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THE EVOLUTION OF PEACEBUILDING

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Start with what they know, build with what they have.

(Lao Tzu, date unknown)

There is a story of a Spanish soldier, who just before he died was asked if he would forgive all of his enemies. He replied that he did not have to, because he had killed them all. However, such final one-sided victories are rare, especially in cases of large-scale intergroup conflict. Whereas it might have been possible in earlier eras to eliminate whole groups of people, such as the Trojans, Carthaginians or Melians, this does not seem to be an acceptable or achievable goal in the modern era – even the worst genocides of the past hundred years did not succeed in totally eradicating their intended targets. Every instance of large-scale intergroup violence therefore leaves in its wake the problems associated with creating better relations in the post-violence era. Sometimes this will be in the context of military defeat of one side, as was the case with the southern states in the US Civil War or the German defeat in 1945. More recent cases would include Afghanistan, Iraq or Sri Lanka. Sometimes the ending of violent conflict is the result of a negotiated peace agreement between the parties, as was the case in Bosnia, Northern Ireland or South Africa.

The contexts may vary, but the historical evidence suggests that it is never easy to address the post-violence stage of intergroup conflict in a manner that promotes healthy and positive relations. For the experience of violence leaves behind problems that can be resistant to short-term 'solutions'. This might be especially true of situations where one side has been decisively beaten and where a 'culture of defeat' can emerge, accompanied by complex psychological and cultural responses that might include new myths about the past, a need to blame their defeat on subversive elements, and the refusal to accept the demands of the victors for moral and spiritual surrender (Schivelbusch 2001).

The emergence of the concept of peacebuilding

The phenomenon of what we now call peacebuilding is therefore not new. As Cutillo (2006: 1) notes, 'external assistance for post-war rebuilding had clear antecedents in the reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan after World War II'. The concept of peacebuilding, however, only entered into the mainstream in 1992, when it appeared in the United Nations (UN) document *An Agenda for Peace*. Since then it has become one of the most discussed concepts in the fields of international politics, peace and conflict research and development studies and as a result has become the subject of a substantial literature.

Galtung (1976) is credited with inventing the concept of peacebuilding. He regarded it as one component of a tripartite conflict resolution strategy that also included peacekeeping and peacemaking and believed that it should be an 'associative approach' that aims to build better infrastructures of peace. One would be hard pressed to recognize Galtung's approach in *An Agenda for Peace*. In part this is because of Galtung's abstract language. His use of terms like equity, entropy and symbiosis contrast starkly with the more mundane language of the 1992 UN document. Furthermore, Galtung's recognition that we need to find multiple peacebuilding 'interaction channels' that are non-state does not find enough of a resonance at the UN, which is particularly state-centric.

Galtung's work acted as a catalyst for other studies including contributions by Harbottle (1980) and Fisher (1993). However, peacebuilding remained a neglected idea until the start of the 1990s when a number of factors made it more germane. As a progressive and sanguine idea one might be surprised to find it being so quickly embraced in the study of international politics, which has not always been receptive to hopeful thinking. However, after the end of the Cold War it appeared well matched to what might be called an optimistic turn in world society that was based on a number of developments. The first was the changing nature of armed conflict, and in particular the decline of wars between sovereign states and the rise of what came to be called 'ethnic conflicts'. Inter-state conflicts are often settled by each party withdrawing back to an internationally recognized frontier (maybe with some territorial readjustment) after which the parties can lead relatively separate lives. In the case of conflicts within states, however, different cultural groups still have to live together in a single jurisdiction when the armed conflict stops, and this seems to demand peace strategies that, in Galtung's terminology, are associative rather than dissociative (Galtung 1969).

The end of the Cold War unfroze some of these protracted intra-state conflicts that had been linked to superpower rivalries and this allowed for greater international involvement in emerging peace processes in these locations including Namibia, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Northern Ireland. The first of these missions set in motion so-called second generation peace operations that attempted to 'implement a comprehensive settlement' (Goulding 1993). Sustained peacebuilding work by the UN as a separate named activity really started here, though a lot of what the UN was doing before this through its specialized agencies might be considered peacebuilding by another name. At the same time as demand for more peace operations increased, the end of the superpower confrontation reduced the likelihood that the Security Council would be paralyzed by a veto and so allowed the UN to take more decisive

actions. This seemed like a particularly neat development, where the demand for more international involvement was matched by the ability of the UN to supply the resources needed.

Furthermore, the way the Cold War ended, through non-violent revolutions that overthrew repressive regimes, seemed to confirm the impression that world society was experiencing an unstoppable wave of democratization. This produced an infectious mood of 'democratic optimism' (Mayall 2000). Given the prevalence of such views in the early 1990s it was not hard to believe that positive interventions in conflict situations to promote greater freedom were working with the tide of history and this might have further encouraged a more crusading form of liberal interventionism.

Alongside such developments, there was also a growth in the idea that human rights protection was more important than respect for state sovereignty. Sisk (2001: 2) has noted how this created 'new opportunities for innovation in peace process design'. It also led to an increase in multilateral humanitarian intervention (Chandler 2002; Hoffmann 1996; Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 1996; Wheeler 2000). This raised the inevitable question: what should be done to build a better society after the intervention had taken place? It was a question taken up by the 2001 *Responsibility to Protect* report that was subsequently adopted by the UN. Chapter 5 of this document addresses the 'responsibility to rebuild'. This focuses on security, justice and reconciliation, and development issues, but is sensitive to the distortions caused by external interventions and is anxious to promote the idea of achieving local ownership.

It is also important to realize that these developments occurred as the liberal peace hypothesis emerged as one of the most influential doctrines of the post-Cold War era. Indeed, by the end of the twentieth century it is not unreasonable to think of it as the dominant peace theory. As such it was inevitable that it would impact on thinking about peacebuilding. This is despite the fact that in its original version this hypothesis was restricted to the narrow claim that democratic states do not go to war against each other (Doyle 1983). However it did not stay confined to this realm and policymakers, in particular, began to apply it to intra-state as well as inter-state conflict despite the absence of clear empirical data to support this move. President George W. Bush, for example, could justify US interventions by referring to the 'transformative power of liberty' (Appiah 2004: 6). The problem was that such statements ignored academic studies that warned about the dangers inherent in an overly simplistic approach to the link between democracy and peace (see, for example, Snyder 2000), and it was an underestimation of the importance of peacebuilding that contributed to the problems that Washington ran into in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The evolution of peacebuilding at the UN

Re-reading *An Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali 1992) one is struck by how little it has to say about peacebuilding. Just five paragraphs are devoted to the concept, which is defined earlier in the document as 'action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict' (par. 21). A whole paragraph is devoted to de-mining. The final paragraph addresses the need for action to enhance 'support for the transformation of deficient national structures and capabilities, and for the strengthening of new democratic institutions' (par. 59). It

identifies two main peacebuilding scenarios. The first is 'civil strife', where a number of strategies are mentioned, including:

disarming the previously warring parties and the restoration of order, the custody and possible destruction of weapons, repatriating refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation.

(par. 55)

The other situation is international conflicts between states. Here the report identifies a number of possibilities, including 'concrete cooperative projects which link two or more countries in a mutually beneficial undertaking' and 'joint programmes through which barriers between nations are brought down by means of freer travel, cultural exchanges and mutually beneficial youth and educational projects' (par. 56). This idea of inter-state peacebuilding has not been given the attention it might deserve, probably because of the infrequent occurrence of conventional wars since 1992.

There are several criticisms that can be directed at the *Agenda's* approach to peacebuilding. Firstly it conceptualizes it as 'post-conflict' and this is problematic for two reasons. The first is that no society is 'post-conflict', since conflict is ubiquitous – maybe post-violence would be a better term, though a violence-free society is also hard to imagine. The second problem is that by seeming to restrict the idea of peacebuilding to the final stage in the cycle of violent conflict it promotes a limited view of what peacebuilding could be. Even at the time it was published Roberts (1993) thought the document over estimated the ability of the UN to organize complex peace operations and underestimated the difficulties with funding and Security Council approval that were likely to arise. Rupesinghe (1998) argued that it was too narrow because it underestimated the role that NGOs can play in peace processes. There was no awareness of the dangers posed when trying to change political and economic structures in deeply divided societies: that democratization and development could produce conflicts as well as resolve them.

Yet *An Agenda for Peace* acted as a catalyst. This is evident from the large number of important studies that emerged within the next decade (see, for example, Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Kumar 1997; Lederach 1997; Maynard 1999; Pugh 2000; Reyhler and Paffenholz 2001). An examination of the topic of articles published in the *Journal of Peace Research* is also instructive here. Between 1982 and 1991 no articles had the term peacebuilding in their titles, though it is discussed in one article by Galtung (1985). In this ten-year period there is just one other article that deals with what might be thought of as 'peacebuilding' matters – youth and conflict in Israel/Palestine (Spielmann 1986). However, between 1992 and 2001 the volume of articles on peacebuilding topics starts to increase, though not as quickly as one might have imagined. During this time there were four articles with peacebuilding in their title, all of them in 2001 with the first in the January edition (Pugh and Cobble 2001). There were also about a dozen other articles on peacebuilding themes including democratization and elections, power-sharing, peace education, community relations, forgiveness and reconciliation, youth attitudes and civil society. From 2002 to 2011 there is an acceleration of output. Although there

were only three articles that included peacebuilding or 'building peace' in their titles, the number that dealt with peacebuilding topics was over thirty (including transitional justice, community relations, conflict identities, reconciliation, forgiveness, peace and development, refugees, truth recovery and democratization).

Three years after *An Agenda for Peace*, and on the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the UN, the Secretary-General issued a *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali 1995) that offered more information about the UN's vision of peacebuilding (it devoted ten paragraphs to this topic). It can be viewed as part of a process whereby 'the concept was progressively expanded' through the UN (Ramsbotham 2000: 173). The *Supplement* recognizes the validity of the post-conflict approach, but now proposes that it 'can be as valuable in preventing conflict as in healing the wounds after conflict has occurred' (par. 47). In most other respects the approach to peacebuilding is not very different from that contained in the original *Agenda*.

However, compared with 1992, the mood at the UN was much more somber because of the failures of the organization in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia. So the *Supplement* also notes that implementation can be 'complicated' because of a lack of support from member states and it calls for more attention to be devoted to the 'timing and modalities' of returning peacebuilding functions to local actors so as to preserve any gains that have been made. This of course is an important issue that remains under-researched. The focus of the rest of the section on peacebuilding is on two types of situations that might require international attention.

The first is where there is already a significant international presence in a country. Here it is envisaged that a strong role for a peace operation will not be problematic though it is pointed out that it is important that the timing of the transfer of responsibilities back to local control should not be unduly affected by institutional or budgetary considerations at the UN. How realistic this is, given the organization's perennial economic problems and the absence of consensus in the Security Council is debatable. The more difficult situation, the document argues, is when peacebuilding is needed but where there is no strong international presence on the ground. In such situations the hope is that the UN Secretary-General, acting on his general mandate under the UN Charter, could play an early warning role and can initiate discussions with the state concerned about what measures could be taken. This seems to be a restatement of what Hammarskjöld called preventive diplomacy.

Unlike the original *Agenda*, the *Supplement* seems no longer interested in inter-state peacebuilding and is focused entirely on armed conflicts within a single sovereign state. However, it still concentrates only on the structural dimensions of peacebuilding. Soon after the *Supplement* the UN established a number of peacebuilding offices. The first was in Liberia (UNOL), mandated to support the peace process in that country following the elections of July 1997. This was followed by offices in Guinea-Bissau in 1999, and the Central African Republic and Tajikistan in 2000 (Teran 2007).

Although the *Supplement* was the most significant restatement of the UN's interest in peacebuilding, a number of other documents were issued by the organization around the same time that seem to reveal a consolidation of the concept of peacebuilding around four pillars: security, development, democratization and human rights (Chetail 2009). So *An Agenda for Development* (United Nations, 1994) claims 'peace-building offers the chance to establish new institutions, social, political and judicial, that can give impetus

to development' and goes on to argue that through a stronger emphasis on social justice and land reform states 'in transition can use peace-building measures as a chance to put their national systems on the path of sustainable development' (par. 23). The *Agenda for Democratization* (Boutros-Ghali 1996) notes that 'the entire range of United Nations assistance, from support for a culture of democracy to assistance in institution-building for democratization, may well be understood as a key component of peace-building' (par. 46). We should also note the *Inventories of United Nations Peacebuilding Activities* (United Nations 1996) and *Peacebuilding Capacity* (United Nations 2006) undertaken by the organization.

The next major UN document to address peacebuilding was the Brahimi Report of 2000 (United Nations 2000). This was a comprehensive review of peace operations established by the UN Secretary-General to try to learn the lessons from the challenges and failures of the 1990s. It expands and deepens previous statements on peacebuilding by pointing out, *inter alia*, the need to deal with spoilers and notes the desirability of complementing peacebuilding with action against corruption and effective action against diseases (including HIV/AIDS). Brahimi approves the idea that the UN should develop a stronger peacebuilding capacity. In fact it proposes that the UN should become the focal point for such international activity (par. 44). It also endorses a 1998 Security Council Resolution that encouraged the Secretary-General to explore the creation of peacebuilding structures at the UN by proposing that the 'Executive Committee on Peace and Security discuss and recommend to the Secretary-General a plan to strengthen the permanent capacity of the United Nations to develop peace-building strategies and to implement programmes in support of those strategies' (par. 47). The Report also makes three other recommendations to improve UN peacebuilding. The first is to allocate some money at the start of a deployment for quick impact projects. Secondly, there should be a 'doctrinal shift' in the use of civilian police and human rights experts to strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights. Lastly, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) work should be funded through the assessed budgets of peace operations in their first year to speed up this work and reduce the dangers of a return to armed conflict.

In fact the high failure rate of peace processes has been a particular problem. According to Murthy (2007: 47) this is as high as 50 per cent within five years. Other problems were also clear, with critics noting a 'strategic deficit' and poor coordination within and between governments when it came to thinking about peacebuilding (Smith 2004). The *Responsibility to Protect* report was also less than complimentary about practice to date and stated:

Too often in the past the responsibility to rebuild has been insufficiently recognized, the exit of the interveners has been poorly managed, the commitment to help with reconstruction has been inadequate, and countries have found themselves at the end of the day still wrestling with the underlying problems that produced the original intervention action.

(International Commission on Intervention
and State Sovereignty 2001: par. 5.1)

In order to try to deal with such problems the UN realized it had to try to give a stronger sense of direction to its work in this area and so at the end of 2005 it agreed to establish

a new Peacebuilding Commission. Its 31 members reflect the multi-dimensional nature of peacebuilding in that it includes seven representatives each from the Security Council (including the P5), ECOSOC and the General Assembly as well as the top five financial and military contributors to the organization. The World Bank and the IMF are not members, though they participate in meetings of the Commission. Both had become accustomed to intervening in the economies of states such as Namibia, Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia to promote neo-liberal policies (see Paris 2002). The World Bank, in particular, has made significant strides in recent years in developing a post-conflict policy.

The main functions of the Commission are to: promote best practice; improve the coordination of actors engaged in this work; advise governments who want assistance with peacebuilding tasks; and enhance the attention and the funding given to peacebuilding at the international level. The first three states to obtain assistance were Sierra Leone, Burundi and Guinea-Bissau. To help with its work the Commission has established a Working Group on Lessons Learned. There is also a Peacebuilding Support Office in the Secretariat to offer strategic advice and policy guidance to the Commission. This is headed by an Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support (currently Judy Cheng-Hopkins from Malaysia).

The Peacebuilding Commission as established was a weaker version of the one proposed in the *In Larger Freedom* report (Annan 2005), that was itself based on a document from the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (United Nations 2004: Part 3). It was diluted because there was a desire to get a consensus from member states and this meant accommodating the views of governments that were not so enthusiastic about this proposed initiative. After some hard negotiations the final version of the Commission had more members, was more cumbersome, had a smaller staff and a lower capacity, and was less dynamic than the one the Secretary-General originally wanted (see Berdal 2009; Miall 2007; Murthy 2007). It also has to rely on voluntary contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund, and has very few powers of its own. One study criticizes it for being 'unwieldy' and for being slow to engage with civil society actors (Lambourne and Herro 2008).

The mandated five-year review of the Commission resulted in a 2010 report entitled *Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture* (United Nations 2010). Its findings offered even more ammunition to critics for it concluded that the 'threshold of success' established in 2005 had not been achieved and it called for improvements to be made in nearly all aspects of the Commission's work. Its recommendations called for: more genuine national ownership; greater civil society involvement; better relationships with the main UN bodies and with international financial organizations; more flexibility; stronger regional development; a stronger field identity; more ambition; a more effective communication strategy; improved status; better performance; more empowerment; and a stronger Support Office. The *Review* stated that it wanted to be a 'wake-up call' for the Commission (par. 174).

The current state of UN peacebuilding

The emergence of peacebuilding theory and practice has been one of the most interesting developments in peace and conflict research in the past generation. There seems little

doubt that it is a strategy that is likely to increase in importance in the years ahead, and just as peacekeeping was the UN's most important innovation in peace and security in the first fifty years of its existence, peacebuilding could become its most important contribution in the next fifty years. Like peacekeeping it has developed in an unplanned and *ad hoc* manner, which might be one reason why it remains a concept that is hard to define. There have also been some positive features of practice to date in places such as Namibia, El Salvador and Mozambique. Tharoor (1995–6: 54) argues that such cases 'cannot lightly be dispensed with'. Yet too often supporters of peacebuilding have been put in the awkward position of favoring more interventions whilst admitting that they have not been undertaken very well in the past. This is like the customer in a restaurant who complains that the food was not very nice and the portions were too small.

There is no doubt that there is a close affinity between peacebuilding and the liberal approach to peace and conflict. Indeed, any peace strategy that promotes democracy, human rights, the respect for the law and a less restricted economy is going to contain strong traces of liberal thinking. None of these ideals seem inappropriate or contemptible in themselves and yet the liberal approach to peacebuilding has become the target of a number of critical studies (see, for example, Mac Ginty 2011; Paris 1997, 2010; Richmond 2009, 2011). There are undoubtedly good grounds for being skeptical about some of the grander claims made by liberal peace thinkers. It can be an approach that is insensitive to gender issues (Enloe 2004; Porter 2007). The same is true of class divisions. It is also notoriously blind to the power of ethnic and national identity. Liberal peacebuilding can also promote an unwarranted solidarist view of global issues in a world which has still stubbornly pluralist (Ramsbotham 2000). Nor is this the first time that liberalism is been behind a grand scheme to transform intra-state conflicts. Those who remember the Walt Rostow style modernization ideas of the early 1960s might be excused a shudder of *deja vu* when they read about a quote attributed to Francis Fukuyama where he hoped that 'someday Somalia would look like Norway. It's called progress' (Pfaff 2011: 69).

Yet there is a need to be cautious in characterizing peacebuilding practice since 1988 as 'liberal' in an uncritical manner. There are several reasons for this. The first is that it underestimates differences of approach within the liberal paradigm. Crudely put, the US approach is different from that of the EU, and both are different from the one adopted by the UN. The UN is very state-centric in its attitude to peacebuilding, whereas the EU is more post-Westphalian (Richmond et al. 2011). Nor is the UN a liberal organization in the way the EU could claim to be. Even within the UN we have noted peacebuilding practice has been influenced by a lack of consensus between the west and states such as China and Russia. Berdal (2009: 160) has argued that the creation of the Commission has actually 'reinforced divisions and tensions within the UN body politic' between the powers and between the North and the South. One of the major fault lines that has developed at the UN is that between the western democracies and states such as Russia and China who are more likely to resist any erosion of sovereignty. This is bound to affect the ability of the UN to create and sustain peacebuilding operations.

Dobbins et al. (2005) note that UN missions tend to have a smaller footprint and a lower profile than US-led missions. They are not as reliant on hard power, cost less and are not accompanied by the 'grandiloquent' rhetoric that is so characteristic of US deployments. They also have a higher success rate in promoting effective peacebuilding. After studying 16 cases between 1945 and 2005, Dobbins et al. (2005: xxv) provisionally

note of 'the eight UN-led cases, seven are still at peace', whereas of 'the eight US-led cases, four are at peace'. The US has been 'slow to learn from its own past interventions (such as in Somalia) and to take advantage of the principles of peacebuilding best practice being developed by the UN' (Lambourne and Herro 2008: 275–6).

It should also be noted that if the way to strengthen peacebuilding is to put more emphasis on grass roots empowerment and civil society, then the strongest support for these ideas might come from the western liberal tradition. So Murthy (2007: 48) notes how it is governments such as the US that have pressed most for a stronger role for NGOs and local stakeholders during peacebuilding.

Furthermore, although peacebuilding has been heavily influenced by liberal ideas this does not mean the strategy has been implemented in accordance with these ideals. As W. Andy Knight (2003: 242) points out, such implementation 'suffers from vagueness and a general failure to distinguish properly between the ideal and the reality on the ground'. The 'reality on the ground' might not always be supportive of liberal beliefs and might involve complicity in developments that are far from liberal because of power considerations, self-interest or short-term/low-cost thinking. These might include empowering corrupt and undemocratic leaders or creating a rentier class in post-agreement societies. Tolerance is a sound liberal principle, but not when it involves acceptance of criminal networks or of human rights abusers (Teran 2007). In such cases we have peacebuilding that is liberal in its inspiration but not in its implementation. One does not have to be a realist to appreciate the warning that governments espousing liberal ideals may be using them as a cover for less altruistic motives.

A second feature of peacebuilding as it has evolved through the UN is its strong focus on structure-centered analysis. As we have already noted, the corollary of this is that there has been a relative disinterest in actor-centered approaches. Strategies such as reconciliation, truth recovery, inter-communal dialogue, building empathy and reducing prejudice do not receive much attention in official peacebuilding doctrine even though the UN and other actors might do such work under other headings. This bias in favor of structural change might be a more general characteristic of peacebuilding doctrine. As far back as the article where Galtung introduced the concept he recognizes that his approach 'does not take sufficiently into account the importance of attitudes, sentiments, emotions' (Galtung 1976). However, he hoped that a better peace structure will in itself induce more positive feelings and attitudes.

A final feature of how the concept of peacebuilding has evolved is its association with UN peace operations that are characterized by two important features: the focus is on the role of external actors and the interventions involve some highly invasive interventions. The close association of peacebuilding and peacekeeping at a very early stage of its development might have been justified on pragmatic grounds. However, it helped to form an impression that peacebuilding was something introduced by external actors into a violent conflict and that it was linked to the international deployment of military forces. In other words, it is something the 'international community' visits on others. So the archetypal peacebuilding cases that have received the most attention in the literature are operations in places such as Somalia, Liberia, Haiti, Bosnia Herzegovina, Afghanistan and Iraq. Important instances such as Northern Ireland, the Baltic states, Macedonia and South Africa tend to be ignored (see, for example, Miall 2007). Here the peace process was led by local actors and the level of international involvement was less

invasive and forceful; more like peace support than peacebuilding. As a result they come closer to the criterion set by Lederach (1997) that good peacebuilding practice should be elicitive rather than prescriptive. By underestimating these examples we could be trying to learn positive lessons about peacebuilding from the wrong cases.

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