Making the Case for a Regional Approach to to Peacebuilding

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, peacebuilding has emerged as a new agenda at the United Nations and among key international actors. Lying at the intersection of development and security, peacebuilding encompasses socio-economic, political, diplomatic, military and security dimensions. Currently, peacebuilding policies and programming deal primarily with issue or country specific challenges, as most violent conflicts now occur within, not among, states. Arguing that contemporary conflicts are actually transnational in nature, this article proposes a complementary level of analysis and action for more effective peacebuilding: viewing peacebuilding from a regional conflict framework and identifying regionally-grounded approaches to address the twin challenges of security and development. Specifically, the article draws attention to regional variations in conflict formations and dynamics, and to their peacebuilding implications. It concludes that a regional approach to peacebuilding requires new analytical tools, creative mechanisms of collaboration among local, regional and international actors, strengthening of regional and sub-regional organisations, and ultimately, significant reform of the current architecture of international development and security.

Introduction

In the last decade, shedding its narrow definition in former United Nations (UN) Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace*, peacebuilding has become a catch-all concept, encompassing multiple perspectives and agendas. Even the active supporters of peacebuilding are puzzled by its widespread usage by academics, development and security specialists, international organisations, donor agencies, non-governmental organisations and field practitioners. Such ready acceptance of a relatively new and loaded concept deserves serious examination from both theoretical and operational angles – especially in a new journal dedicated explicitly to peacebuilding and development. Indeed, there is a growing body of literature that critically examines the concept of peacebuilding and questions the growing convergence of the development and security agendas in the post-Cold War context.

This article adopts a more pragmatic approach. Taking as given that the new peacebuilding agenda is already being promoted around the world actively, it starts with an overview of the current approaches to peacebuilding. Noting that current peacebuilding policies and programming deal primarily with issue-specific or country-specific challenges that do not fully correspond to the nature of contemporary conflicts, the article proposes a complementary level of analysis and action that is necessary for more effective peacebuilding. This analysis situates peacebuilding policy and practice within a regional framework and identifies appropriate regionally-based approaches that address the twin challenges of security and development. Specifically, the article draws attention to the importance of regional variations in conflict formations and conflict dynamics, and their peacebuilding implications. The article concludes that despite its

rhetorical appeal as an integrated approach to the twin concerns for peace and development, peacebuilding remains a highly experimental project. Peacebuilding requires well-calibrated and politically-grounded action at the local, regional and global levels to deal with the complex, interlocking and multi-level sources and manifestations of contemporary conflicts. It further suggests that regional peacebuilding approaches, addressing the transnational dimensions of contemporary conflicts, might prove particularly useful.

Peacebuilding: The Intersection of Security and Development

The much celebrated end of the Cold War did not herald the end of violent conflicts in international affairs. By the early 1990s, about 40 countries were engaged in armed conflicts, perched precariously on the verge of conflict, or in the early stages of post-conflict reconstruction. The threat or reality of violent localised conflicts has been accepted as a dominant feature of contemporary international affairs. Importantly, since violent conflicts of the post-Cold War era disproportionately occurred in the world's least developed and developing countries, such conflicts could not be viewed as an aberration in a country's natural development. The so-called continuum from war to peace, from relief to development, from insecurity to stability that might have held true in inter-state wars, rarely applied to the conflicts that confronted the international community in the last decade. As a result, the United Nations gradually acknowledged that it could no longer attend to its twin mandates for security and development in a compartmentalized or sequential manner. The successive publications of *An Agenda for Peace* and *An Agenda for Development* by the United Nations in the early 1990s, marked the recognition of the interdependence between development and security in the contemporary world and the need to deal with them through integrated approaches.

In the last decade, there has been considerable progress in bringing these two areas of international concern together at the conceptual and policy levels. In its broadest sense, the concept of peacebuilding has evolved to capture the interlinkages between the agendas for peace and development. Indeed, peacebuilding has come to define much of the development and security discourse of the 1990s — at the United Nations, at multiple governmental and intergovernmental levels, donor agencies, key international and regional organisations, research institutes, and NGOs.

While many organisations and actors continue to define peacebuilding differently, there is a growing convergence of opinion among policymakers and practitioners alike that peacebuilding needs to be defined by its objectives and not by its instrumentalities. At its core, peacebuilding involves the prevention and resolution of violent political and social conflicts, the consolidation of peace once violence has been reduced, and post-conflict reconstruction with a view to avoiding a relapse into violent conflict. In other words, going beyond the traditional military, diplomatic and security approaches of the Cold War era, peacebuilding addresses the immediate, proximate as well as the root causes of contemporary conflicts including structural, political, socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors. Because such factors fall directly in the realm of development, peacebuilding inevitably concerns development. It is, however, different from conventional development to the extent that it is explicitly guided and motivated by a primary commitment to the prevention, avoidance and resolution of violent conflicts.

In its broadest sense, peacebuilding is applicable to all phases of the conflict cycle and can extend to various areas from physical security to economic development to human

rights. Moreover, it operates at many levels at which conflict exists — from the micro community to the macro political level, from the national and the regional to the global levels — so long as these are approached from the peacebuilding perspective described above. In short, peacebuilding is not a fancier synonym for development, nor is it a new label for security in the post-Cold War era. It is the recognition that contemporary conflicts represent serious threats to peace and to development that do not lend themselves to traditional security instruments or conventional developmental approaches. Instead, going beyond state-centric concepts of security, contemporary conflicts require integrated, multi-faceted and multi-level strategies that can help address the multiple causes of conflict from a long term developmental perspective.

Peacebuilding is ultimately a homegrown project and requires the active engagement of societies in conflict. Nonetheless, the term entered the international lexicon specifically to identify ways of deploying international assistance to support local or regional efforts to support peace. Although this has inevitably injected a distorted external bias to peacebuilding, it is useful to the extent that peacebuilding is now on the international agenda with a momentum and legitimacy of its own. Given the international focus of this paper, peacebuilding will therefore be used primarily to refer to the full range of policies, strategies and instruments that can be used by the international community to address both the immediate as well as the root causes of conflict. Over the last decade, these have come to include such diverse strategies and programmes as the new generation of UN peace operations, elections and human rights monitoring, security sector reform, demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR), refugee integration, good governance, public sector reform, sanctions regimes, and transitional justice programmes. In other words, the scope and boundaries of peacebuilding are being defined in the process of its application (Mehler & Ribaux 2000).

One useful way to differentiate between current international approaches to peacebuilding has been to group them into 'deductive' vs. 'inductive' approaches. 'Deductive approaches' refer to the diversity of policy instruments, tools and capacities developed by the international community in support of the broader peacebuilding agenda. 'Inductive approaches' refer to the context-specific strategies that have arisen in response to the particular constellation of socio-economic-political-military factors underlying a specific conflict (Cousens & Kumar 2001:12).

Not surprisingly, drawing their rationale from the existing international machinery mandated to deal with issues of peace, security and development, deductive approaches have flourished in the last decade. Virtually every international organisation, bilateral or multilateral agency, international NGO, has reviewed its mandate and operations with a view to carving out its own peacebuilding niche (Leonhardt 2000a). For example, notwithstanding internal debates, there has been a significant shift in thinking on the part of many humanitarian aid agencies to identify a peacebuilding role for humanitarian actors in complex political emergencies. Similarly, human rights organisations, developmental NGOs like OXFAM and CARE, regional economic organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the international financial institutions including the World Bank, have begun to identify ways in which they could better implement their current mandates or expand them in order to respond to the multiple peacebuilding requirements of conflict-torn, conflict-prone or post-conflict countries (See, for example, the DAC (What is the DAC) Guidelines 2001). Simultaneously, there has been a corresponding revision of policies and internal structures within individual agencies to

undertake discrete peacebuilding programmes and tasks (European Platform 1998). The resultant inventory of peacebuilding tasks and priorities identified by international governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations is as vast as it is daunting – far outstripping the financial and other resources available to the international community and seriously exposing the challenges of an integrated, coordinated or coherent approach to peacebuilding. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to note that the United Nations system, donor governments, regional organisations, international NGOs and other international actors have individually and collectively started to document what are collectively called 'Policy Guidelines', 'Lessons Learned' and 'Best Practices' in peacebuilding. These include, for example, sectoral studies on key components of the new peacebuilding agenda such as peace implementation and peace enforcement, security sector reform, truth and reconciliation, gender and peacebuilding, governance and participation. They also include operational lessons on inter-agency collaboration and coordination, institutional and individual skills development and training, new funding mechanisms, timing of interventions and exit strategies (O'Neil & Tschirgi 2002:275-282).

Unlike their 'deductive' counterparts, the 'inductive approach' to peacebuilding is characterised by their focus on the dynamics of particular conflicts rather than on institutional or sectoral mandates and competencies. While deductive approaches seek to identify and expand the range of tools, capacities and resources available to the international community for peacebuilding, inductive approaches are concerned with tailoring concrete strategies in response to the peculiarities of a given conflict. In the last decade, inductive approaches to peacebuilding at the country level have proliferated – closely reflecting the active intervention of the international community in a growing number of conflicts around the world. In fact, given the preference of the international community, and especially the United Nations, to deal with conflicts at a country-level, inductive approaches to peacebuilding have served to translate peacebuilding policy into practice. Country case studies examining the peacebuilding role of the international community in such diverse contexts as Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor have provided a rich body of comparative experience and practice. The policy and operational lessons emerging from these case studies have provided a useful counterpoint to the generic lessons characterising deductive approaches (Cousens & Kumar 2001:225-233, *The Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Network Website*).

'Deductive' vs. 'inductive' approaches represent 'supply-driven' vs. 'demand-driven' strategies to peacebuilding. Deductive approaches were developed by international actors whose roles and mandates were overtaken by profound changes in the international environment that came with the end of bipolarity in international affairs. Multilateral approaches to problems transcending national boundaries also seemed more appropriate in an age of globalisation, where there is a rising influence of international actors, i.e. NGOs and businesses. Inductive approaches, on the other hand, evolved an *ad hoc* responses to emergent crises or conflicts when conventional approaches proved inadequate or inapplicable. Both approaches have their particular strengths and weaknesses. It has convincingly been argued that ultimately peacebuilding involves a combination of the two approaches within a 'peacebuilding as politics' model (Cousens & Kumar 2001:10-16). Going beyond the inventory of peacebuilding tasks of deductive approaches and the country-specific focus of inductive approaches, 'peacebuilding as politics', requires establishing a strategic framework of objectives for international assistance in each conflict context based on a solid understanding of the sources of that conflict. It requires privileging conflict resolution over other competing goals and

priorities and identifying appropriate tools and instruments 'to cultivate political processes and institutions that can manage conflict without violence but with authority and, eventually, legitimacy' (Cousens & Kumar 2001:12).

Reflecting diverse regional conflict realities, contemporary transnational conflicts challenge the international community in different ways and require a different mix of multilateral mechanisms and instruments derived by a regionally-informed peacebuilding framework.

'Peacebuilding as politics' has much to commend as a strategy. However, there is a missing level of analysis and action between the deductive and inductive approaches to peacebuilding that deserves more attention than it has received to date. Despite the fact that many contemporary conflicts are described as 'internal conflicts,' the reality is that most of these conflicts are not confined to a single country but are transnational in nature (Wallensteen & Sollenberg 1998:621). Thus, they do not readily lend themselves to sector-based and agency-based deductive approaches or country-based inductive approaches. Reflecting diverse regional conflict realities, contemporary transnational conflicts challenge the international community in different ways and require a different mix of multilateral mechanisms and instruments derived by a regionally-informed peacebuilding framework.

The following sections focus on conflict and peacebuilding from a regional perspective. It is proposed that meso-level, or regionally-based analysis and action will enable the international community to move beyond the generic lessons of deductive approaches and the country-specific strategies of inductive approaches to start developing more robust and realistic theories and practices of peacebuilding.

Regional Conflict Formations

Most contemporary violent conflicts share several important features. They occur within, not among states (especially in contexts of underdevelopment, incomplete state formation and state collapse); they exhibit deep-rooted socio-cultural, ethnic or religious cleavages within societies; and they involve civilian populations to a degree unimaginable only a few decades ago (Kaldor 1999). Yet, these are not simply 'internal' wars. In many cases, their causes and ramifications transgress national borders and create a complex web of cause and effect that is difficult to understand or address at the level of a single state. Ethnicity, refugee movements, natural resource and arms flow, trade, financial transactions, pandemics are all part and parcel of contemporary conflicts which cannot be contained within the boundaries of a state. Because international policy and practice have been heavily shaped by state-centric conceptions of security that has been the hallmark of international relations to date, the international community has been slow in characterizing and addressing the conflicts of the post-Cold War era. For example, within the academic community, there is little consensus about the causes and consequences of internal wars (Gardner 2002:15). Similarly, there is only fragmented understanding of the regional and international dimensions of such 'internal' conflicts (Brown 1996:23). Even in cases where there is an explicit focus on the 'external' dimensions

of internal conflicts, there is a decided bias in viewing these either in terms of 'contagion,' 'diffusion,' or 'spill-over effects' of country-based conflicts as in Sierra Leone and Liberia. These cases are also viewed as instances of 'bad neighbourhoods' in, for example, the Great Lakes Region or the Horn of Africa. It is true that states within a region often share similar vulnerabilities due to structural factors such as ethnicity, geography, history and economic underdevelopment which in turn places them at a higher risk for violent conflicts. Nonetheless, contemporary conflicts, which engulf entire regions or sub-regions, are more than an aggregation of or the domino effects of internal conflicts. Instead, contemporary 'internal' conflicts are increasingly transnational in nature — unbounded by geographic or political boundaries. Thus, there is a growing need to understand the specificities of conflicts in different regions from a new perspective.

There are several ongoing efforts to examine regional conflicts. Perhaps the most developed among these is the 'regional order' or 'regional security complexes' (RSC) model. The RSC model posits that contemporary conflicts need to be understood from a regional perspective, and that with the end of the bi-polar system, regions have increasingly become the primarily arena for violent conflicts and security threats. The RSC model is however heavily state-centric, largely ignoring the importance of non-state actors in contemporary conflicts. Thus it reflects a post-Cold War reformulation of 'traditional' security and international relations theories (Buzan, Lake & Morgan 1997). While the RSC model merits serious attention from a strategic studies perspective, its utility for the purposes of this article, which explores the interlinkages of development and security, is fairly limited. Not surprisingly, the dominant policy relevance of the RSC model is for regional conflict management through appropriate multilateral security arrangements rather than peacebuilding.

In contrast, the evolving 'Regional Conflict Formations' (RCF) approach seems to hold great promise for peacebuilding theory and practice. RCFs are defined as 'sets of transnational conflicts that form mutually reinforcing linkages throughout a region, making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts' (Rubin e*t al.* eds 2001). The RCF approach starts with recognition of the multiplicity of factors that lead to conflicts, but it goes beyond the specifics of individual conflicts to examine the complex web of mutual vulnerabilities and risks that create and feed conflicts within regions.

The RCF approach rests on several assumptions: a) contemporary armed conflicts tend to be regional; b) RCFs are characterized by regional and global political, military, economic and social networks; c) regional conflict management strategies need to address the geographic as well as the functional elements of RCF; and d) regional approaches to conflict need to engage regional/sub-regional states, inter-governmental organisations and civil society networks. In short, the RCF approach seeks to capture the multi-level character of contemporary conflicts, the multiplicity of conflict actors and networks, and the rapidly changing nature of conflict boundaries.

Systematic work on RCF is still limited in nature (Rubin e*t al.* eds 2001; *Rubin et al.* 2002). This is partly due to the fact that regionally-based analyses and 'area studies' served entirely different functions during the Cold War and were replaced by 'globalization' as the emergent paradigm in the post-Cold War era. However, as the uneven impact of globalization increasingly became apparent, and violence threatened the 'new world order' differentially in different regional contexts, there has been a slow resurgence of interest in the regional specificities of conflict (Lake & Morgan, eds 1997:20-68). Currently, much of the content of the new approaches to regional conflict comes from comparative

analysis of country-specific studies which highlight the interlinkages between internal and external causes and consequences of conflict. This has naturally led to a closer understanding of the interactions between the various conflict-inducing and conflict-reducing factors within a regional arena.

For example, a recent report on the 'Infrastucture of Peace in Africa' noted that conflict dynamics in the four sub-regions of Africa demonstrated distinct characteristics (Juma & Mengistu 2002). In West Africa four issues stood out: the Charles Taylor factor, the Franco-Nigerian rivalry, the link between the exploitation of natural resources and war, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Inevitably, conflicts in the sub-region were affected by these factors. Meanwhile, conflicts in Southern Africa were greatly shaped by the security architecture of the sub-region which was in turn largely defined by the legacy of apartheid, the fear of South Africa's economic and political dominance in the post apartheid era, and the fragility of democratisation throughout the sub-region. In Central Africa, on the other hand, three distinct factors have defined conflicts and responses to them: ethnicity and governance, the competition for the natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the conflicting interests of regional and international actors. Finally, in the Horn of Africa, the nature and dynamics of conflicts have been influenced by another mix of factors including the legacy of superpower rivalry and the weakening of the state, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and involuntary human migration. As the study concluded:

> [a]ny interplay of these factors generates a wider range of consequences, including population displacement within and beyond borders, fragmentation of societal structures, militarization of the civilian population and generalized insecurity (Juma & Mengistu 2002).

In other words, violent conflicts in the four sub-regions of Africa display distinct historical, structural and idiosyncratic factors. But equally important, even within each sub-region, it is the interplay between various factors that can help explain how local conflicts mutate into regional conflict systems. The above study was not designed to examine the interplay among these factors. However, applying a regional conflict formation (RCF) approach to conflicts in any of the sub-regions or the continent as a whole would yield important insights about the mutually-reinforcing or mitigating impacts of regional conflict networks that go beyond simple explanations of the 'spill-in', 'spill-out' or 'demonstration' effects of individual conflicts.

Regional conflict formations are peculiar to regions and incorporate local as well as global factors that come into play in a conflict region. Such factors can be structural or contingent. They can also be direct or indirect. A research project undertaken by the Center on International Cooperation on regional conflict formation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa noted that the conflicts in the region exhibited certain features. These ranged from weak or illegitimate states and absence and/or weakness of regional organisations to globalisation and international markets which combined to shape conflicts in the region (Rubin et al. eds 2001:7). Similarly, a recent workshop on regional approaches to the reconstruction of Afghanistan noted that numerous cross-border factors have served to foster conflict in the Southern Central Asian region. These included: security competition in the context of a political vacuum in Afghanistan; transnational armed groups, militarisation and arms trafficking, the drug trade and organised crime, parallel economy and transit trade, refugees, migrants, Diaspora and cross-border ethnic groups (Rubin *et al.* 2002). When overlaid on the specificities of the conflict in Afghanistan, it becomes

evident why a regional approach is vital to any peacebuilding strategy in the Southern Central Asian region.

Clearly, much work needs to be done to explore how local, regional and global factors interact in an age of globalisation to fuel and sustain conflicts in distinct regions (van de Goor *et al*, eds 1996). For example, an ongoing project by the International Peace Academy on Economic Agendas in Civil Wars has begun to generate important insights about the transformation of violent conflicts through licit as well as illicit transnational economic networks. Such research has great significance for understanding conflicts involving natural resources and designing appropriate policy responses for conflict prevention, conflict management and peacebuilding. (*Economic Agendas in Civil Wars Project*, International Peace Academy website). The fundamental strength of the RCF approach is its ability to capture the dynamic nature of contemporary conflicts in contrast to the prevailing tendency to view contemporary conflicts as the expression of deep-rooted historical grievances such as ethnicity, territory, or politics. In fact, it has rightly been noted that 'conflict boundaries are changing faster than conceptual boundaries' (Rubin *et al.* eds 2001:6). Thus, the RCF approach, which is based on changing networks and linkages running across history and geography, provides a more dynamic tool for analysing contemporary conflicts. The recognition of the transnational character of contemporary conflicts is not to deny the importance of deep-rooted domestic factors that continue to fuel such conflicts (Berdal & Malone). However, even conflicts that are rooted in historical grievances such as race, ethnicity and religion are 'new' wars rather than mere extensions or re-ignition of earlier conflicts (Duffield 2001:187). The introduction of new factors such as economic globalisation, HIV/AIDS, the expansion of the reach of mass media, or the global spread and effectiveness of criminal networks are immensely important in changing conflict formations and dynamics even in the case of protracted conflicts. For example, the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11 have inevitably changed conflict dynamics in many regions – albeit in different ways. It is no longer possible to analyse conflicts in the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia or even Africa without factoring in terrorism as a new factor in each region. It is worth noting that although terrorism itself is not a significant feature of African conflicts, the anti-terrorist campaign spearheaded by the United States is expected to have an impact on conflict dynamics in Africa. This is due to the heightened international support for regulating the movement of arms, finances and people across borders.

If contemporary wars are a web of interlocking conflicts involving the transfer of populations, arms, armies, finances, and conflict goods across increasingly porous boundaries, it is not sufficient to deal with them through country-level interventions. They require broadening the scope of conflict analysis and response both geographically and conceptually. Thus, regions, *defined more as the arena for networked interactions than as geographic entities*, take on a special meaning for peacebuilding.

Regional Peacebuilding Strategies

The previous section sought to make a case for viewing contemporary armed conflicts through a regional prism – a prism that recognises the dynamic, interlocking and mutually reinforcing nature of local, regional and global networks that create and sustain conflicts beyond juridical or political boundaries. The implications of the RCF approach for peacebuilding theory and practice are quite important – especially when coupled with the country-level and generic peacebuilding approaches discussed previously.

The RCF approach has an added strength. By drawing attention to the complexity, fluidity and interconnectedness of contemporary conflicts, the RCF perspective encourages a reflexive approach to peacebuilding on the part of the international community. In other words, RCFs cannot be seen simply as external problems to be resolved. Instead, they are products of the changing nature of international relations in the post-Cold War era. RCFs reflect the relative significance of different regions in the emerging global system as well as the evolving roles of internal vs. external, state vs. non-state actors in the new regional order. Thus, the international peacebuilding project itself becomes subject to analysis as part of the RCF model. International interventions (whether in the form of peacekeeping, peace support operations, humanitarian aid, or creation of special criminal courts) become part of the dynamics of regional conflicts.

During the Cold War, the superpowers exercised heavy-handed control over local and regional conflicts. Depending on superpower politics, such control at times exhibited itself through overt proxy wars. At other times, it was instrumental in simply keeping the lid on conflicts that were not considered important arenas for competition (Lake & Morgan eds 1997:3; 40). The end of the Cold War witnessed two contradictory trends. On the one hand, there was significant superpower disengagement from certain countries and regions which no longer held geo-strategic interest for them. On the other hand, there was an ever increasing number of requests for international assistance in conflicts that would previously not have attracted international attention. Not paradoxically, some of these conflicts were a direct result of the withdrawal of superpower influence and interest in certain regions which lifted existing inhibitions against violence and created a dangerous vacuum leading to war.

The mix of diplomatic, military and developmental policies and instruments that were cobbled together by the United Nations, international and regional organisations, donor agencies and international NGOs as part of the new 'peacebuilding agenda' was in fact a reaction to the political vacuum created after the Cold War. Initially, rather than a consistent approach to peacebuilding, the international community's response was a strategy by default. As the peacebuilding agenda expanded and international intervention took on a life of its own, peacebuilding inevitably became a part of the conflict dynamics – albeit with different impacts in different regions. For example, the mandate, size and duration of peace missions in Kosovo, Somalia and Rwanda directly influenced the course of the war in these different settings. Similarly, the provision of international assistance for elections inevitably played an important role in the eventual conclusion of peace accords in Cambodia and Sierra Leone. Economic levers such as sanction regimes or pledges of international assistance served as powerful incentives and/or disincentives in diverse cases as Iraq, Guatemala, and Afghanistan.

It is in this context that the concept of 'peacebuilding as politics' takes on a new meaning. In order to identify objectives for international peacebuilding assistance in any context, international actors need to factor in their own actions, reactions, and interests within a broader regional framework.

It is not sufficient for the international community to continue to elaborate and expand the variety of peacebuilding tools and instruments at its disposal. The full catalogue of such tools range from the deployment of peace operations in conflict zones, the establishment of new institutions such as the special war crimes tribunals, financial and technical support for security sector reform in post-conflict contexts, or administration and monitoring of elections. These tools are likely to be ineffective outside a broader political framework. Similarly, the creation or strengthening of various institutional mechanisms or arrangements for peacebuilding will make little difference – unless such

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mechanisms can be deployed within a political framework designed to support viable peace processes within a regional context. Where there is a common political framework for international peacebuilding, the chances of success increase greatly since this allows the international community to draw upon existing international or regional institutions or to create hybrid mechanisms. Where such a political framework is missing (for lack of political will or due to conflict of interests among the international actors), the international peacebuilding agenda is bound to be *ad hoc*, piece-meal or contradictory — if not outright counter-productive. In such cases, even the existence of formal international or regional institutions is inadequate to compensate for the lack of a guiding political framework.

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A quick comparison of the international engagement in the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa is revealing. In the Balkans, the anticipated regional consequences of the violent conflicts flowing from the breakup of former Yugoslavia eventually led to active intervention by the EU, NATO, OSCE and the United Nations under a shared 'peacebuilding' framework involving military, diplomatic, economic, legal and social instruments and programmes. The result has been forceful, decisive and sustained international engagement in the Balkans in order to change the conflict dynamics in the region. While the long-term impact remains to be seen, the existence of a shared political framework made collective and concerted action possible. The existence of well-established and regionally oriented institutions, of course, facilitated the implementation of that framework — even though the configuration of the international collaboration was quite different in the case of individual conflicts in the region.

In the Middle East, on the other hand, the international community has been stymied as much by internal divisions as by the obstinacy of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. With the Middle East deeply divided along several fault lines and lacking an effective regional organization, the Oslo process was seriously contested within the region from its inception. However, it ran into deeper trouble when the US tried to broker an agreement between Israeli and Palestinian leaders divorced from the broader regional context and without the active support of key regional partners. Once the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations ran afoul, there was no larger political framework within which to sustain the peace process. Despite strong calls from the United Nations and the European Union (EU), the United States has been unwilling to pursue a multilateral solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that does not correspond to Israel's narrowly-defined security interests. Thus, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to infuse and aggravate all other sources of conflict throughout the Middle East region. Despite a decade of international assistance in support of the Mideast 'peace process' backed by intense diplomacy and high levels of aid, in the absence of a shared regional political framework as well as the lack of effective regional mechanisms to broker peace, peacebuilding in the region remains a distant goal. Yet, in no other region are the imperatives for development and security more interrelated — both negatively and positively — and in need of local, regional and global solutions.

In the sub-regional conflicts in Africa, the peacebuilding project suffers from different problems. The international community lacks the political will and commitment to get involved and to remain engaged in African conflicts, preferring to have regional or sub-regional organisations to take the lead. Yet, African intergovernmental organisations do not have the institutional capacity and resources to respond to conflicts in their regions. Thus, in every sub-region of Africa, the international response to the raging conflicts has been meek, limited and far too late. One encouraging exception has been the international community's evolving response to the war in Sierra Leone whereby the UN-mandated UNAMSIL operation, supported by British military forces, eventually led to the stabilisation of the situation and a holding peace. However, analysts agree that unless the sources of conflict in the Mano River region (involving Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea) are addressed collectively within a common political framework, the significant gains achieved in Sierra Leone could easily be lost (Adebajo 2002).

As demonstrated by the repeated calls for 'coordination' or 'coherence' among peacebuilding actors, there is growing appreciation of the importance of a shared framework for effective peacebuilding that goes beyond policy or operational guidelines. The reality of post-Cold War international relations however, is that there is no overarching global 'political' framework within which to ground the new peacebuilding agenda. Yet, given the wide differences among conflict formations in various regions and sub-regions, there is an important opportunity for regionally-based and regionally-informed peacebuilding strategies. Given the current architecture of international assistance, regional approaches have so far not been used explicitly and effectively. Instead, governments, international organisations, and donor agencies have generally developed and implemented country-specific programmes without a common regional framework that can address transnational conflict issues.

There is, however, growing pressure for approaches that go beyond state-based and state-driven strategies. For example, given their relative lack of power in their own countries, civil society actors in conflict zones are creating regional networks. The United Nations, unable to respond to the number of peacebuilding challenges it faces, is encouraging stronger involvement of regional organisations and entities in peacebuilding. Increasingly, the UN is seeking new mechanisms for its peace operations such as the 'UN plus formula' involving partnerships with selected regional institutions, extra regional actors and coalitions of the willing around a common framework. The UN's interventions in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, East Timor and Afghanistan have elements of a regional approach. Similarly, the creation of the new African Union as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) reflect an openness to address conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies in Africa from a regional perspective. Finally, the recent establishment of a UN regional office in Dakar to monitor and respond to conflicts in the West African region from a sub-regional perspective is also a very promising development. These discrete developments, coupled with the emergent interest in the 'new regionalisms' portent well for the future (Maclean 1999, Marchand 1999). However, the challenges to translating these innovations into effective peacebuilding tools remain formidable — especially in light of the serious institutional and resource constraints in conflict torn regions.

Conclusion

The new peacebuilding agenda has allowed the introduction of new ideas, new actors, new approaches and new instruments into the study as well as the practice of international development and international security. Indeed, the international community's

endorsement of universal norms such as human rights, internationalisation of justice, human security, humanitarian interventions, democratic governance, transparency and anti-corruption, has served to underline the substantive linkages between development and security. It has also highlighted the need to address these issues at multiple levels from the local to the global.

The new peacebuilding agenda has allowed the introduction of new ideas, new actors, new approaches and new instruments into the study.

On the other hand, as this article sought to demonstrate, the new peacebuilding agenda needs to move beyond rhetorical exhortations for better coordinated, more coherent and more effective use of existing peacebuilding tools and approaches. Instead, it needs to ground itself in a more rigorous analysis of regionally-based geo-political as well as socio-economic *factors* and *networks* feeding violent conflicts in various countries and regions. When complemented by the deductive and inductive approaches already in place, regionally-tailored initiatives can inject a vital political framework into peacebuilding.

The adoption of a 'regional approach' to peacebuilding would require further work in at least four distinct areas. First, there is need for rigorous, sustained and comparative research and analysis on conflicts from a 'regional conflict' perspective. More specifically, the international community needs to pay closer attention to researchers and analysts from different regions. This means listening to their assessments about conflict dynamics, as well as their proposals for regional strategies and capacities for peacebuilding. In the last decade, there has been considerable investment in analytical tools such as conflict analysis, conflict assessment, and peace and conflict impact assessment. The utility of these tools, which have been predominantly developed by Western researchers and generally used at the country level, would be significantly improved if their scope were expanded to regional conflicts and incorporated input from researchers from the regions. Second, given the current mismatch between peacebuilding needs and institutional capacities at the regional as well as international levels, there is great opportunity for innovative provisional arrangements that can most effectively draw upon local, regional and international institutions for effective peacebuilding. The international community is already experimenting with various forms of 'coalitions of the willing' — the so-called 'the variable geometry' of international alignments of the post-Cold War order. Currently focused primarily on security, these new arrangements need to extend to the wider range of peacebuilding challenges discussed in this article — including the management of international development assistance. Third, since these types of arrangements are likely to be *ad hoc* and temporary, the international community needs to invest in reforming and supporting regional and sub-regional institutions such as the African Union or ECOWAS. These institutions should assume a stronger role in regional peacebuilding — not necessarily on their own but in partnership with the UN and other international organisations. Finally, and perhaps most challenging, there is need for fundamental reform of the current international architecture for peace and development — an architecture that remains totally inadequate to deal with the twin contemporary challenges for peace and development that confront the international community. While wholesale reform of the international system is a pipe dream, the conceptual, policy and operational issues addressed in this paper all point to the need for significant institutional

renovations. These renovations should enable institutions to better correspond to the changing roles of states, non-state actors, intergovernmental organisations, and other multilateral institutions in the 21st century.

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