

## **Symposium on Richard Caplan's *Measuring Peace: Principles, Practices, and Politics***

*Editors' Note: The following are excerpts from the Introduction and the Conclusion of Richard Caplan's new book, Measuring Peace: Principles, Practices, and Politics (Oxford University Press, 2019). We invited Alex Bellamy at the University of Queensland, Cedric de Coning at the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs (NUPI), and 'Funmi Olonisakin at King's College London to offer their reflections on the book. Their contributions appear after the excerpts.*

How can we know if the peace that has been established following a civil war is a stable peace? Each year inter-governmental organizations, donor governments, and non-governmental organizations expend billions of dollars and deploy tens of thousands of personnel in support of efforts to build peace in countries emerging from violent conflict. The United Nations alone at the end of 2017 had nearly 93,000 uniformed personnel in the field and had committed some \$6.8 billion in support of peacekeeping operations that year (United Nations, 2017). Yet despite this considerable commitment of resources, as well as the accumulation of extensive knowledge and experience relevant to peacebuilding in the course of the past two decades, external efforts to consolidate peace in conflict-affected countries have met with mixed results.

The recurrence of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) in late 2012 is a case in point. CAR is one of six countries on the agenda of the UN's Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the UN body established in 2005 with a mandate to support recovery efforts in countries emerging from violent conflict.<sup>1</sup> Civil war raged in CAR from 2004 to 2007 until a peace agreement, an amnesty, and the formation of a national unity government laid the foundations for a durable peace, which the UN took measures to reinforce. Violent conflict re-erupted after rebel forces, accusing the government of François Bozizé of failing

to abide by its commitments, staged a coup in December 2012. The fact that CAR suffered renewed armed hostilities on the UN's watch underscores the volatility of so-called post-conflict countries and the need to understand why peace may fail to consolidate despite substantial international engagement.<sup>2</sup>

CAR is not an isolated case. Between 1946 and 2013, 105 countries suffered civil wars of various magnitude. Of these, more than half (59 countries) experienced a relapse into violent conflict—in some cases more than once—after peace had been established (UCDP/PRIO, 2014). By one estimate, on average 40 percent of countries emerging from civil war are likely to revert to violent conflict within a decade of the cessation of hostilities (Collier, Hoeffler, Söderbom, 2008, p. 465).<sup>3</sup> According to the World Bank, 90 percent of all civil wars that erupted in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were in countries that had previously experienced a civil war since 1945 (see Table 1) (World Bank, 2011, p. 3). Many of these countries have been recipients of extensive post-conflict recovery assistance on the part of the international community.

Peace may fail for a variety of reasons but many efforts to build peace have been hampered in one important respect: by the lack of effective means of assessing progress towards the achievement of a consolidated peace. As a consequence, peacebuilders are often navigating without a compass. International organizations and donor governments routinely undertake monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the specific programmes that they support in countries recovering from violent conflict, often to determine if funds are being used as intended or if programme activities have been implemented as planned. Rarely, if ever, however, do these organizations and governments conduct broader, strategic assessments to ascertain the quality of the peace that they are helping to build and the contribution that their engagement is making (or not) to the consolidation of peace.

**Table 1: Civil War Onset and Recurrence**

<b>Decade</b>	<b>Onset in countries with no previous conflicts (%)</b>	<b>Onset in countries with a previous conflict (%)</b>	<b>Number of onsets</b>
<b>1960s</b>	57	43	35
<b>1970s</b>	43	57	44
<b>1980s</b>	38	62	39
<b>1990s</b>	33	67	81
<b>2000s</b>	10	90	39

Source: *World Bank, 2011*

This is not to suggest that peacebuilding actors make no effort to take stock of progress overall. To the contrary, there are periodic reports from the field by high representatives and their equivalents, briefings to organizations' member-states and government ministers, and expert independent analysis by research institutes, among other barometers of change. While these assessments can be very insightful, they are often ad hoc, impressionistic, or devised on the basis of either inexplicit criteria or stated criteria—such as the fulfilment of mandates—that are not necessarily suitable for determining how well a peacebuilding operation may be helping to meet the requirements for a stable peace.

The key issue to consider, then, which this book addresses, is can we know—and if so, how can we know—if the foundations for sustainable peace and development have been established so that the United Nations and other multilateral organizations, donor governments, and non-governmental organizations engaged in peacebuilding can decide whether, when, and in what ways they can re-calibrate their engagement in these countries? While decisions of this kind will always be political ones ultimately (Caplan 2012, pp. 315-16), a greater appreciation of the quality of the peace that has been established would arguably enable international actors engaged in post-conflict recovery and development to make better informed judgements about appropriate courses of action. To build a secure peace, it is argued in the chapters that follow, it is important to take the measure of peace.

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To conclude, can we know with any certainty whether a peace is a stable peace? The short answer is ‘No’. Conflict dynamics are generally too complex to be able to determine whether in any given case the peace that has been established is a stable peace. We can know with hindsight whether a peace *has been* stable, and we can seek to draw conclusions from historical experience about factors that have contributed to a stable peace—as we did in Chapter 4—but we cannot know with certainty that the peace that prevails currently is a stable peace.

The limitations notwithstanding, it is possible—as the findings of this study suggest—to ascertain the quality of a peace, and the vulnerability of that peace to conflict relapse, with higher levels of confidence. As has been shown in the foregoing chapters—and has been demonstrated with reference to actual practice throughout this book—there are numerous ways for peacebuilding actors to strengthen their capacity to monitor progress towards achieving a consolidated peace. Better assessment, in turn, can inform peacebuilding actors in the reconfiguration and reprioritization of their operations in cases where conditions on the ground have deteriorated (or improved). This is not to suggest that all peace failures can be foreseen or that, if foreseen, can be prevented. The point is simply, but not unimportantly, that more rigorous assessments of the quality of the peace can facilitate more effective external engagement.

There is no single recommended approach to effective strategic assessment. Indeed, one of the more surprising, and most interesting, findings of this research is just how varied strategic assessment can be, whether it is early warning and conflict analysis in the case of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), benchmarking and co-assessment in the case of the United Nations, or the production of a range of ‘peace indicators’ in the case of several research institutes, among many other approaches, not all of

them represented in these pages. The evidence suggests that many of these initiatives have brought the quality of peace into sharper focus and have helped to improve the efforts of peacebuilding actors.

Varied though the nature of strategic assessment may be, many of the principles that underpin these initiatives are shared principles. What all of them have in common, first and foremost, is a recognition of the vital importance of contextual knowledge for the insights it affords into local conflict-relevant dynamics and their implications for devising appropriate strategies for the maintenance of peace. As a 2015 British Academy report on ‘Rethinking State Fragility’ stressed:

[I]t is essential to develop a broad and deep understanding of the historic, cultural and political context of a locality, country and region on a case by case basis.... Interventions in the areas of conflict, stability and security are aiming to carry out a transformative political exercise, whatever the mixture of developmental, diplomatic or military purposes. To re-orient the socioeconomic, political and institutional characteristics of a place requires caution, sensitivity, and a depth of knowledge and understanding (Lewis & Wallace, 2015, p. 2).

Again, this may seem obvious and, yet, there is a tendency among peacebuilding organisations, to varying degrees, to rely on pre-conceived models or templates that are often either maladapted or plainly ill-suited to local conditions. The attraction of these templates for practitioners is that they serve to compensate for contextual knowledge that is lacking and, moreover, allow peacebuilding organisations subject to time pressures to respond quickly and deliver results (Woodward 2007, p. 163; Autesserre 2014, p. 13). The lack of contextual knowledge is the chief obstacle to assessing progress towards achieving a consolidated peace.

Other principles of good practice characteristic of sound strategic assessment include early and continuous assessment of conflict and conflict-relevant dynamics. It is important to be sensitive to shifts in the conflict landscape—regionally, nationally, and locally—with regard to key actors, emerging threats, patterns of violence, and perceptions of security among the population, especially on the part of any vulnerable communities, whose welfare is often a bellwether for a stable peace. It is also important to reflect on whether the theoretical assumptions underpinning peacebuilding tasks are correct and, if not, what changes are required in the assumptions and associated tasks. Additionally, it is important that any benchmarks and indicators of progress that are selected to monitor progress are realistic, measurable and, above all, meaningful. Finally, it is critical to incorporate local perspectives into strategic assessments—in order to achieve local buy-in and to help ensure accuracy. The difficulty arises when local perspectives diverge—as we should expect they will in conflict-affected societies. How third parties deal with contentiousness and contradiction is a topic deserving of greater attention.

In an ideal world, decisions by third parties regarding engagement in support of peace would be driven primarily by considerations of the requirements for the maintenance of peace—in other words, the state of the peace at stake. Sometimes they are, as we have seen. But in a world in which states must contend with competing demands on the use of their scarce resources, and when reputational costs are at stake, then the decision to engage, the nature of the engagement, and the duration of the engagement will all be political decisions ultimately, subject to domestic pressures, budgetary concerns, competing strategic considerations, etc. When China vetoed renewal of the UN's preventive peacekeeping operation in Macedonia (UNPREDEP) in 1999, it was not because of careful consideration of the state of the peace in the former Yugoslav republic, which in fact would succumb to

violent conflict two years later. Rather, it was a reaction against the establishment of diplomatic relations between Macedonia and Taiwan (Partos 1999).

Better assessments of the quality of peace, therefore, are not a panacea for conflict recurrence. However, to the extent that sound analysis can inform policy deliberations, more rigorous assessments of the robustness of peace have the potential to make a substantial contribution to the prevention of conflict recurrence. As donor governments, inter-governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations reassess the nature of their engagement in any given conflict-affected country, they would benefit from greater effort to ascertain the quality of the peace that they have helped to build and its capacity to withstand the pressures to undermine it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1645 (2005) and UN General Assembly Resolution 60/180 (2005), adopted concurrently on 20 December 2005, authorized the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission. CAR was put on the agenda of the PBC in 2008 at the request of the Bozizé government.

<sup>2</sup> For an assessment of the situation on the eve of renewed hostilities, see United Nations 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Different studies yield different estimates of conflict relapse depending on the data, criteria, and methodology employed. These differences are not significant for purposes of the analysis presented in this book, however. For a critical discussion of the varying estimates, see Suhrke & Samset (2007).

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