States of Conflict

Lessons in conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Alex Glennie

September 2010
© ippr 2010

Institute for Public Policy Research
Challenging ideas – Changing policy

About ippr

The Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) is the UK's leading progressive think tank, producing cutting-edge research and innovative policy ideas for a just, democratic and sustainable world.

Since 1988, we have been at the forefront of progressive debate and policymaking in the UK. Through our independent research and analysis we define new agendas for change and provide practical solutions to challenges across the full range of public policy issues.

With offices in both London and Newcastle, we ensure our outlook is as broad-based as possible, while our Global Change programme extends our partnerships and influence beyond the UK, giving us a truly world-class reputation for high-quality research.

About the author

Alex Glennie is a research fellow in the Global Change Programme at ippr. Since 2006, she has served on the Secretariat of ippr's Commission on National Security in the 21st Century, contributed to a programme of research on migration and development, and managed a major project on political Islam. She is the author of *Building Bridges, Not Walls: Engaging with political Islamists in the Middle East and North Africa*.

Acknowledgements

Contents

1. Introduction

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen increasing interest in the related issues of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The death toll and associated costs of major military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, and lengthy conflicts or insurgencies in many other states and regions – including Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sri Lanka, India, Israel-Palestine, the Caucasus, Central Asia and parts of South America – have highlighted the need for a more strategic approach to preventing conflict. Research suggesting that as many as 40 per cent of states fall back into conflict within 10 years of violence ending also indicates that a great deal more needs to be done to ensure that temporary cessations of hostility are transformed into sustainable peace settlements (Collier et al 2003).

In a series of reports during his tenure as Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan urged the international community to move from a culture of reaction to one of prevention (Annan 2001; 2006). But this is much more easily said than done. Despite the obvious benefits of attempting to defuse potential conflicts before they emerge, policymakers have found it hard to sell the idea of putting time and money into addressing latent hostilities that may never become violent. This is partly because it is difficult to provide empirical evidence for the efficacy of these measures, and partly because examples of successful conflict prevention tend to be under-reported by governments and the media.

A different set of challenges present themselves when it comes to peacebuilding. Efforts to resolve conflict and rebuild societies that are capable of withstanding future shocks are often drawn-out processes that require sustained commitment from a range of actors who have overlapping – but sometimes competing – objectives. Without a clear consensus about the best way to support peace processes, external players may exacerbate conflicts rather than help to end them. These problems of strategy may also be compounded by straitened global financial circumstances, which have left many countries with fewer resources to spend on lengthy peacebuilding processes.

This briefing paper draws out some of the lessons learned about conflict prevention and peacebuilding through the work of ippr's Commission on National Security in the 21st Century. It draws heavily on four published case study reports on conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, as well as the findings presented in the Commission's interim and final reports.[1] The report seeks to identify those lessons that will be most relevant to governments and international organisations, and argues that in spite of the difficulties described above, there is still a compelling case for policymakers investing more political and financial capital in both conflict prevention and peacebuilding.
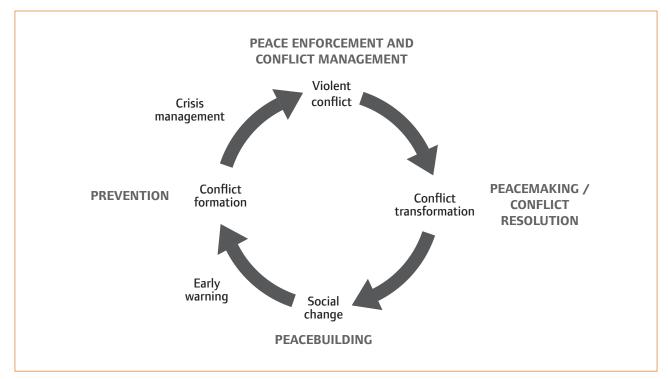
---

1   These reports are all available at www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports/

2. Definitions

As there are no universally accepted definitions of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, it can often be difficult to identify where one activity ends and the other begins. In the literature, conflict prevention is usually defined in one of two ways. Some see it as a short-term 'operational' process in which a combination of actions (such as mediation, diplomacy or sanctions) are taken with the aim of preventing widespread violence in the period directly before it looks likely to erupt (Woocher 2009). Others adopt a broader 'structural' definition, and include policies (such as development, financial aid and capacity building) that take place further upstream and aim to make countries more resilient and able to withstand conflict risk factors. A key proponent of this view was the influential Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, which described successful conflict prevention as requiring 'long-term policies that could reduce the likelihood of conflict by encouraging democratisation, economic reform, and cross-cultural understanding' (Carnegie Commission 1997).

Defining the scope of peacebuilding is similarly problematic. It tends to be seen as the stage in a conflict when a negotiated settlement or a military victory has put an end to violence, and efforts to institutionalise peaceful relations between previously warring groups and to rebuild the political, economic and social structures of the affected areas can get underway. But as Ali and Matthews suggest, this process can sometimes begin during the period of hostilities or even before a conflict begins, since 'structures that are created and events that occur prior to and during civil war can shape the way in which peace is rebuilt after the fighting has stopped (Ali and Matthews 2004: 6). This bleeds into the structural definition of conflict prevention described above.

Implementing effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding policies can become complicated if the lines between them become too blurred. This paper therefore treats them as distinct elements within a continuous cycle, as shown in Figure 2.1:

Figure 2.1
Conflict cycle

Source: Melander and Pigache 2007

Given that there are clear overlaps between the two sets of activities, we distinguish them by the point at which they take place in the conflict cycle. So prevention is defined here as concerted action (including both operational and structural policies) taken for the explicit purpose of preventing a conflict that has not yet emerged, while peacebuilding is the process that begins towards the end of a conflict to promote reconciliation, build a more resilient political and socio-economic system, and prevent a recurrence of the conditions or tensions that led to the original conflict.

3. Changing conflict patterns

To put this analysis in context, the following section provides a brief overview of some major conflict trends in recent years.[2] While there are reasons for optimism, the serious challenges still to be overcome in responding more effectively to conflict situations around the world should not be underestimated.

Looking at the positive developments first, it appears that absolute levels of conflict have fallen over the past few decades. In its analysis of the costs of war, the influential Human Security Report Project has found that, since the late 1980s, there has been a significant although uneven decline in the number of state-based armed conflicts, defined here as a conflict where at least one party is the government of a state and where there are at least 25 battle-related deaths (Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2008).

Figure 3.1
State-based armed conflicts by type (1946–2006)

Sources: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4 2008; Human Security Report Project 2007

This drop in the number of conflicts in which at least one party is a government has been accompanied by three other notable developments. First, since the end of the Cold War, the number of conflicts coming to an end has begun to outweigh the number of new conflicts starting: a reversal of trends between 1960 and 1990.
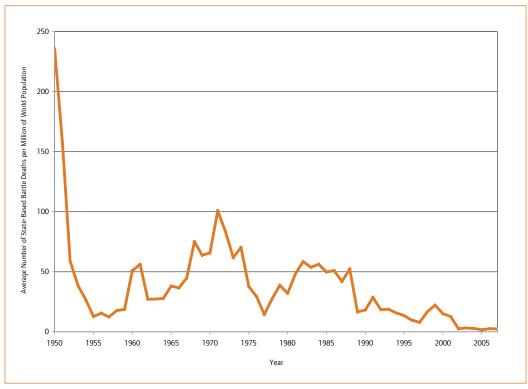
Second, the method of conflict termination has changed. While absolute victory by one party or the other was responsible for the majority of conflict terminations in the period 1950–99, since 2000 there has been a rise in the number of negotiated settlements. Between 2000 and 2005, 17 conflicts were settled through negotiation (compared to just five through out-and-out victories) and the limited available evidence on this suggests that the negotiated settlements are proving more durable (Human Security Report Project 2007).

Third, as Figure 3.2 shows, the number of reported battle deaths from state-based violent conflict has decreased significantly since the late 1980s, thanks in part to the changing nature of warfare. Conflicts where two or more conventional armies meet on the battlefield have become increasingly rare, replaced by a greater number of low-level insurgencies and rebellions that tend to take place within rather than between states.

2   For an expanded version of this discussion, see Chapter 4 of the interim report of ippr's Commission on National Security in the 21st Century (ippr 2008).

Figure 3.2

Average number of battle deaths from state-based armed conflicts per year, per million of world population, 1950–2007

Sources: UN World Population Prospects Database; PRIO Battle Deaths Dataset v.3.0; UCDP/Human Security Report Project Dataset

More counter-intuitively, there has also been a fall in mortality rates in countries affected by conflict over the past few decades (Human Security Report Project 2010). Given that conflict frequently leads to huge numbers of 'excess' deaths – as a result of disease, malnutrition and disruption of economic and social infrastructure – it might have been expected that mortality rates would remain high. However, despite the difficulties involved in collecting data on this issue, the Human Security Report Project suggests that major improvements in public health in the developing world have led to a considerable decline in both peacetime and wartime mortality rates. The increasing effectiveness of humanitarian assistance to populations in areas affected by conflict has also helped (Human Security Report Project 2010).

Although the conflict patterns described above are encouraging, they should not lead to a sense of complacency on the part of international policymakers. The headline figures mask considerable regional variations, so while the number of conflicts in Africa has fallen, levels of violence in the Middle East and parts of Asia remain high. The numbers also fail to capture some other worrying trends. For example, levels of population displacement caused by armed conflict seem to be increasing, and in 2007 the estimated number of people forced to leave their homes as a result of conflict and violence exceeded 26 million for the first time since the early 1990s (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council 2008). While three countries (Sudan, Colombia and Iraq) accounted for nearly half of the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), conflict-related displacement occurred in 49 other countries that year. These numbers represent huge levels of insecurity. IDPs often have limited or no access to food, water and shelter, and they also frequently experience serious violations of their human rights through attacks, detentions or arrests. Women and girls among the IDP population are particularly vulnerable to rape and exploitation, while many children are forced to drop out of school and become easy recruitment targets for armed groups.

Another cause for concern is the recent increase in the number of campaigns of one-sided violence, which are defined as the use of armed force against civilians by the government of a state, or by a formally organised group, that results in 25 or more reported deaths in a given country in a calendar year. In 2004, the number of these types of conflict surpassed the total number of state-based armed conflicts for the same year, suggesting that the practice of targeting civilians may be on the

rise (Human Security Report Project 2007). Although the doctrine of the 'responsibility to protect'[3] has been broadly accepted by the international community, it still operates more effectively in principle than in practice. Governments and international organisations find it extremely difficult to generate both the political will and the legitimate mandates required to intervene in the internal affairs of other states, so an increase in the number of civil conflicts that involve governments perpetrating violence against their own people will likely complicate conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts by international actors.

The fact that conflicts now tend to be intrastate rather than interstate has not reduced the spillover effects of violence, since the impacts of widespread death and disruption are rarely contained within a country's borders. Neighbouring countries and wider regions are often destabilised by the flow of small arms and light weapons, mercenary groups and displaced people that conflicts can produce. The interconnected conflicts in West Africa over the past decade – in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and Senegal – are a good example of this. During Sierra Leone's long civil war in the 1990s, the Revolutionary United Front movement received arms from both Charles Taylor's regime in Liberia and Burkina Faso (Ero and Ndinga-Muvumba 2004). Rebel groups are also more likely to cross national borders made porous by conflict in order to find safety in neighbouring countries, often leading government forces to follow suit, thus spreading violence across borders (Chalmers 2008).

Beyond the grave costs in terms of human life and wellbeing, the economic consequences of conflict are immense. An important World Bank report on this issue noted in 2003 that 'by the end of the typical civil war incomes are around 15 per cent lower than they would otherwise have been, implying that about 30 per cent more people are living in absolute poverty' (Collier et al 2003). Conflict can also have a serious economic effect on surrounding regions, since instability in one country can often depress growth rates in its neighbours and sometimes prompt them to increase their military expenditure.

The conflict patterns described above sit within the context of serious and worsening conditions of state fragility and failure in the international system (see ippr 2008 for more details). Indeed, the 2009 Failed States Index found 131 of the 177 states it examined to be unstable, as measured against a number of political, social and economic indicators, with 38 of these falling into the most serious category of fragility (Fund for Peace 2009). And while it is difficult to prove a direct causal link between state failure and conflict, of the 20 states ranked as most fragile in the Failed States Index 2009, most are currently experiencing some form of armed conflict or political violence on their territory.

Responding effectively to the serious challenges described above will require international actors to be increasingly strategic and coordinated in the way they approach conflict prevention and peacebuilding. An important step in this process is to gather and build on what has been learned from international involvement in past and present conflicts. This paper now turns to some of the lessons that can be taken from four specific case studies: Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia.

---

3   The 'responsibility to protect' is a set of norms and principles giving the international community a mandate to intervene in situations where national governments are unable to protect their own citizens from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and the most serious crimes against humanity, or are themselves the perpetrators of such violence (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001). The doctrine was developed by an International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in 2001, picked up by the UN Secretary General in following years, and then formally signed up to by heads of state at a World Summit meeting in 2005 (organised to assess progress towards the Millennium Development Goals). The legitimacy derived from this affirmation of the principle has helped to make it a part of customary international law, although it is yet to become legally enforceable internationally.

4. Learning from our case studies

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to either conflict prevention or peacebuilding. What works in one context may not necessarily be successfully replicated elsewhere – its effectiveness will depend on the particular political, economic and social conditions at play in a situation of potential or actual conflict. However, while the conflicts in ippr's four case study countries differ from each other in a number of ways, it is still possible to draw out common lessons from them. These lessons are discussed in more detail below, before a concluding section that considers some of the implications for policymakers.

Lessons in conflict prevention

As a result of the work of the UN Secretary General, the OECD, and non-governmental initiatives like the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, there is now widespread acceptance of the idea that efforts to prevent the outbreak of violence are likely to be far more sustainable than attempts to manage and resolve conflict after it has emerged, both from a human and an economic perspective. For example, the Obama administration's new National Security Strategy states that 'proactively investing in stronger societies and human welfare is far more effective and efficient than responding after state collapse' and pledges that the US will work to improve its capability to strengthen the security of states at risk of conflict and violence (The White House 2010). The current national security strategies of many other countries, including the UK, make similar commitments.

However, findings from our case studies and from the literature indicate that policymakers often find it difficult to put this principle into practice. A number of reasons for this can be identified. First, evidence on the value of conflict prevention tends to be anecdotal rather than empirical, making the argument that prevention is more cost-effective than reaction more intuitive than objective. Second, there is a lack of coverage given to the good examples of conflict prevention that do exist. With some notable exceptions, column inches and news reports are more likely to focus on the tragic failure of preventive actions in places like Sudan than on the fine details of how conflict can and has been avoided in places like Macedonia. These problems are compounded by the fact that there are few short-term political incentives to invest in prevention. Why spend money on something that may never happen, when there are so many other ongoing conflicts that require attention and resources?

However, these challenges are not insurmountable. Although the research conducted for this project does not enable us to estimate the precise financial savings that could be made over the long term through investing in conflict prevention,[4] it does suggest a number of lessons and best practices for actors involved in preventive activities.

1. Actors engaged in conflict prevention need to engage early and stay the course

As discussed above, there are different understandings of what constitutes conflict prevention, which raises questions about the timescale over which preventive activities should take place. This paper has adopted a broad definition of prevention, including both upstream policies aimed at making conflict-prone societies more resilient and the direct actions taken directly before violence breaks out. As such, one of the most important lessons from our case studies is that international actors engaging in conflict prevention need to be prepared to commit to a comprehensive and long-term process, rather than mobilising only when conflict appears imminent. This is the approach that has been taken in Macedonia, where external actors have spent more than a decade coordinating a generally successful effort to prevent the endemic unrest in the Balkans from spilling over and adding to local conflict risk factors.

As contractions in the global economy limit the resources available to governments and national organisations for spending on overseas assistance, this might seem like a hard ask. But a sustained commitment to conflict prevention does not necessarily imply that huge amounts of money must be spent. Rather, it indicates the need for international actors to work together more strategically to identify the specific skills and resources that each can contribute to the process, and then to divide responsibility accordingly.

---

4   See Brown and Rosecrance 1999 and Chalmers 2004 for examples of this kind of analysis.

2. Inclusive prevention efforts that focus on the underlying drivers of conflict are more likely to succeed

The best conflict prevention initiatives are those that involve all parties to a dispute in the process of finding a way to resolve their differences. This was the explicit mandate of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (ICFY) Working Group on Ethnic and National Communities and Minorities, an instrument which grew out of attempts to help the states emerging from the break up of Yugoslavia conclude a durable peace settlement. As described in our Macedonia case study report, the ICFY Working Group used field visits, shuttle diplomacy and trilateral forums as a means of engaging with the government and the country's Albanian and Serbian minority groups. The trilateral forums were particularly important as a confidence-building measure, since they allowed groups with different interests to come together on a relatively equal footing, to air their grievances in a constructive setting, and to identify potential sources of conflict as early as possible (Paintin 2009). This is a model that could be repeated to good effect in other situations where violent conflict appears likely.

Actions to prevent conflict should also address the root causes of tension between different ethnic and societal groups, or they are unlikely to have a long-term and positive impact. In Macedonia, international actors had a good grasp of the key issues at stake, which led to a clear focus from the outset on responding to the concerns of minority groups who feared that their social and cultural rights were threatened by the policies of the government. For example, language rights were a particularly contentious topic, and so the ICFY supported efforts to increase the number of classes taught in Albanian in schools, while the High Commissioner for National Minorities put sustained pressure on the government to work towards de-segregating higher education in Macedonia. The outcome of this was the establishment of Macedonia's first officially tri-lingual university in 2001, which was an important means of defusing tension between Albanians and Macedonians.

3. High-level diplomatic engagement can make a difference

While successful conflict prevention requires hard work on the part of many actors at all levels of society (including community NGOs, local and central government officials, the media and the military), active engagement by senior figures that are not seen as being partisan to one side or the other can often have a significant impact on the dynamics of a conflict. Such individuals can shine a light on potential conflicts that may not be receiving much political or media attention to ensure that they are dealt with promptly.

For example, in 2001, a conflict flash-point arose in Macedonia when an Albanian rebel group called the National Liberation Army launched an attack against the government. This group was made up primarily of unemployed Albanian youths who were frustrated by the lack of progress made towards consolidating minority rights during the 1990s. Various international actors were quick to intervene in this situation. Even before formal peace talks began, the EU and NATO engaged in intense shuttle diplomacy. Lord George Robertson, then Secretary General of NATO, and Javier Solana, then EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, both visited Macedonia a number of times during the initial phases of the crisis, persuading all parties to end the violence and seek a political solution. The involvement of such senior individuals signalled the intent of the international community to ensure that violence did not spiral out of control, and was successful in creating space for the swift negotiation of a more durable peace settlement.

Respected senior statesmen can also confer legitimacy on efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation between parties to a conflict. Since standing down as UN Secretary-General in 2006, Kofi Annan has performed this mediating role in a number of conflicts. As the Chair of a Panel of Eminent African Personalities he led a negotiation process that prevented civil unrest in Kenya from escalating into widespread violence, following contested election results in 2008. Interventions of this kind will not always be sufficient to stop the emergence of violent conflict on their own, but should certainly be used more frequently as part of a comprehensive conflict prevention strategy.

4. Smart power is required for effective conflict prevention

Evidence suggests that the most successful attempts to prevent conflict are those that use a smart mix of military and non-military tools, which will sometimes include preventive military deployments. Policymakers find it hard to justify the use of pre-emptive military force, and for good reason. Without a clear mandate and widespread legitimacy among those they are designed

to protect, deployments of this kind risk exacerbating rather than improving conflict situations. However, carefully planned military deployments can help to defuse crisis situations and prevent the emergence of violence, if combined with other diplomatic and development tools designed to address the structural causes of conflict. These deployments will rarely provide a long-term solution, but can create a secure environment in which softer preventive activities are able to take place, and should not just be used as a last resort when all other diplomatic solutions have failed.

During the 1990s, the UN deployed its first (and only) preventive force in Macedonia. The United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) was a relatively small contingent of 1,049 military officers, 35 military observers and 26 civilian police tasked with monitoring developments on the ground and acting as a deterrent for any would-be spoilers to Macedonia's independence process. Given its size, this deployment would not have been able to halt the spread of mass violence, had it emerged. But the political function of UNPREDEP was ultimately much more significant than its military role. Its presence in the country indicated that the international community would respond vigorously to any challenges to Macedonia's territorial integrity, with reports of the UN Secretary General suggesting that UNPREDEP could be expanded in size if necessary. Meanwhile, the sense of security that was provided by UNPREDEP also allowed other conflict prevention initiatives to take root.

Of course, international preventive deployments will not always be feasible or appropriate in situations of conflict that look likely to become violent. Timing matters here, and preventive deployments must be used at a point in the conflict cycle where they are likely to have the most impact. For instance, it is unlikely that a force the size of UNPREDEP would have made a difference to the way that Rwanda's civil war unfolded in 1994, given both the speed at which the conflict spread and the late stage at which the international community intervened. But the example of Macedonia does suggest relatively small numbers of troops and monitors can be instrumental in preventing violence, if they are used far enough upstream and as long as they are backed up by a credible indication that a larger force can be deployed if necessary.

5. Good coordination between conflict prevention actors is essential

The success or failure of conflict prevention activities rests on whether those involved are pulling together or working at cross purposes. The 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia over the contested South Ossetia region is a useful example of a situation where the competing objectives of the international actors involved weakened ongoing efforts to prevent violent conflict. In 2005, the reluctance of France and a number of other European states to take over responsibility for monitoring the Georgian-Russian border from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) meant that just three individuals were sent as part of an EU Special Representative's Border Support Team, instead of the 150 border monitors that had been requested. Although the lack of a strong and unified international European presence in Georgia in 2007 and 2008 was not the only factor in the emergence of armed conflict, it both intensified the general breakdown of trust between the various Georgian actors and failed to address the divisive role that Russia was playing in the region (Popescu 2009).

By contrast, effective coordination between the many international actors involved in conflict prevention efforts in Macedonia – the United Nations, the OSCE and the ICFY Working Group, and later the United States, the EU and NATO – was instrumental in ensuring that there was consistency at both an operational and a leadership level. During the 2001 crisis, the sudden engagement of so many actors could easily have led to confusion over aims and disagreement over roles. Yet in Macedonia all of the international players involved had a knowledgeable field presence and a common vision for the country, allowing each to play to their strengths and contribute to an identifiable end state (Paintin 2009). This was reinforced by the fact that the international team maintained strong lines of communication with the Macedonian government throughout the main conflict prevention phase in the 1990s as well as during the 2001 crisis, which reduced the potential for misunderstandings and helped all actors to work collectively towards a solution.

Lessons in peacebuilding

The primary lesson to be learned about peacebuilding from our case studies is that international actors involved in helping states make the transition from conflict to stability must temper their ambitions with a sense of realism. While it is right for actors involved in peacebuilding to aim for the

creation of sustainable political settlements that are capable of delivering good governance, it is important that the bar is not set too high for states emerging from conflict. Nevertheless, there are a number of principles and practices that internationals can adopt in order to improve the quality and durability of peacebuilding efforts.

1. Peacebuilding should be based on a good understanding of the situation on the ground and develop capacity that is already present in country

Tempting as it is to use the period immediately following a conflict as an opportunity to remake dysfunctional political systems, it should be recognised that there is no ideal set of institutions and practices that can be airlifted into a country as if it were a vacuum. Instead, peacebuilding processes must start with what is already present (in terms of people, institutions and infrastructure) and build from there, since the most sustainable peacebuilding efforts tend to be those which are implemented by local actors possessing both a sense of ownership of the process and a stake in its success.

Our Afghanistan case study offers a mixed picture of success on this front. Parts of the reconstruction process have been designed and carried out by Afghan ministries, funded by a combination of locally-raised revenue and money contributed to an Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund by external donors. Clear efforts have also been made to allow the country's government to determine the shape of new institutional structures themselves, as part of an explicit 'light footprint' approach to reform.

Yet the extent of the damage caused by the war and the serious weaknesses it exposed in the country's politics and infrastructure has required extensive involvement by international organisations, private commercial contractors and NGOs. In some instances, this has forced local actors to take a more inclusive approach to peacebuilding than they otherwise would have, as in the process of selecting a loya jirga (grand council) in 2003 to draft a new constitution. But in others, it has meant that considerable amounts of funding have bypassed the Afghan state entirely to be spent directly by other governments or international bodies on work that is often carried out by costly private commercial contractors rather than local people.

A better approach in this case would have been to invest heavily in the creation of public sector jobs with a focus on rebuilding the country's damaged infrastructure, in an effort to bring down the country's high unemployment rate. Strengthening domestic capacity will almost always be a more effective way of promoting stability and development over the long term, and should therefore be the focus of international support for peacebuilding.

2. Inclusive political settlements are more likely to deliver sustainable peace agreements

As noted above, an increasing number of violent conflicts are now being settled by negotiations rather than military victories. Yet if there are no outright winners, peace processes may produce groups with objectives and agendas that continue to clash even after the cessation of armed hostilities. In this context, it is important that international actors involved in peacebuilding direct their efforts towards supporting inclusive peace settlements and creating new governing structures that tackle the full range of issues that caused and perpetuated the conflict. If minority concerns are not adequately addressed, this can sow the seeds for further violence down the line.

For example, the international peacebuilding process in Bosnia was very focused on strengthening the powers of the central state. This suited the interests of the country's Bosniak politicians who, as members of the largest ethnic – and political – group in Bosnia, would be the prime beneficiaries of a more centralised state. However, it weakened the legitimacy of the peace process and the new institutions it produced amongst the country's Serb and Croat minorities. The approach taken in Kosovo was quite different: the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the EU and the OSCE worked closely with donors to help build institutions that enjoyed fairly broad support amongst the country's different ethnic groups.

This lesson about inclusive political settlements holds true even in those situations where one party to the conflict does achieve a decisive victory, such as the conclusion in 2009 of the long-running civil war in Sri Lanka between the Sinhalese-dominated government and the country's Tamil minority. As observed by the International Crisis Group, the crushing military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been insufficient on its own to provide the conditions for a more stable Sri Lankan democracy. More than a year after the official end of the war, the

grievances that fuelled the actions of the LTTE have still not been addressed satisfactorily, while an internal commission of inquiry set up by the government to investigate the way in which the war was prosecuted over its final seven years is unlikely to meet Tamil needs for redress and reconciliation (International Crisis Group 2010).

External actors may have less scope for involvement in these kinds of post-conflict scenarios, but they should still seek to use whatever leverage they do possess – such as the ability to press for independent inquiries into human rights abuses, or to put conditions on development assistance – to discourage governments from ignoring the concerns of minority groups.

3. Peacebuilding actors should prioritise the development of strong governance institutions

In an ideal world, international organisations and governments supporting countries emerging from conflict would act as neutral arbiters between different interest groups. However, peacebuilding does not take place in a political vacuum and external actors often become involved in the political decisions that must be made about allocating resources and power. This is not always a bad thing: as noted in our Kosovo study, if UNMIK had refrained from taking a more active political role than originally intended, it would have been unable to deliver on any of the commitments in its peacebuilding mandates (Zaum 2009). But it can be problematic if it leads to a situation where individuals or particular political groups are built up at the expense of institutions.

The potential dangers of this approach are illustrated by the situation in Afghanistan, where the international community's strong support for President Karzai has been partly responsible for the lack of strong institutional structures that might ameliorate the effects of poor leadership. For example, the presidential elections of August 2009 were seen as being deeply flawed, with evidence of widespread fraud and vote-stealing taking place. But, as Maley notes, the repercussions of this could have been significantly reduced if more time and energy had been spent supporting the development of a government capable of giving a broader range of individuals and groups with progressive ideas about reforming their country a say in its governance (Maley 2009).

This should not be taken as a blanket criticism of the international approach in Afghanistan, for significant resources have been channelled into developing governmental capacity since 2001. It is simply a reminder that international actors will often have a more positive and sustainable impact on peacebuilding processes if they focus their efforts on building durable legislative and judicial structures that promote good governance and the rule of law, and which are able to exert clear checks and balances on the power of the executive.

4. International aid should take better account of the specific needs of post-conflict societies

Although international aid is frequently essential in providing the capital and the skills to help war-torn states rebuild their physical and political structures, it can be a blunt instrument in efforts to promote reform, especially if it is channelled into projects that are built on the concerns of external funders rather than the most pressing needs of the country's population. For example, with almost 70 per cent of Kosovo's population living in the countryside, and the majority of these rural inhabitants making a living from agriculture, it might have been expected that donors would make agricultural reform an early focus of their activities. However, they have been much more interested to date in projects that seek to strengthen the rule of law: of the nearly €185-million EU instrument for pre-accession assistance, more than €28 million has been spent on these projects, compared to just over €7 million on agricultural developments (Zaum 2009).

The issue here is one of prioritisation and sequencing, since a strong and enforceable legal framework is clearly necessary to create the conditions for economic development in post-conflict societies. But the planning and disbursement of funds could have been more tightly connected to the specific needs of the Kosovan people, a lesson which translates across to other peacebuilding scenarios.

5. There must be a clear plan for international disengagement

One of the most difficult problems confronting international actors helping to rebuild societies following a period of conflict is the question of when they should leave. Withdrawing prematurely can allow conflict to re-emerge, if the underlying tensions that caused it have not been adequately

addressed. In Macedonia, the premature withdrawal of international organisations engaged in conflict prevention activities in the 1990s threatened to undo the good work that had been done up until that point, and left a vacuum that allowed violence to break out again in 2001. The UK and the United States are currently facing similar dilemmas in Afghanistan and Iraq, as they are planning for withdrawal of their troops even as the military and political situations in both countries remain highly unstable.

However, there is also a danger that if external actors stay too long, their presence can become an essential condition for the maintenance of peace and security, which may prevent national governments and previously warring groups from taking responsibility for the peacebuilding process themselves. For example, Bosnia is currently dependent on international credits and loans to finance budget deficits and debts, while the country's military has been reconfigured to mirror NATO structures. Bosnia's judiciary has also become highly internationalised, with many foreign judges, prosecutors and judicial experts having been deployed to local courts, bringing their own interpretations and norms of international law with them (Bliesemann de Guevera 2009). A similar situation has occurred in Kosovo, with the EU, UN, NATO and other western states having assumed control of mediation in the relationship between the government of Kosovo and the country's Serb municipalities in order to maintain stability.

There is no easy answer to this question of timing. But the more important lesson here is about how the peacebuilding process is planned. From the outset, external actors should focus on developing a shared vision of what they want to achieve, in the context of providing support for local actors, and then on planning how best to distribute these activities amongst themselves to avoid overlap and waste. There should also be a clear idea of what a successful end state would look like and the concrete steps that it would take to get there, even in the absence of a precise timetable for achieving this.

5. Policy implications

In the UK and elsewhere, public faith in the value of interventions – either to prevent violent conflict or to rebuild peace after it has occurred – has been shaken in recent years. The fallout from international engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan has decreased popular support for the idea of preventive deployments overseas, while on a practical level, budget cuts have started to limit the resources available to many of the countries that traditionally engage in such activities. But these developments cannot be used as an excuse to draw back into isolationism, for in an increasingly interconnected world, conflict does not only have an impact on the lives of those in areas directly affected by violence, but threatens to unravel the fabric of global security and prosperity. As such, there is a pressing need for strategies that can both address conflict risk factors before they lead to violence and save money in doing so. The final section of this paper pulls out some key conclusions that flow from the analysis above, focusing particularly on what could be done to improve the conflict prevention capacity of governments and international organisations. Although these are framed in general terms, all are recommendations that the UK government is well placed to lead on.[5]

1. Policymakers would find it easier to make the strategic case for a 'responsibility to prevent' if more evidence existed of the efficacy of conflict prevention

The final report of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict observed that 'with a public that is aware of the value of prevention and informed of the availability of constructive alternatives, the political risks of sustaining pre-emptive engagement in the world are reduced' (Carnegie Commission 1997: xivi). Public education of this kind is always difficult, but would be helped by the availability of more and clearer data and evidence. Although there is a substantial body of academic and practitioner literature on responding to ongoing conflicts or helping to rebuild peace once conflict has occurred, less work has been done on conflict prevention and the savings it could bring. There are just a few studies which have attempted to quantify the costs involved in cases where conflict prevention has or could have been utilised and then compared these to the costs of responding to widespread violence. And while the OECD-DAC Network on Development Evaluation has recently piloted a promising guidance tool for assessing conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities, the information this generates will need to be made more accessible for policymakers and the media if it is to have a significant impact.

Recommendation: Governments should make it a priority to fund independent research that evaluates conflict prevention activities and collects evidence about their cost effectiveness and value for money, as a resource for policymakers and the media. This should be based wherever possible on primary in-country research and should be kept up to date in a freely-available international database. Case studies should focus on what instruments were deployed, how success was achieved, and how it might be replicated in other cases and circumstances. They should also translate technical evidence into policy-relevant findings that can be understood by a wide audience.

2. International commitments to prevent deadly conflict need to be better monitored

The value of conflict prevention has been broadly accepted by governments and international organisations, and underpins the national security strategies of many countries. However, it is currently very difficult to assess their progress towards giving prevention equal priority alongside efforts to address ongoing conflicts. Better systems for monitoring and evaluating government and intergovernmental action in this area would improve these assessments.

NGOs, campaigning groups and the media also have a crucial role to play. They are generally good at holding governments' feet to the fire over their response to ongoing conflicts, with the massive international campaign that has been mobilised around the civil war in the Darfur region being a particularly good example of this. But they could do more to ensure that governments are held accountable for the commitments they make with respect to the prevention of conflict.

Recommendation: There should be a drive to create an international reporting framework for monitoring and evaluating the success of conflict prevention activities. This would enable governments and international organisations to report regularly on their progress towards achieving conflict prevention targets, which in turn would prompt a more systematic evaluation of lessons

---

5   More specific recommendations about the UK's conflict policies can be found in the interim and final reports of ippr's Commission on National Security in the 21st Century (ippr 2008 and 2009).

learned about what works and what does not. This kind of measurement would also provide stronger incentives for best practice in conflict prevention, as it would be a way of identifying and praising good performers while naming and shaming those who are not following through on their targets.

3. High level activism needs to address potential as well as actual conflicts

There are a number of high profile individuals and groups that engage in international advocacy around conflict issues. One example is The Elders organisation, which is an independent group of eminent global leaders, brought together by Nelson Mandela, who use their collective influence and expertise to support peacebuilding efforts and to address major causes of human suffering (The Elders 2010). Another group is the African Union Panel of Eminent African Personalities (currently chaired by Kofi Annan), which was launched in 2008 in response to the widespread violence that followed contested elections in Kenya and which monitors ongoing tensions there. These types of interventions can often be critical in raising mass awareness of conflict, and should therefore be used much more frequently as a tool of conflict prevention.

Recommendation: A 'conflict prevention network' of high-profile activists should be established with a specific mandate to identify and seek to address tensions that have the potential to tip into conflict in the short and medium term, and to act as an early warning system for policymakers and the media.

4. Peacebuilding efforts should seek to avoid making the presence of international actors a condition of stability

International aid can be a critical source of support for conflict-affected areas as people there engage in the process of rebuilding their society and infrastructure. However, this often creates a situation where international actors become so politically and economically involved in the reconstruction efforts that their presence is then essential for the maintenance of stability and their withdrawal can lead to the collapse of domestic peacebuilding processes. It would be impossible to identify an 'ideal' length of time for international actors to remain active participants in the peacebuilding process after a conflict has ended. This will vary depending on the political, economic and social conditions in individual countries and the willingness and ability of local actors to drive the peacebuilding process themselves. However, our case studies suggest that international organisations, governments and NGOs need to do as much as they can to empower the local governments and civil society to take control of the process as early as possible.

Recommendation: Governments and other organisations engaged in peacebuilding should constantly monitor the effects their presence may have on the internal dynamics of post-conflict societies, and do what they can to minimise any that might cause harm. They should also ensure that local actors have the capacity and the resources to drive the process of peacebuilding forwards themselves.

Conclusion

Although the multitude of conflict pressures within the international system present policymakers with serious challenges, there are reasons for optimism. Over the past few decades, the international community has taken great strides in the way that it approaches conflict prevention and peacebuilding in states or regions affected by violence. The work of the UN, the OECD and the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, among others, has shifted the normative debate in a progressive direction by making the case for conflict prevention too strong to be ignored. Moreover, the national security strategies and development policies of many states now contain clear commitments to put this principle into practice.

Efforts to rebuild states and societies shattered by conflict have also become more strategic. International actors are increasingly aware of the need to let the governments and people of these countries decide on their own path towards peacebuilding, and are better at coordinating their efforts to ensure that aid is used as productively as possible.

However, as this paper has shown, there are still important lessons to be learned and acted upon. The recent contraction of the global economy has provided governments and international organisations with a unique opportunity to design cost-effective conflict policies that put prevention at their heart. They must seize this chance with both hands.

References

Ali TM and Matthews RO (2004) *Durable Peace: Challenges for peacebuilding in Africa* Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Annan K (2001) *Prevention of armed conflict* Report of the Secretary-General, General Assembly Report A/55/985–S/2001/574

Annan K (2006) *Progress report on the prevention of armed conflict* Report of the Secretary-General, General Assembly Report A/60/891

Bliesemann de Guevera B (2009) *States of Conflict: A case study on peace-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina* London: ippr

Brown M and Rosecrance R (eds.) (1999) *The Costs of Conflict Prevention and Cure in the Global Arena* New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York
www.wilsoncenter.org/subsites/ccpdc/pubs/costs/cosfr.htm

Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (1997) *Preventing Deadly Conflict: Final Report* New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York

Chalmers M (2004) *Spending to Save? An Analysis of the Cost Effectiveness of Conflict Prevention*
www.csae.ox.ac.uk/conferences/2004-BB/papers/Chalmers-CSAE-BB2004.pdf

Chalmers M (2008) *Global Inequality and Security Policy: A British Perspective* Whitehall Paper 70, London: The Royal United Services Institute

Collier P with Elliott VL, Hegre H, Hoeffler A, Reynal-Querol M and Sambanis N (2003) *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* Washington, DC: The World Bank

The Elders (2010) 'About the Elders' www.theelders.org/elders

Ero C and Ndinga-Muvumba A (2004) 'Small Arms, Light Weapons' in Adebajo A and Rashid I (eds) *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region* London: Lynne Rienner

Fund for Peace (2009) 'Failed States Index 2009'
www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=99&Itemid=140

Human Security Report Project (2007) *Human Security Brief 2007* Vancouver: Simon Fraser University

Human Security Report Project (2010) *Human Security Report 2009, Part II: Shrinking costs of war* Vancouver: Simon Fraser University

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council (2008) *Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2007* Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2001) *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* Ottawa: International Development Research Centre

International Crisis Group (2010) *Sri Lanka: A Bitter Peace* Asia Briefing No. 99, Colombo/Brussels: International Crisis Group

ippr (2008) *Shared Destinies: Security in a globalised world* London: ippr

ippr (2009) *Shared Responsibilities: A national security strategy for the UK* London: ippr

Maley W (2009) *States of Conflict: A case study on state-building in Afghanistan* London: ippr

Melander E and Pigache C (2007) 'Conflict Prevention: Concepts and Challenges' in Feichtinger W and Jurekovic P (eds.) *Konfliktprävention: zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit* Wien: the Austrian National Defence Academy, 9–17

Paintin K (2009) *States of Conflict: A case study on conflict prevention in Macedonia* London: ippr

Popescu N (2009) 'The EU's Conflict Prevention Failure In Georgia' *Central Asia Caucasus Institute Analyst,* 14 October www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5198

Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (2008) 'UCDP Definitions', www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/definitions/

The White House (2010) *National Security Strategy* Washington, DC: The White House

Woocher L (2009) *Preventing Violent Conflict: Assessing Progress, Meeting Challenges* USIP Special Report, Washington DC: USIP Press

Zaum D (2009) *States of Conflict: Lessons from statebuilding in Kosovo* London: ippr