Peace-Building and Global Governance

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The global governance of peace-building faces several challenges. One, peace-building in practice does not necessarily privilege peace. Its critical practitioners—UN agencies and states with large foreign aid programs—implicitly assume that the capacities and norms they support will sustain peace; instead, there are real tensions between peace and justice. Two, because peace-building aims to promote a rights-respecting state or government, peace-building activities are sometimes constrained by the target state itself. Three, peace-building efforts fail to fully harness nonnational actors and processes. To increase the effectiveness of peace-building, the primary global governors of peace-building need to develop ways to sustain disparate small-scale indigenous efforts to build peace even when the state opposes such support. However, even with global governors adopting this approach, the state could continue to play a spoiler role and local efforts could also be inconsistent with the normative agenda embedded in peace-building constructs.

THE STATE AS A CONSTRAINT

Despite the evolution of peace-building efforts, a chronic gap remains between the promise and the reality of this work. In addition, peace-building suffers from definitional ambiguity, which allows global peace-builders to see themselves as promoting both rights and peace, and thus avoid grappling directly with dilemmas they face in practice.

While UN agencies and nations with significant foreign assistance programs remain the primary funders and advocates of peace-building, the core unit through which peace is built remains the nation-state. The state is the entity through which peace is or is not considered to have been achieved; and practically speaking, international and national peace-building support is channeled through the state. This is hardly a surprise since the United Nations itself and the international system are built upon the state. Yet tensions arise with the state over control of policy and resources, and more fundamentally because the peace-building community wishes to protect and empower all citizens equally, for at its heart this community promotes rights.

Peace agreements that result from negotiations between or among armed groups may not reflect popular sentiments or envision equal rights for all, but peace-builders become facilitators of these agreements. Where an agreement includes a process for changes in governance—such as an electoral system or decentralization of government—it is more likely formally to enable peace-building to empower a diversity of actors. In the alternative scenario—peace-building in weak but not necessarily post-conflict states—the state partner is almost by definition lacking in some form of legitimacy, thus compromising peace-builders.

If peace-builders simply build critical capacities of nascent or weak states, the peace-justice/rights tensions with the government itself are less pronounced. This is especially true of the security sector, in which peace-builders want to help the state gain a monopoly on violence as a prerequisite for peace,

and governments are eager to enhance their military and police forces. Sometimes peace-builders are able to build rights protections—at least initially—into their capacity-building support (e.g., rights training, creating oversight entities, or encouraging an ethnic or other demographic mix of forces). States generally prefer that the donor community provide technical or training capacity-building rather than work on policy development or implementation, which can be seen as impinging upon sovereignty.

States seek to shape most forms of peace-building. In economic development, states may strive to control where development occurs geographically, which industries or sectors are featured, and who benefits from investments or training programs. Similarly, the government may view health and education programs through an ideological or political lens, or simply as a matter of empowering or enriching itself. Gender or ethnic group inclusion can be another crosscutting fault line, especially immediately following or concurrent with internal conflict. Peace-building programs to create awareness of civil and political rights or to otherwise empower minorities or communities associated with political opposition can be among the most sensitive programs, from the government's perspective. The Kenyan government's posture toward international peace-builders, for example, combines national pride, distrust of the donor community's motives, and patent political calculations. This matters because the state ultimately determines what international peace-builders can do.

International actors depend on the state's consent. The United Nations is built upon member state sovereignty; states prize and are expected to reciprocate deference to sovereignty. Officials and bureaucrats need to constantly juggle what they see as their substantive mission and the mandate the host government is willing to recognize. At a practical level, the host state grants visas, enforces contracts, and provides security; so outsiders entering the country, moving cargo through customs, renting facilities, and seeking to protect their employees rely on the state in order to do their work. The government therefore exerts power through many small levers as well as a higher principle. This power can accrete to a de facto veto on what UN agencies or the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working on behalf of donor nations wish to do. It can frustrate the normative agenda of peace-building.

If the political leadership of a state is ethical, transparent, and responsive to citizens, peace-builders face fewer tensions between advancing normative goals and advancing peace. Yet most failing states lack such normatively congruent governments. Peace-builders' dependence on the state also limits their ability to directly criticize the state when it is perceived to act contrary to peace-building goals, however defined. Sovereignty as a value in itself conflicts with the normative agenda embedded in peace-building. Is it possible to step outside the conventional conceptualization of international politics, to envision a governance model that more fully involves partners other than the state—both as outside providers and as inside peace-builders?

BUILDING AND LINKING LOCAL ACTOR NETWORKS

An alternative approach might be to dramatically expand micro-peace-building, enabling and linking community-based work at the local level. This approach would build on the current practices of some nations, foundations, and NGOs of extending small grants to local partners that share the goals and norms of the grantor. It is essentially a work-around in situations in which central state actors are corrupt, ineffective, discriminatory, or simply do not have the same peace-building priorities as the grantors. Small partners could include municipalities, towns, or national faith, worker, or other affiliation institutions, in addition to local civil society organizations. Ideally, funders would support existing

grassroots efforts rather than issuing requests for proposals that reflect donor notions of what is required.

Adopting a less state-focused approach would be a significant shift for the United Nations and nationally funded peace-building community. Such an approach poses both political and administrative hurdles. Politically, the state still retains the ability to block external support for actors within its borders. Thus, a collective shift in which UN agencies and partners agreed on a common practice for their support (so that states are less able to block individual proposals), paired with a partial shift in current UN and national peace-building funding resources (say, dedicating 20 percent to micro-peace-building) to complement but not replace centrally coordinated funding, would seem most likely to succeed in obtaining state acquiescence.

Equally important from a practical standpoint is the facilitation of efforts to administer micro-level financial and technical support, since it is cumbersome to provide many small grants in lieu of a single large program. Moving to a micro-model concomitantly requires more permissive and informal partnerships that place resources and power in the hands of local actors. A common clearinghouse approach and a collective effort could ease the way for state agencies in particular to give up control and to find less invasive and time-consuming ways to ensure transparency and accountability. A related challenge is finding ways to coordinate or link the individual small-scale actors and efforts such that they can reinforce one another and enhance productivity.

Moving toward micro-peace-building requires creating and sustaining new global platforms that are grafted into the international system to position and connect new actors and, in particular, to give a more direct voice to local communities. This approach could link the state-based actors that currently dominate the peace-building discourse and activity with other independent actors such as NGOs, foundations, and corporations, and with the grassroots actors that are essential for identifying, refining, and meeting specific peace-building needs.

Here, nascent efforts to galvanize and connect localized grassroots activity to counter violent extremism (CVE) offer instructive examples. The Strong Cities Network (SCN), launched in 2016, is run by a nonprofit organization to connect cities and municipalities in an information-sharing, best practices–collection network. SCN is planning to launch a new innovation fund to catalyze public-private partnerships to create alternative futures for at-risk youth. The independent Researching Solutions to Violent Extremism (RESOLVE) network has helped link local researchers worldwide since 2015. Partners are provided with research grants and technical support, and research is made available to practitioners in the field. Initially funded by the United States, the network has begun to diversify its funding.

The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) was created in 2014 by a multilateral counterterrorism coalition to function as an independent body that could seed local efforts. While it remains largely funded by states and works directly with central governments, GCREF by design promotes local community involvement in identifying and carrying out CVE work and thereby helps legitimate and protect those actors. The European Union launched the Radicalization Network in 2011 to link frontline individual practitioners working to prevent radicalization, providing a hub for individual expertise and learning.

These models suggest possibilities for adaptation to the peace-building challenge. One could imagine an organization, similar to GCERF, that is essentially a pass-through for vetting small grant partners and administering micro-grants. The CVE models also suggest value in creating regional or global networks of grassroots peace-building individuals or entities—providing technical support, capacity-

building, best practices exchanges, and awareness of how individual efforts could relate to one another and larger UN or national investments.

NO PANACEA

These CVE models remain highly dependent on state funding and have difficulty attracting investments from the private and nonprofit sectors. State funding is not necessarily problematic when states are truly willing to relinquish control over the funds, but sustaining and diversifying that financial support over time could be the central challenge for global governance innovation in peace-building.

Donor organizations and states could be reluctant to support an approach that would require them to give up some degree of ownership, control of resources, decisions and values, or public credit. Donors also could still face state hostility to peace-building efforts with nongovernmental or municipal partners. Donors also will confront many practical and logistical challenges in sustaining networks comprised of many diverse local actors with limited capacity. Local actors will in turn struggle unless donors help them develop greater administrative, organizational, and substantive capacities to sustain themselves as members of an externally supported learning network as well as carry out their ongoing work.

Given the concentration of resources in states and the role of the state in the international system, the United Nations and leading foreign assistance providers will likely continue to dominate global peace-building efforts. It is difficult to envision the private sector doing more than augmenting state efforts, if that. If there were a renaissance in great power comity and international cooperation became more pronounced, trusteeship and more invasive forms of peace-building might be conceivable. Alternatively, the normatively inclined peace-builders might simply work with a smaller subset of committed state partners in hopes of more certain results. But if current trends hold and great power comity declines, or if global finances weaken, peace-building could, by default, fall to the leading regional power rather than be addressed by the UN system and states or entities with large foreign assistance programs. Moreover, a significant spread of conflict that threatened to overwhelm global or regional responses would also advance the importance all actors placed on peace, rather than the realization of rights, thus changing the character of peace-building.

In the interim, global governance leaders—the United Nations and leading powers—should look to augment their lackluster approach to peace-building by expanding partners and methods, collectivizing the management of microfinancing, and ceding their monopoly on defining the goals of peace-building. In this scenario, the status quo largely will continue but be augmented by an uneven evolution of a global mosaic of governance—self-organized pockets of substate and transnational actors whose policies and practices may be more legitimate and sustainable even as their goals diverge from the social compact most peace-builders envision.