At War’s End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict

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How do you build peace in a society emerging from civil war? This is a question preoccupying many statesmen and academics, not least due to the implosion of Iraq, the continuing instability in Afghanistan, the intractability of the conflict(s) in Sudan, and the recurrence of conflict in large parts of the developing world. The study of post-conflict peacebuilding is thus, unsurprisingly, undergoing a period of expansion. While peacebuilding involves everything from demobilising and disarming armed groups to writing new constitutions and development plans, it is not a ‘technicist’ or politically neutral project but is highly ideologically driven.

Since the end of the Cold War and the removal of the major obstacle (i.e. the Soviet Union) to the forging of collective security arrangements which promote the interests of the advanced capitalist world, a new consensus has emerged. The principal practitioners of peacebuilding – the UN, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the EU, NATO, the African Union (AU), the IMF and the World Bank – are all driven by a belief in the pacific powers of ‘liberalisation.’ This involves ‘marketisation’ (liberalisation in the economic sphere) and ‘democratisation’ (liberalisation in the political sphere). Roland Paris does us a great service in At War’s End by stripping peacebuilding back to its ideological origins and providing the reader with a useful assessment of the theoretical assumptions which underlie it. The book is split into three parts dealing with the theoretical and historical origins of peacebuilding and the ‘liberal peace thesis,’ the record of peacebuilding missions, and a consideration of problems and solutions. Paris offers an empirically rich assessment of 14 peacekeeping missions from 1989 until 1999 but while his critique offers real insights, his proposed solution – ‘institutionalisation before liberalisation’ – is problematic.

From peacekeeping to peacebuilding
Peacebuilding missions in the 1990s were guided by a belief that peace and stability would be ensured by implementing a ‘liberal peace’ – thus they promoted democratisation and marketisation. This was based on a resurgence of what Paris calls “Wilsonianism” (after the US president Woodrow Wilson): a ‘faith in the
peace-producing powers of liberalisation’ (p. 7). After decades of gaining dust on the shelves of the academy, in the mid-1980s the ‘liberal peace thesis’ was dusted down and made a comeback. Studies on the relationship between liberal democracy and inter-state violence, particularly the work of Michael Doyle, have been supplemented with research examining the relationship between liberal democracy and intrastate violence, such as the work of R.J. Rummel. [1] These studies are often cited by policymakers as proof of the pacifying effects of liberalisation as a strategy for rebuilding war-torn societies. However – and this is one of the many contradictions at the heart of the ‘liberal peace thesis’ – while it may well be the case that well-established liberal democracies are conducive to domestic peace (although the absence of war among democracies does not mean that democracies do not fight wars: France, Britain and the US are states that rate high amongst those who have been most engaged in warfare since 1945 [2]), is the actual transition to liberal democracy conducive to peace? This question guides Paris’s study.

Paris cites research by Walton and Seddon (1994) on the destabilising impacts of liberalisation. The clear relationship between widespread popular unrest and the promotion of free markets through structural adjustment policies in many developing countries in the 1980s and 1990s indicates that economic liberalisation has negative impacts (p. 46). Political liberalisation, too, may well also destabilise already fragile states. Research by Mansfield and Snyder, amongst others, has found that states with emerging democracies are especially likely to go to war as a means of handling internal tension (p. 45). These conclusions form a central part of Paris’s critique of the ‘liberal peace’ assumptions behind post-conflict reconstruction strategies.


The difference between the UN missions of the 1990s and those that had gone before is that during the Cold War, ‘peacekeeping’ was the main security priority and activity of the UN. Missions thus involved monitoring ceasefire or patrolling
buffer zones. Only two deviated from this pattern – the disastrous 1960s Belgian Congo mission, and the 1960-63 security force that oversaw the end of colonial rule in western New Guinea. The guiding principle of the UN in this earlier period was to keep out of domestic politics. As Paris outlines, this was necessary for four main reasons. First, the UN Charter expressly prohibited involvement in the domestic affairs of any state. Second, parties to the conflict were unlikely to accept a more intrusive role by external actors. Third, the permanent members of the Security Council (particularly Cold War rivals, the US and the Soviet Union) were more often than not against UN involvement in the domestic affairs of their allies and client states. And fourth, the existence of an alternative model of socio-economic governance meant that the liberal model did not have carte blanche in this period – the Soviet Union operated single party rule and a command economy where the law of value was suppressed through state ownership of the means of production. Cold War rivalry between these two different social formations meant that the UN could not promote one particular model of governance. The post-colonial developing world was thus born into an international system riven between capitalism or Communism – allowing many to play the Superpowers off against each other to their own benefit.

While Paris gives these factors equal strength, the latter, I would argue, is the key reason for the limited role of the UN in the pre-1989 period. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and thus the end of a militarily and economically powerful opponent to the worldwide imposition of capitalism, a more virulent strain of capitalism (neoliberalism) which had emerged in the 1980s now became dominant. The developing world was therefore denied not only an alternative pole of international support, but also a different developmental model. As US State Department official Francis Fukuyama proclaimed triumphantly at the time, the collapse of Communism signalled the end of history, capitalism had won the battle, there was no alternative. The UN, therefore, could now take up the neoliberal cause (pp. 13-21).

Demystifying the peacebuilding discourse back into its neoliberal origins does not mean that many involved in peacebuilding are not committed to ending conflict, preserving peace and building a better society. However, the parameters for peacebuilding strategies are set by a neoliberal agenda that is not neutral: all UN peacebuilding missions have promoted liberal market democracy as a method by which to break the ‘conflict trap.’ [3] The provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights relating to democracy were thus, as Carl Gershman (quoted in Paris)
Turner wrote in 1993, suddenly ‘dusted off and presented to the international community as the foundation for a new world order’ (p. 22). Neoliberal economics, already being promoted throughout the developing world by the structural adjustment policies of the international financial institutions (IFIs), were thus supplemented by more strident policies of democracy-promotion by inter-governmental organisations (IGOs), IFIs and donors, many of which set up well-financed organisations and inserted political conditionalities into commercial agreements. Paris quotes Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs: ‘By the mid-1990s, almost the entire world had adopted the fundamental elements of a market economy’ (p. 21). The orthodoxy of the ‘Washington Consensus,’ with its emphasis on rapid economic liberalisation, privatisation and integration into the world economy, thus also formed the core of the new peacebuilding discourse.

By charting the historical and ideological background to the post-conflict reconstruction strategies followed by the main peacebuilding organisations in the 1990s, Paris does us a great service. He suggests that:

Decades from now, historians may look back on the immediate post-Cold War years as a period of remarkable faith in the powers of liberalization to remedy a broad range of social ills, from internal and international violence to poverty, famine, corruption, and even environmental destruction (p35).

What is interesting is how universal this discourse has become: international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), while proposing more grassroots participation to counteract the ‘top-down’ approach of mainstream peacebuilding, also operate within the parameters set by the neoliberal project:

Most international NGOs (in the field of human rights, development and emergency relief) seemed to accept the view that free and fair elections, respect for civil liberties, and market-oriented economies are desirable objectives for developing states (p. 33).

Thus, in a very limited but obvious way, Paris confirms the conclusions of Mark Duffield’s more radical critique: that there now exists a complex system of global governance which reaches beyond the individual governments of the North. [4] However, while Duffield sees this as part of a violent political economy whose goal is to transform and subjugate the Global South, Paris (albeit critical of the limitations of liberalism) sees it as ‘the best long-term solution for civil violence.’ [5]
The experience of post-conflict reconstruction – an assessment

In part two of the book, Paris examines the impact of these post-conflict reconstruction strategies of democratisation and marketisation across his chosen 14 case study countries. He poses the question, ‘has the Wilsonian assumption of peacebuilding – that rapid liberalisation would foster a stable and lasting peace in countries emerging from civil wars – been borne out in practice?’ (p. 55). These chapters offer the reader a brief analysis of each of the conflicts and the impact of the UN peacebuilding missions.

Of those that failed (i.e. Angola and Rwanda), in the most tragic case, that of Rwanda, Paris stops short of explaining the genocide as a response to democratisation, but he does argue that:

The evidence suggests that the mass killing of Tutsis was a last-ditch effort to block implementation of the Arusha Accords. Plans for political liberalisation, including the transition coalition government and democratic elections, would have challenged the dominance of the Hutu clique that surrounded Habyarimana [the President] and controlled the military (p. 74).

Add to this the impact of the structural adjustment program, which exacerbated ethnic tensions and reduced the already weak state capacity, and the scene was set for genocidal violence.

This is a damning indictment of ‘Wilsonianism,’ but sadly a common story albeit with perhaps not such immediate devastating impact on human life. Research I have conducted on the experience of the Palestinian Authority (PA) has shown that ‘liberal peace’ policies are pursued with little regard for their appropriateness to the situation on the ground (and often with little regard for what local people want). [6] The policy package advanced by donors, institutions and development agencies after the Oslo Accords conformed to the ‘Washington Consensus’ in its emphasis on economic liberalisation, privatisation and integration into the world economy. But the PA’s economic problems are not the result of government intervention and market distortion but the result of continued Israeli dominance over the PA economy and its policy of ‘asymmetrical containment.’ [7] While the Oslo Accords gave the PA limited control over some territories within the West Bank and Gaza, Israel formalised, made permanent and extended its ability to control the movement of people and goods into and out of the Palestinian territories through a complex system of checkpoints. A 2006 World Bank report counted nearly 500
checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank, an area which is around a third of the size of Wales. This has had a devastating impact on the economy of the PA. A very different type of policy intervention is therefore required to alter this highly negative development path. As pointed out by Rick Hooper, UNSCO (Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator) chief of staff in the mid-1990s, one key problem was the inability, or reluctance, on the part of development specialists, to grasp the peculiarity of the PA’s context: continued military occupation and the absence of sovereignty. Treating the PA as a poor sovereign country was doomed to fail as a development strategy given the limits set on what it could achieve. The recent economic sanctions imposed since the election of Hamas in January 2006 have, of course, devastated the economy, brought the country to the verge of civil war and is likely to lead to the collapse of the PA. The response of the international community has been extremely counterproductive and is, in effect, a form of collective punishment imposed on the Palestinian people. The election of Hamas, a proscribed terrorist organisation, offers a challenge to liberal peacebuilders as it indicates a huge lacuna between what peacebuilders want and what they may actually get. Recent debates within the peacebuilding discourse have involved exploring how to promote ‘good’ civil society and get the ‘right type’ of leaders into power. Paris is a leading advocate of this approach (pp. 185-96).

The examples of Cambodia and Liberia serve as fodder for Paris’s critique (which unfolds in chapters 9 and 10) that ‘free and fair’ elections are not sufficient for democracy to flourish in the absence of other essential aspects of liberal democracy: respect for political and civil liberties, real political contestation, and constitutional limitations on the exercise of power (p. 90). Paris is understandably sceptical about the potential for the implantation of democracy by external forces in states without any of these attributes:

Both countries [i.e. Cambodia and Liberia] emerged from their peacebuilding missions as quasi-democracies based on the power of strongmen who brook little dissent and use intimidation and threats to suppress political opposition (p. 96).

**Institutionalisation before liberalisation**

The conclusion that Paris reaches is that peacebuilding has often exacerbated tensions in post-conflict societies by ‘rushing’ democritisation and marketisation programmes. His solution is ‘institutionalisation before liberalisation’ – a phased, gradual and managed transition to market democracy which involves building
the necessary political and economic institutions before elections and structural adjustment policies are implemented (p. 179). Paris proposes that peacebuilders must thus become nation-builders and stay for as long as it takes, even acting as surrogate government authorities (as witnessed recently in East Timor and Kosovo) in order to lay the foundations for a sustainable peace. While this may appear infinitely sensible, I would argue that Paris is naïve about the motives of peacebuilders. Proposing that peacebuilders foster ‘good civil society’ and ensure that the ‘right leaders’ come to power plays into the hands of traditional Great Power practice and offers an apparently neutral academic justification for current US and EU actions.

In Iraq, for instance, Bosnia’s experience was used as evidence that early elections might do more harm than good. This supported the US’s desire to hand power and the responsibility for establishing a new state to a group of Iraqi politicians identified before the war. [11] These politicians were well versed in the western discourse and thus, so the US believed, could be relied on to put Iraq firmly in the western camp. In her review of Bosnia and Iraq, Manning (2006) characterises the US’s approach to post-conflict peacebuilding in Iraq as based on a ‘voluntaristic view of politics,’ i.e. the US believed it could choose and institute politicians with little regard for that society’s historical and social context. However, creating an ally is not the same as creating a strong state rooted in civil society, which, unfortunately the US (and the UK) is now discovering. In addition, developing world politicians cannot always be relied on to uncritically follow the desired agenda of their western supporters. On 7 August 2006, Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, who was the US’s preferred candidate, criticised US counterinsurgency tactics, charging that it would damage his national reconciliation process. [12]

Paris does not consider Iraq (or Afghanistan), largely because his case studies take place before 1999, but also because, as he states, ‘the challenges of peacebuilding after foreign invasion are quite different from those in post-civil war missions, particularly when the peacebuilders are the conquering powers themselves’ (p. 5). This is true, of course. However, the Iraq case throws up three interesting issues. First, it is an example of the sort of aggressive interventionist nation-building proposed by Paris. The US-dominated Coalition Provision Authority (CPA) established local and provincial councils and a national-level Iraqi Governing Council, and then tried to control the process of elite selection. Second, it is a very stark example of the devastation caused by rampant neoliberal policies, imposed on the country by the CPA. As charted by Naomi Klein and others, a radical set of
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laws were introduced which dropped corporate tax from 40 percent to 15 percent, opened the economy wide to foreign investors allowing them to own 100 percent of Iraqi assets (outside of the natural resource sector) as well as repatriate 100 percent of the profits (which would not be taxed), and there was no requirement to reinvest in the country. [13] According to Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist at the World Bank, these were ‘an even more radical form of shock therapy than pursued in the former Soviet world.’ [14] Klein (2004) points out that ‘There are many in Iraq who argue that ... Bremer’s reforms were the single largest factor leading to the rise of armed resistance.’ [15]

And third, it shows that often there are powerful opposing forces to the implementation of policies of participation and empowerment proposed by well-intentioned development and peacebuilding practitioners. As Klein (2004) charts, L. Paul Bremer, US administrator of Iraq, delayed plans for immediate elections to the Iraqi Governing Council by seven months, thus allowing the continued bargain-basement sale of Iraqi national assets (even though such asset stripping is illegal under the Geneva Conventions). [16]

From Stiglitz to Paris – one voice, one discourse

As noted by Pugh (2005): ‘Debates on peacebuilding have paralleled debates on development.’ [17] A brief incursion into recent debates within the development world therefore sheds some light on peacebuilding, as well as offering, I will argue, an interesting parallel with Paris. In development circles, the problems created by rampant neoliberalism were mounting throughout the 1990s and increasingly subjected to critique, not least from previous proponents such as George Soros, Joseph Stiglitz and, more recently, Jeffrey Sachs. As outlined by Maxwell (2005), Stiglitz’s critique, first delivered in 1998 and expanded in *Globalization and its Discontents* (2002), has informed changes in development discourse. Stiglitz’s critique focused on the need to create institutions which would underpin markets and private sector-led development, to create the conditions for an educated and healthy workforce, and ensure national ownership of the process. [18] A new consensus emerged on the need to build institutions – both economic and political – which would provide the framework for a market economy and nationally-owned poverty reduction strategy papers. ‘Poverty reduction’ and ‘good governance’ were now firmly entrenched within the development lexicon. [19] As outlined by Cammack (2006) and Duffield (2002), the new consensus posited that
development policy needed to reach beyond macro-economic policies to penetrate down into developing societies in order to transform them from within. [20]

These changes in the development discourse has fed into peacebuilding policies, particularly the emphasis on building institutions and ensuring national ownership. Paris's critique of 1990s peacebuilding missions – of failing to build institutions capable of managing the transition to liberal democracy – is thus part of this developing discourse. The 2004 UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* proposed a UN Peacebuilding Commission, whose inaugural meeting was held on 23 June 2006. Constructed as an advisory body (with 31 members selected by various methods) and designed to help integrate strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery (across UN bodies, regional organisations and IFIs), at its opening session, the importance of building effective institutions and ensuring national ownership in post-conflict societies was emphasised. [21] The UN, IFI's and donors are thus charged with taking a greater role in building economies, states and institutions. This has involved a whole host of economic and political conditionalities being imposed on many post-conflict states. All this highlights the inherent tension between sovereignty and the desires of the externals to intervene and engineer. As Duffield charges, these policies have echoes in the 19th century British idea of ‘native administration,’ i.e. devolving administrative duties to local structures while retaining external control over economic and state development. [22] There is thus a danger of a neo-colonial relationship developing where the west will only work with those willing to ‘behave.’ So, for instance, in the Palestinian territories, the election of Hamas has been met with sanctions and the removal of funds thus precipitating a humanitarian catastrophe. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that not all civil society organisations are pacific or inclusive (e.g. the *Interahamwe* in Rwanda) and can become real peace-spoilers, as outlined by Paris (pp. 160-63). But since 9/11 and the ‘war on terror,’ there has been a narrowing of what constitutes legitimate political action. The current tendency to label many opposition movements as ‘terrorist’ provides authoritarian states and local elites with the raison d'être to clamp down on opposition movements as witnessed, for instance, in the north Caucasus. But, as studies have shown, excluding opposition groups creates the potential for conflict and makes an enduring peace less likely. The key to building a peace economy is to address the sources of conflict, not mask them.

Paris is well aware that fostering ‘good’ civil society and promoting the ‘right’ type of leaders may create a backlash against peacebuilders. However, he insists that the
new generation of peacebuilding missions will 'require international peacebuilders to take on the role of nation-builders – to serve as surrogate governing authorities for as long as it takes to implement the liberalizing reforms that the peacebuilders themselves prescribe for war-shattered states.' (p. 206)

The danger of a neo-colonial relationship emerging is something which Paris believes may well be a necessary evil to achieve peace. But peace on whose terms? One of the biggest failures of the current post-conflict peacebuilding agenda for local people is their lack of involvement in the major decisions affecting their future. There is a rhetoric of ‘participation’ and ‘self-empowerment,’ which is not being implemented on the ground. Despite claims to the contrary, the imposition of macro-economic packages is a deeply political issue and one which holds huge implications for local people. In Kosovo and Albania, privatisation transferred assets from governments at knock-down prices but this largely only benefited the elite, and was conducted without employment protection measures. More worrying still, employment and income issues are regarded as mere adjuncts to the development of free markets. There is an assumption that there will be a ‘trickle-down effect’ i.e. that free markets will lead to economic growth which will, in turn, lead to jobs. But this is not happening – or you get the phenomenon of jobless growth and/or highly unequal growth. In contrast to the large sums and effort spent on generating the free market (cutting regulation, simplifying tax rates, and encouraging foreign direct investment) and on anti-terror initiatives (such as the now ubiquitous anti-money laundering regulations), very little is spent on researching or supporting the labour market, trade unions and cooperatives. For example, the ‘jobs’ part of the ‘Jobs and Justice’ manifesto in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2002 was a charade, simply expecting foreign direct investment and privatisation to lead to job creation. [23] All this is exacerbated by the fact that many post-conflict economies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, tend to attract ‘bottom feeder’ companies who take little notice of labour rights or corporate social responsibility initiatives. [24]

Under these circumstances, Paris’s claims that liberalisation exacerbates social tension because democracy and capitalism encourage competition (p. 156) appears farcical. Liberalisation exacerbates social tension in post-conflict societies because it puts profit before people, privatisation before jobs, free trade before food security, private property rights before social welfare, and western security before development. As one critic remarks:
Although the language of reconstruction programmes is rife with terms such as ‘rights,’ ‘good governance,’ ‘sovereignty’ and ‘democracy,’ affected countries do not have the right to break with macroeconomic orthodoxy, challenge imbalances of global power and resource distribution, and chart their own paths towards rebuilding their societies and economies. [25]

In addition, while helping to institute democracy would appear to be an innocuous ‘good’ with which few would disagree, the actions of many organisations involved in democracy promotion is highly suspect. Two of the main US democracy promotion institutions, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) were involved in the successful coup against the Aristide government in Haiti in 2004 and the failed coup attempt against the Chavez government in Venezuela in 2002. [26] Only last month (September 2006), the US government, through its international development agency USAID (channelled through the Office of Transition Initiatives), was accused of using ‘democracy promotion’ money, to bankroll opposition groups in Venezuela and Cuba. [27] The US’s desire to promote the ‘right’ type of leader is also evident in its democracy promotion strategies in the Middle East (through the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the Greater Middle East Initiative). These have been largely directed towards a relatively narrow constituency of liberal, secular, pro-Western elites who do not represent the region’s grassroots majority, while ignoring the popularity of Islamist groups. But Islamic movements now constitute the main opposition to authoritarian regimes in the region and represent a wide spectrum of opinion – from modernist to Jihadi. Viewing all Islamic groups as akin to al-Qaeda and treating them as such is thus likely to impact badly on the modernist strand to the benefit of Jihadi tendencies. [28] Despite what the US or other western governments say or do, support for the Islamists will continue. The main issue is whether they will use the ballot box or violence, and this is something which the west can influence.

**Building a political economy of peace**

While Paris’s book is an excellent survey and critique of the assumptions and actions of 1990s peacebuilding missions, his proposed solution – ‘institutionalisation before liberalisation’ – puts the onus on domestic sources of poverty, instability and underdevelopment. What it ignores, however, possibly because it is too difficult to contemplate, is that building a global political economy of peace will require an extensive redistribution of wealth and power at both the local and global levels.
Over $350bn is spent annually by the OECD to support its agriculture sector. This is about the same as Africa’s combined GDP and dwarfs the $50bn spent on aid. The total cost of western trade barriers on agricultural products has been estimated by Oxfam to be over $100bn. [29] The Catholic development NGO, Cafod, estimates that unfair trade rules rob poor countries of $2.45bn (£1.3bn) a day – 14 times what they get in aid. [30] Increasing aid and abolishing western tariffs on agricultural goods, however, may well not be enough for countries caught in what the World Bank refers to as the ‘conflict trap’ [31] It may also be necessary to subsidize and protect strategic industries in order to create employment and to protect, foster and invest in licit livelihood options thus aiding post-conflict reconstruction and reducing the shadow economy.

Roland Paris begins his book with the famous quote from Georges Clemenceau, French premier from 1917-20, a major contributor to the Allied victory in world war one and framer of the Treaty of Versailles: ‘Il est plus facile de faire la guerre que de faire la paix’ (‘It is far easier to make war than to make peace’). I will end this review with a quote from Martin Luther King Jnr., American civil rights activist and pacifist who was hounded by the FBI: ‘True peace is not just the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.’

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References


The Times 2006, ‘Iraqi PM incensed at American raid on Shia militia stronghold,’ 8 August. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-2303864,00.html


Notes

[19] Although, as suggested by Pugh (2006), this ‘reformist consensus’ may well have been disrupted by the US at the UN New York Summit of September 2005 by insisting on all mention of the Millennium Development Goals being eliminated from the summit declaration.
[21] UN Secretary-General, 23 June 2006.
[23] For an elaboration of this see Pugh, 2006, forthcoming.
[24] These points are taken from, and elaborated at greater length in, Turner and Pugh, 2006, forthcoming.
[27] Campbell 30 August 2006.