‘real’ or objective significance, and the interests that are served by this process. The results of this can have enormous political impact: securitization mobilizes exceptional resources and acts as a pretext for political powers and action which may not be considered necessary or legitimate in ‘normal’ circumstances. Subjective interpretations and constructions of threats and challenges can and do have enormous material consequences in terms of funding, diplomatic attention, and sometimes even military action. The use of the failed state label—when it is applied, why, and with what effect—and the perception of threats inherent in conflict-prone societies are not a reflection of objective truth or reality, but of a subjective interpretation of events. As a demonstration of the importance of political constructions, the empirical reality of failed states is in many ways actually less important than the perception of powerful actors towards the concept and the security threats inherent in them. Viewing peacebuilding as a part of the ‘security’ agenda is therefore a part of the process by which threats and challenges are constructed and responded to.

The manner in which weak and failed states have been elevated in importance, the manner in which peacebuilding is presented as a part of the security agenda by powerful actors, the nexus between peace and development reflected in elite discourse and official statements, and the resources which—although still modest—are directed towards peacebuilding activities, does suggest that a form of securitization is at work. Challenges which might, in different times, have been interpreted and addressed as ‘humanitarian’ or ‘development’ issues are now increasingly given the ‘security’ label, with all the implications that this brings. The facilitating conditions of securitization are

mostly present: the form of the ‘speech act’—official speeches and proclamations, supported by mainstream scholars and policy analysts—which enables the ‘securitizing move’ (the discursive construction of a security challenge) and a receptive audience, including the public, political leaders, and the security establishment. The broader facilitating context is also fairly persuasive for most audiences: there is wide agreement that conflict-prone or failed states are a direct or indirect ‘threat’, and the ‘proof’ is clear for all to see in Afghanistan, Somalia, and elsewhere. The effect of securitization is also reasonably clear: peacebuilding challenges, as a part of the security agenda, receive greater attention, greater resources, and become the purview of defence establishments as well as development or humanitarian agencies. In turn, development and humanitarian agencies—in an illustration of discursive construction—see their development and humanitarian work as a contribution to ‘security’. Indeed, multilateral discourse related to peacebuilding reflects this intersubjectively shared construction of weak and conflict-prone states as a threat, and peacebuilding as the response; the language is literally shared. The ‘normal rules’ of politics are also suspended in the face of these so-called threats: states commit resources and risk the lives of armed personnel despite the absence of a military threat defined in conventional inter-state security terms, and the ‘international community’ is willing to intervene in domestic jurisdictions and effectively suspend state sovereignty in the interests of containing conflict.

At the same time, it is not easy to suggest that this is a definitive case of successful securitization, and it is not easy to know if an issue has been successfully securitized. Despite the trends and processes identified herein, the idea of weak and conflict-prone states as an ‘existential’ security threat—a core theme in the study of securitization—is not met with unanimous support by the policy communities of powerful states. Moreover, the ‘relevant audience’—perhaps the general public, whose support is necessary for governments to intervene in conflict-prone states, or parliamentarians and finance authorities that need to authorize public expenditure—is not absolutely clear. Nevertheless, similar ambiguities are arguably present in the broader securitization debate. The manner in which peacebuilding is being represented in elite discourse—as a response to subjectively constructed security threats inherent in conflict-prone and failing states—suggests a form of securitization, albeit loosely applied and perhaps only partially successful.

The Securitization of Peacebuilding: Pros and Cons

The securitization of peacebuilding has brought obvious benefits. With the realization that weak or conflicted states in the developing world can ‘threaten’ security, powerful states and international organizations have invested increasing amounts of funds and attention to containing conflict and stabilizing volatile societies. This has increased volumes of humanitarian assistance, pushed

hitherto forgotten—or ignored—crises onto the international policy radar, and prioritized the resolution of some conflicts. Simply put, viewing conflict, poor governance and underdevelopment in the developing world as a threat to Western interests has brought much-needed resources, aid and capacity building to some of these countries.

Figures related to development assistance and peace operations reflect this. For example, total OECD-recognized overseas development assistance, made through the Development Assistance Committee, as an absolute figure and as a percentage of GNI, both increased from 2003 to 2007. In 2007/08 the total DFID programme was £5.2 billion, an increase of £172m over 2006/07. Since 2003/04 DFID's programme has grown by 40 per cent; DFID's bilateral programme budget was £2.9 billion in 2007/08, an increase of £179m over 2006/07. DFID's bilateral programme has increased every year over the last five years with bilateral expenditure 47 per cent higher in 2007/08 than 2003/04 (DFID 2008). Aside from overall ODA figures, it is important to note that the proportion of assistance directed towards governance and conflict prevention activities has increased significantly. In terms of UN peacekeeping, in the 45 years between the establishment of the UN and 1990, 18 operations were established. Between 1990 and 2009, 44 peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations were established, a clear increase.

The results of this appear to suggest that increased international efforts are helping to reduce the absolute numbers of civil wars—although the relationship is complex and not definitive—which is surely an unambiguous victory from both the humanitarian and security perspectives. A number of authoritative analysts and datasets point to this reduction in major civil war. The results of the Center for Systemic Peace at the University of Maryland suggest that 'global warfare has remained in decline through 2007 and has diminished by over sixty percent since its peak in the late 1980s' (Marshall and Cole 2008, p. 3). Moreover, 'the general magnitude of global warfare has decreased by over sixty percent since peaking in the mid-1980s, falling by the end of 2007 to its lowest level since 1960' (*ibid.*, p. 7). Similar claims are found in a range of other sources, including the Human Security Report (Mack 2005, Human Security Group 2006, 2007), the Uppsala University Conflict Data Program (Harbom *et al.* 2008), the University of Heidelberg Conflict Barometer (University of Heidelberg 2007), the Political Instability Task Force (Goldstone *et al.* 2005), and others (for a discussion on this see Newman 2009b).

One explanation for the decline in major civil war is the greater understanding within the 'international community' of the broader negative effects of civil war and greater motivation to address it, and thus a broader shift amongst powerful states to address weak and conflicted states. As a part of this, international organizations—in particular the United Nations—are more active and more successful in preventing, managing and terminating conflict, and consolidating peace after conflict. The increased involvement of UN peace operations inside states, addressing situations of civil war, is not a wholly satisfactory explanation for the decline of civil wars, since there are methodological difficulties in making

the case that international peacebuilding has *prevented* the onset of civil war and/or state failure. However, some have argued that the renewed UN activism has indeed prevented conflicts from occurring, and if more civil wars are being prevented than before, then this may form part of the explanation for the decline in absolute numbers of such conflicts. In addition, the intervention of international peacebuilders can arguably be significant in ending civil wars sooner than they otherwise would have done, and preventing the reoccurrence of major civil war, and this is supported by the empirical work of some political scientists (Fortna 2004, Doyle and Sambanis 2006). This would certainly be relevant to trends in numbers of civil wars. There are alternative and/or additional explanations for the decline in major civil war since the end of the Cold War, such as the increasing number of consolidated democracies, the reduction of intervention by third parties compared to the proxy wars of the Cold War, the decline of ideology, and systemic changes related to conflict (there are fewer 'wars of national liberation' because most territories are now independent) (Newman, 2009b). Nevertheless, it is intuitively reasonable to argue that the upsurge of peacebuilding activity has played a role in the decline of civil war.

The securitization of peacebuilding also arguably reflects a shift, in both policy and academic circles, towards a more accurate understanding of insecurity and violent conflict, characterized more by civil war and persecution rather than conventional patterns of inter-state war. One could therefore argue that the securitization of peacebuilding can have positive human security outcomes by focusing on individual and community needs—as peacebuilding operations purportedly seek to do—rather than broader geostrategic goals that have often been used to sacrifice human needs, certainly for much of the twentieth century. The maintenance of international peace and security is now recognized as going beyond the balance of power and deterrence amongst states; conditions of individuals are seen as a part of the equation. In line with this, international peacebuilding since the end of the Cold War has included a range of human-focused activities: supporting ceasefires and peace processes, demobilization and disarmament of former combatants and reintegrating them into society; stabilizing the economy; employment creation and economic development; repatriation (or resettlement) of refugees and internally displaced persons; responding to food insecurity; responding to acute health concerns; strengthening law and order; promoting and facilitating democratic practices; strengthening institutions of justice and legislation; resuming and strengthening public service delivery; promoting human rights and reconciliation; and addressing land reform claims. Therefore, to the extent that contemporary peacebuilding reflects a liberal approach to promoting peace and security within and between states, it rests upon the foundation of human 'contentedness'. Simply put, although critical scholars rightly question the nature and impact of some peacebuilding policies, the peacebuilding project is essentially based upon a human-centred conception of peace and stability.

However, there are a number of negative implications to the securitization of peacebuilding. It tends to de-legitimize states that fail to conform to the

hegemonic worldview and those societies which fall short of 'institutions' familiar to external (Western) scrutiny. It can thus be seen as a part of a broader agenda to coercively reform 'developing' countries. It also reinforces a tendency to externalize problems in the developing—'other'—world, and even to demonize the 'other' as a pretext for control and intervention. This results in a lack of respect, sensitivity and understanding of problems elsewhere. It also reflects a failure to appreciate that these problems are in some ways a consequence of pathologies inherent in the international system. According to this critical view, this translates into peacebuilding policies which are not legitimate or effective, and which ignore the underlying (systemic) sources of conflict. The coercive approach to peacebuilding—most obviously for example in Bosnia and East Timor but more subtly in many other contexts—and the aversion to local dissent are illustrative of this.

Secondly, linking international peacebuilding to international security may also result in selectivity: assistance will be concentrated in areas of strategic interest, to the detriment of other needy but less 'important' regions. In addition, this type of thinking implies a politicization of assistance, prioritizing the needs of 'friendly' countries, again to the neglect of humanitarian needs elsewhere. This is demonstrated by a comparison between the peacebuilding resources invested in the Balkans—especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eastern Slavonia and Kosovo—with those invested in many African cases; the failed state concept has brought greater attention to Africa, but strategic priorities ultimately prevail. Indeed, none of the major transitional administration operations have been undertaken in Africa.

Thirdly, since the rationale behind the securitization of peacebuilding is to prioritize stability, it results in an emphasis in international peacebuilding upon top-down mediation amongst power brokers and building state institutions, rather than bottom-up, community-driven peacebuilding or the resolution of the underlying sources of conflict. This is often quite intrusive, and, according to critical scholars, insensitive towards local cultures and institutions (Chandler 1999, 2006, Chopra 2000, Bain 2006, Turner and Pugh 2006). This approach engages with the 'facts on the ground' and the local brokers of power, which are often those actors that played a leading role in conflict. The rationale for this, of course, is that the cooperation of such elites is essential in order to achieve and sustain peace and stability; any peacebuilding strategy which neglected this reality would be unsustainable. This approach arguably values stability and a negative peace—whatever form this takes—above justice and conflict resolution. The result of this is not liberal peacebuilding in a Wilsonian tradition, but rather a realist illiberal peacebuilding informed more by Hobbes. This raises concerns about the legitimacy of peacebuilding according to norms of self-determination and sovereignty. Indeed, there also appears to be a failure to recognize and address indigenous institutions and forms of authority, and a presumption of uniform or 'virgin' territory in the areas in which peacebuilding occurs. Peacebuilding reflects externally conceived models of how 'peace' should be characterized and judged; it is donor driven.

It also reflects the idea of peacebuilding as a fundamentally technical or practical challenge—the idea that ‘Western states and international institutions . . . reinterpret economic, social and political problems in other parts of the world as questions which are largely amenable to technical administrative solutions’ (Chandler 2006, p. 7). The implication is that peacebuilding assistance is essentially value-free and does not represent important choices and interests. There are benefits to this—the idea of capacity-building of national actors and technical assistance avoids controversy and projects the idea of local ownership. However, but the apolitical model of peacebuilding may miss the reality on the ground and fail to create conditions conducive to stability. Moreover, in this context, there is a danger that state-building may undermine traditional indigenous authority structures (Chesterman 2007, Lemay-Hebert 2009). This may be morally questionable and illegitimate, but also if the new centralized agendas fail to take root, instability and conflict can ensue (as in East Timor in 2006). Some authors view a more sinister agenda at work. Duffield (2003) has argued that this top-down peacebuilding represents ‘metropolitan monitoring, intervention and regulation unprecedented since the colonial period’ in order to constrain the negative impact of global market failures. And for Chandler (2006, p. 1), these practices ‘constitute highly invasive forms of external regulation’.

In addition to being problematic for failing to engage with the political realities on the ground—and thus raising questions of effectiveness—the top-down approach has also contributed to concerns about the interests served by peacebuilding and the manner in which peacebuilding activities are designed. According to this critical reading, the efforts to de-politicize peacebuilding are an attempt to suppress unwelcome debate about the implications of these activities, and a pretext for marginalizing local voices when they offer resistance to peacebuilding policies. A securitized approach to peacebuilding therefore generally results in a negative peace.

Conclusion

Twenty-first century peacebuilding activities reflect evolving perceptions—and constructions—of the nature of, and threats to, international and national security. Weak and conflict-prone states are widely regarded, especially in policy circles, as a—possibly even *the*—key security threat, and so international peacebuilding activities in part represent a response to this. Therefore, peacebuilding has as a core objective the stabilization of armed conflict and state failure in order to prevent or contain its international repercussions. There are clearly some negative consequences to this in terms of the nature and impact of peacebuilding activities. However, it may be necessary to accept the ‘reality’ of conservative visions of peacebuilding oriented around the promotion of stability, despite the limitations of this, in order to achieve the reduction of violent conflict. Critical challenges to contemporary peacebuilding from a normative perspective are valid, but they are based upon an inaccurate

assumption about the true nature of peacebuilding. Debates and activities of contemporary peacebuilding reflect competing visions and interests and the securitization of peacebuilding exposes these internal inconsistencies and tensions within the concept (see for example Heathershaw and Lambach 2008).

There are two broad and opposing approaches (Newman 2009c). Transformational peacebuilding emphasizes the resolution of conflict, which may include addressing underlying sources of violence. This approach is premised upon the assumption that durable peace and stability rest upon the achievement of positive peace and giving free expression to local voices, desires and forms of politics. Transformational peacebuilding is built upon bottom-up community initiatives and engages with local institutions, customs and norms. It also accommodates pressures for social change as a part of resolving the root causes of conflict and addressing human security needs. Transformational peacebuilding promotes social justice and accountability for past human rights abuses. For these reasons, in the academic world at least, transformational approaches come closest to advocating emancipation as an objective of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This approach to peacebuilding in theory does not reflect a universalizing vision—in contrast to liberal approaches—and is more likely to be context-oriented and centred around community needs. It involves engagement with civil society actors and a more community-focused approach which cultivates moderate peace leaders. Kaldor (2006, p. 123) describes this as a 'cosmopolitan' approach: 'a positive political vision, embracing tolerance, multiculturalism, civility and democracy'. According to this, peacebuilding processes must therefore seek opportunities to restore 'legitimate political authority' and the input of progressive, non-sectarian voices from below, to encourage the 'islands of civility' amongst reasonable people to talk and make compromises. Advocates of transformational peacebuilding are inevitably critical of top-down approaches, claiming that they merely perpetuate an unjust 'negative' peace. Balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches involves a balance between recognizing the realities of power and aspiring to cosmopolitan aspirations and a positive peace.

In contrast, realist peacebuilding entails containing or repressing conflict in the interests of international peace and stability in general or particular hegemonic interests. Although it may use the language of peace, this approach is primarily concerned with international systemic stability and addressing the international threats to security inherent in civil war and state failure. It does not necessarily seek to resolve underlying sources of conflict; advocates of this approach are sceptical of international efforts to achieve societal change. Realist peacebuilding recognizes power as the 'facts on the ground' and therefore engages with local power-holders as the key to achieving peace and stability. In keeping with this, realist peacebuilding prioritizes the (re)construction of strong states—rather than open, participatory governance or social transformation—as the means of containing conflict and promoting stability. Justice, welfare and the resolution of the underlying sources of conflict

(although usually desirable) are pursued only insofar as they are relevant to maintaining stability.

It is difficult—or impossible—to conclude which approach to peacebuilding is ‘best’ or most legitimate, because the concept remains subjective and contested. Advocates of both the transformational and realist approaches may rightly claim internal consistency for their own doctrines yet they rest upon different founding assumptions. Peacebuilding—as is seen on the ground—does enhance the lives of people in conflict-prone countries, but it is primarily oriented around the promotion of stability and curtailing the international repercussions of conflict. Within this securitized model of international peacebuilding an approach to peace based upon transformation or emancipation, whilst normatively attractive, is not viable. On balance, despite sometimes resting upon spurious notions of ‘new’ security threats and despite some negative consequences, the securitization of peacebuilding has had a positive overall effect upon people in conflict-prone societies. The challenge, both for scholarship and policy, is to consider hybridized approaches to peacebuilding which acknowledge the ‘realities’ of power but which strive for some degree of conflict transformation and legitimacy, both of which are necessary for sustainable peace and stability.

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