

Peacetime Violence

Post-Conflict Violence and Peacebuilding Strategies

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Abstract

This synthesis provides an overview of academic findings on the sources of violence in post-war environments and on the strategies to address them. It distinguishes between unaddressed pre-war tensions, war-induced cleavages, and peace-generated conflicts. It shows that, according to the best research, current peacebuilding strategies have two major weaknesses. First, they neglect the micro-level dynamics of violence. Second, they do not devote sufficient attention and resources to state reconstruction (which is distinct from merely holding elections). These weaknesses explain why peacebuilding efforts often fail to end violence even when they produce other positive outcomes.

Introduction

The persistence of violence during the implementation of peace agreements is a frequent problem. Often, these continued conflicts lead to the resumption of war, as in Angola, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Timor.

After the mid 1990s and the massacres that followed the failure of the Angolan and Rwandan peace agreements, academic scholars began studying the post-peace agreement period (Stedman, Rothchild et al. 2002). This research program has yielded three major findings. First, the causes of continued violence during peace implementation are not necessarily the same as the causes of the war. Root causes of violence often persist, but new economic, social, political, and ethnic cleavages also form during and after a conflict. Second, micro-level agendas play a significant role in sustaining violence before, during, and after a war. Third, although peacekeeping and peacebuilding interventions significantly increase the likelihood of sustainable peace (Fortna 2008; Howard 2008), they would be even more effective if they focused more on state building and grassroots conflict resolution.

After emphasizing that any analysis should consider local and international dimensions in addition to national ones, this synthesis details the main causes of violence in post-conflict environments. It distinguishes between unaddressed pre-existing tensions, war-induced cleavages, and conflicts specific to the peace implementation phase. It systematically reviews current policy strategies in order to assess whether they adequately address the causes of violence identified.

Significance of grassroots and international agendas

In most cases, a combination of individual, local (at the village, clan, or district level), provincial, national, and international agendas cause war and post-war violence. However, peacebuilders often focus on the national realm and neglect sub-national and supra-national tensions, thus decreasing the effectiveness of their programs.

- Micro-level dynamics of conflicts

A group of researchers, inspired by Yale Political Scientist Stathis Kalyvas, has demonstrated that pre-war, war, and post-war violence is the joint product of micro-level and macro-level tensions (Autesserre 2006; Kalyvas 2006; Krämer 2006; Straus 2006). Grassroots hostilities include intra-party disputes, land conflicts, social antagonisms, political divergences, economic

quarrels, personal grudges, professional jealousy, family feuds, and romantic rivalries. In most civil conflicts, local actors reinterpret these antagonisms into the language of national or international cleavages in order to enlist support from governments or rebels. At the same time, national and international leaders manipulate local feuds to find the recruits, resources, and information they need to pursue their macro objectives (Kalyvas 2006). As a result, decentralized tensions fuel violence during peace implementation, sometimes increasing the risk of war resumption.

→ *Peace processes usually focus on the national and international tracks and overlook the bottom-up causes of violence. Peacebuilders should pay more attention to grassroots tensions when designing peace agreements, devote significantly more funding to local conflict-resolution programs, and provide diplomatic and UN staff members with training in bottom-up peacebuilding. It is important to note, however, that there is no consensus regarding which specific policies and strategies are most effective in addressing grassroots tensions (for suggestions, see Anderson and Olson 2003; Autesserre Forthcoming; Lederach 1997, and the project Reflecting on Peace Practices).*

- Neighborhood effect

Sambanis (2001) has identified a significant statistical correlation between the presence of undemocratic or warring neighboring states and a country's risk of experiencing an ethnic war. Numerous case studies have also shown that most civil wars have regional dimensions, because economic, political, or ethnic tensions often spill over to neighboring countries and destabilize them (see for example Sierra Leone and Liberia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as the intertwined conflicts of the African Great Lakes region). In such cases, having national strategies makes little sense.

→ *Current peacebuilding strategies are too oriented toward individual states. Regional partnerships should be built into current peace processes (Ellis 2005).*

The following sections provide a framework to analyze these local, provincial, national, and international causes of violence and to respond to them effectively. It is important to keep several points in mind when using this framework. Although this synthesis presents them separately for analytical purposes, these causes are usually intertwined and fuel one another. In addition, their respective weights vary depending on specific national and local contexts. Despite this variation, however, two policy recommendations seem relevant for most situations: peacebuilders should focus more on state reconstruction, and they should pay more attention to micro-level dynamics.

Unaddressed root causes of the war

The “root causes” of a conflict often persist after the war has officially ended; they can also reappear in different forms. Academic researchers usually articulate these causes according to the “greed and grievance” dichotomy (Collier and Hoeffler 2001), where greed and grievances are not opposite elements but “inextricably fused motives” of violence (Collier and Sambanis 2005).

Greed: the most widespread explanations for continued violence focus on economic motivations.

- Exploitation of natural resources

The presence of lootable, easily marketable commodities such as diamonds, gold, or drugs is considered one of the main determinants of civil war outbreak or duration (Collier and Hoeffler 2001; Ross 2004). During peace implementation, resource exploitation often continues to cause violence in several ways. Armed groups fight one another for the control of mining sites. They abuse the local population in order to confiscate ownership of resource-rich lands or to coerce recruits into exploiting these sites. They resist the re-establishment of state authority – which would end their profitable control over resource-rich areas – by violent means if necessary. Finally, profits from illegal exploitation of resources enable armed groups to finance their continued war efforts.

→ *Current peacebuilding strategies include naming and shaming by panels of experts, sanctions against traffickers, and tracing of precious minerals – such as the Kimberly Process for diamonds.*

This approach pays insufficient attention to the re-establishment of state authority over resource-rich areas. It also overlooks the lessons of the successful Liberian peace process, which demonstrated the benefits of creating an international trusteeship for the control of resources in the immediate aftermath of a war.

- Land conflict

In developing countries, access to land is the main means of survival and integration into local social structures. Land scarcity therefore leads to serious hostilities over property rights and exploitation. Anthropologists and political scientists have emphasized the role of contested land rights in fueling violence before, during, and after a war. They have also stressed the importance of land tenure policies in conflict prevention and conflict settlements. (Daudelin 2003; Fitzpatrick 2001; Vlassenroot and Huggins 2004).

→ *Current peacebuilding strategies rarely focus on land tenure policies in the immediate aftermath of a conflict; they usually postpone land access reform until the country is stabilized. In consultation with local stakeholders, peacebuilders should review land policies and, when relevant, modify them as soon as possible after a conflict ends.*

Grievances: Political, identity, or social grievances are also frequent causes of post-war violence, especially when they are combined with a lack of political rights and a high level of economic inequality.

- Ethnic, political, social, economic, and religious divisions

Case study analyses of countries such as the D.R. Congo, the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, and South Africa show the existence of a strong link between ethnic, political, social, or religious divisions and violence, both at the local and national levels. The debate regarding this link is not about whether divisions cause violence per se, but about whether divisions alone can cause war or war resumption (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Gurr and United States Institute of Peace 1993; Laitin and Brubaker 1998).

The controversy around the role of economic inequalities follows a similar pattern. Sen and Foster (1997) argue that high levels of economic inequality are closely related to rebellion, either because the poor seek redistribution or the rich want to prevent it. By contrast, Collier and Hoeffler (2001) have demonstrated that the statistical correlation between inequality and war occurrence is actually very low. Most researchers nevertheless agree that, even if they may be insufficient to cause generalized conflicts, economic inequalities do fuel violence during peace implementation.

→ *Regardless of the nature of these divisions, current peacebuilding projects usually focus on macro-level dimensions and events that take place in the capitals. While these strategies often contribute to assuaging national and regional tensions, they share one significant problem: they regularly fail to address micro-level dynamics, especially those present in rural areas. Peacebuilding efforts should more systematically address the ethnic, political, religious, economic, and social divisions present at the micro levels.*

- Lack of political rights

Authoritarian rule is positively correlated with civil war occurrence because the lack of political rights impedes the peaceful resolution of political conflict (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000). Such lack of political rights often occurs in post-conflict environments, when the winning party adopts dictatorial control over the state or when the democratization process fails.

Foreign donors regularly impose democratization on post-war countries as a pre-condition for aid or peacekeeping missions. While some democratization processes have succeeded (such as Namibia and Liberia), many others have failed to end violence and promote democracy. Academic researchers have identified two reasons for these failures. First, democratization is often equated with holding free and fair elections, while other key measures, such as the reconstruction of the bureaucracy and justice system, are overlooked (Autesserre Forthcoming). Second, post-war elections contribute to ending violence only when certain pre-conditions are in place, such as the demilitarization of warring parties, the right to freedom of speech, and the existence of an independent justice system (Lyons 2005; Snyder 2000). These pre-conditions often take at least five to ten years to develop in countries that have just experienced full-scale

war and have little or no democratic history, while the current practice is to hold elections within two years of a peace agreement (Paris 2004).

→ *To ensure that elections will contribute to peacebuilding, democratization processes should focus on creating pre-conditions for a free, fair, and meaningful vote. It means in particular conducting security reform, strengthening civil society, and reconstructing the justice system before holding the first post-war polls.*

War-induced causes of violence

When a conflict ends, some groups stand to lose the economic, political, or social power they acquired during the war, and they therefore have vested interests in the continuation of violence. They can transform into spoilers unless peace settlements have specific provisions for them (Stedman 1997):

- Economic interests:

Scholars such as Keen (1998) and Kaldor (2007) have extensively analyzed the economic transformation that countries undertake when at war. Most war economies include criminal components, such as resource trafficking, which persist in post-conflict environments.

→ *The weaknesses of current peacebuilding strategies in this regard are similar to those detailed in the above section on illegal exploitation of resources. In particular, current peacebuilding strategies pay insufficient attention to the re-establishment of state authority, which is crucial to dismantling criminal networks (provided the state elite is not involved in resource trafficking).*

- Political and social interests

Wars deeply change the social, ethnic, political, economic, and religious power structures of the affected countries. The most widespread effect is generational: the need for combatants favors young males, including those with no education or professional training who, during wartime, enjoy social, economic, and political power far greater than what they would be entitled to in a peaceful society. These transformations in power structures lead to tensions during and after a generalized conflict. They can prompt dissatisfied parties to act as spoilers in order to recapture the influence they lost.

→ *Current peacebuilding projects usually focus on national dynamics when addressing changes in the power structures caused by the war. They should also consider the ethnic, political, or social issues that fuel violence at the sub-national level and may escalate again into generalized conflicts.*

Lengthy wars also create a favorable environment for violence:

- Lack of state capacity

Lengthy wars often weaken the state, sometimes to the point of state failure. The lack of state authority, and especially the absence of a reliable justice system and of impartial coercion forces, allows for the persistence of illegal resource exploitation, coercion of civilians by armed groups, and violent resolution of conflict. This creates a vicious circle, with continued violence and trafficking further weakening the state. (Reno 1998; Rotberg 2004; Zartman 1995)

→ *Current peacebuilding strategies are short-term endeavors that pay insufficient attention to state reconstruction (Englebert and Tull 2008; Paris 2004; Woodward 2006). Peacebuilders should conceptualize post-conflict interventions as long-term endeavors and focus their efforts on rebuilding strong states.*

- Conflict trap

Wars significantly damage the productive capacity of a country, thus creating a “conflict trap” (Collier 2004). Countries recovering from wars usually experience low or nonexistent economic growth, which perpetuates the poverty that facilitated war in the first place – either by generating economic inequalities and grievances or by facilitating the recruitment of fighters.

→ *Collier’s team recommends that international actors give post-conflict states three years to recover their absorption capacity, and that they then inject massive development aid in order to*

jumpstart economic growth. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have implemented such programs in selected post-conflict countries. However, these efforts have remained overly focused on the macro levels. Peacebuilders should assess the grassroots impact of development programs and incorporate local conflict-resolution and conflict-prevention measures in development initiatives. They should also devote more funding to reconstruction projects that promote the reintegration of former combatants into their home communities.

Peace-induced causes of violence

Peace settlements themselves produce four additional causes of tensions.

Security dilemma

Civil wars break the trust between a country's different member groups, thus creating conditions ripe for a security dilemma. Measures that a group takes to increase its security – such as refusing to disarm combatants – can be perceived by other groups as threats. These groups will then attempt to make themselves more secure – for example, by rearming combatants – thus diminishing the perceived security of the first group. This creates a spiraling dynamic that may lead to localized fighting or to war resumption even though all parties wanted peace to prevail (Fearon 1998; Jervis and Snyder 1999).

→ *Quantitative and formal research emphasizes the importance of third-party guarantees in assuaging the security dilemma and overcoming commitment problems. Particularly effective tools include international peacekeeping troops, power-sharing pacts, and strong peace agreements that include the creation of demilitarized zones and joint commissions for dispute resolution (Fortna 2003; Hampson 1996; Stedman, Rothchild et al. 2002; Walter 2002).*

Transitions to democracy

Countries are more likely to engage in war, both internally and externally, in times of regime transition, especially democratization. The larger the magnitude of the regime change, the more significant the risk of war (Mansfield and Snyder 1995).

→ *Current peacebuilding strategies impose democratization in the immediate aftermath of a conflict as a condition for aid and/or the deployment of peacekeeping troops. The scholarly debate on post-war democratization focuses on two major issues: timing and sequence. Should democratization start immediately after a conflict or after a ten-year period? Which of the different components of democracy should come first? No consensus has been achieved.*

Peace versus Justice

War abuses generate major grievances and hatred. Transitional justice processes are needed to compensate victims for their suffering and to prevent perpetrators from being rewarded. Without justice, victims are likely to develop revenge motivations, which prevent the reintegration of combatants into civilian life and may generate a new cycle of violence. At the same time, however, the existence of a justice process is likely to hinder disarmament efforts, because combatants fear being brought to court. (Pankhurst 1999; Williams and Scharf 2002; Zartman and Kremenjuk 2005)

→ *There is no consensual policy recommendation regarding transitional justice. Academics similarly disagree about whether post-conflict strategies should favor peace or accountability.*

Return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs)

Refugee experts hold the return of refugees and IDPs as a necessary condition for peace, but this assertion is debated (Adelman 2002), and in addition, refugee return poses significant risks to a peace process. It puts additional strains on already depleted resources and may reignite existing identity conflicts. Because those who stayed during the war have often taken over refugees and IDPs' houses, land, and jobs, the return of the latter often create complex conflicts over property and entitlement rights.

→ *Conflicts caused by the return of refugees and IDPs currently rank among the major concerns of humanitarian organizations. However, these agencies often complain that funding for IDP and refugee reintegration remains largely below needs.*

Conclusion

Current peacebuilding strategies require two major modifications to address more effectively the causes of continued violence during peace implementation. First, peacebuilders should prioritize state reconstruction, which is distinct from merely holding elections. In particular, they should devote more effort and resources to rebuilding the bureaucracy and justice system as well as re-establishing state authority over resource-rich areas. This would contribute to ending organized violence, facilitate democratization processes, and help address war economies and illegal trafficking. Second, peacebuilders should devote more attention and resources to grassroots conflicts. They should especially focus on contested rights to land, reintegration of former combatants, and local political, social, economic, and ethnic divisions, which fuel post-war violence and can lead to the resumption of war.

These two modifications require increased resources for peacebuilding. However, there is a frequent mismatch between the complexity of a conflict and the financial, military, and human resources committed to dispute resolution (Doyle and Sambanis 2006). This observation leads to a gap in the scholarly and policy research on the topic: although most scholars agree that additional resources are needed, we do not yet know how to generate these additional resources. Until this is settled, peacebuilders should consider redistributing existing resources toward state building and bottom-up conflict resolution.

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