<center>**"Ethical Dilemmas and the Contradictions of Peacebuilding"**</center>

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<center>**Presentation at the Launch of the Forum for Peacebuilding Ethics**
New York, 19 February 2009</center>

The idea of developing an ongoing conversation between academics and policy professionals on the ethical aspects of peacebuilding is both timely and important – and I'm delighted to be a part of this effort.

I have been asked to say a few words about "Ethical Dilemmas and the Contradictions of Peacebuilding." Of course, peacebuilding is an extraordinarily complex enterprise, full of uncertainties, tensions and contradictions. Timothy Sisk and I recently produced an edited volume on the contradictions of peacebuilding, focusing on the practical policy dilemmas they create for peacebuilding agencies, both at headquarters and in the field.[1]

Dilemmas are characterized by inconsistent or opposing imperatives – that is, the apparent need to do two (or more) things that are in conflict with each other. In some cases, these dilemmas involve ethical elements, or questions about what is the *right* thing to do.

Drawing on the findings of our book, I would like to briefly describe five major tensions or contradictions in peacebuilding, because I think they might provide a useful framework for pursuing a discussion of peacebuilding ethics.

First is the basic paradox that **outside intervention is used to foster self-government**. Some of the most difficult policy dilemmas flow from the paradoxical fact that peacebuilding missions seek to promote national autonomy and self-government but that they do so by means of international intervention. Even though these missions are of course designed to assist national authorities, the power they exercise is inevitably intrusive, no matter how well intentioned they may be. This tension is at the heart of such practical and ethical challenges such as the design of transitional governance structures, the provision of security and public services, and determining how long a mission should continue – and in what form – and also in addressing questions of transitional justice.

The second and related tension is that **foreigners are effectively involved in identifying legitimate local leaders**. The need for local ownership of a peace process is paramount, of course, but international management is often required to implement this local ownership. This creates a paradox: When foreigners participate in identifying the local "owners," the international involvement in such decisions defies the principle of local ownership, which can in turn call into question the legitimacy and the sustainability of any ensuing political institutions.

Third, **universal values are often promoted as a remedy for civil violence and other problems**. Although international wars often have international dimensions, they are also local phenomena, fought and experienced by individuals and groups living in a particular socio-cultural context. Many of the dilemmas of peacebuilding arise from incongruities between the universal and predominantly liberal values, and the particular social, political and cultural traditions and practice of the host society on the other. This tension, like the previous two, adds to the problem of defining policies that are appropriate,

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[1] Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, eds., *Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (London: Routledge, 2009), http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~rparis/statebuilding.html.

effective, ethical and legitimate, not only in the eyes of the interveners, but in those of the local population.

Fourth is the unavoidable **tension between continuity and change** in societies undergoing transitions from war to peace, which involves both a break with the past and a reaffirmation of history. We all know that international peacebuilders can't remake war-torn societies, yet they nevertheless often underestimate the resilience of the deeply engrained patterns of political and economic life. In any such circumstance, old and new practices can blend together in unexpected ways, sometimes productive and sometimes destructive, but always difficult to predict. Some element of change is inevitable – it must be so, if we are talking about creating conditions for a sustainable peace after war. The challenge, however, is to effect such change without undermining the conditions of legitimacy that may be attached to traditional practices. Walking that line can be extraordinarily difficult and it raises any number of ethical problems.

Fifth and finally, **short-term peacebuilding imperatives often conflict with the longer-term requirements for sustainability**. In the early stages of an operation, international peacebuilders typically face very strong pressures to address the short-term needs. This might involve striking explicit or tacit bargains with particular individuals or groups that are "morally questionable," because making peace often involves dealing with – and therefore according some legitimacy to – actors who fought the war and whose hands are not be entirely clean. Yet, the longer-term requirements for sustainable peace might require gradually easing such elites out of power and broadening political participation to other groups and the broader society. How to do that, and when to do that, are practical and ethical questions that have no simple answers, but they are crucial to moving from post-war stabilization to longer-term peacebuilding.

Whether or not these five contradictions or tensions provide a useful framework for a discussion of peacebuilding ethics, whatever framework is ultimately adopted by the Forum for Peacebuilding Ethics should, in my view, focus on understanding and navigating of the *dilemmas* of peacebuilding. In other words, we should start from the premise that there are competing imperatives in peacebuilding, and that in many cases there are no simple solutions to reconciling these competing imperatives.

As important as the idea of local ownership is, for example, it's not good enough simply to repeat mantras about the need for local ownership because real-world implementation of this advice involves navigating practical and moral minefields. My plea is to move beyond such mantras: to acknowledge and think through complexity. This requires two kinds of courage: (1) the courage to challenge existing orthodoxies, but also (2) the courage to challenge the *counter*-orthodoxies. Without both kinds of courage, a discussion of peacebuilding ethics won't be as productive as it should be.

Consider Afghanistan. Many people argue on both moral and pragmatic grounds that continuing to fight the Taliban is a bad strategy on the grounds that the war can't be won and that it is resulting in substantial civilian casualties. A more effective and ethical approach, according to this view, would be to negotiate with at least some members of the Taliban – namely, those with only local goals, who really just want to be left alone. That is a perfectly defensible argument. But what would such negotiations involve in practice? I put it to you that they would involve making compromises on some of liberal values – including the equality of women – enshrined in the post-Bonn Afghan constitution. What, then, is the ethical thing to do in this case?

When we dig down, in other words, there are no easy answers. For that very reason, we need to deepen the discussion and cast aside simple bromides and mantras. We need to scrutinize and debate not only what is feasible in peacebuilding, but what is morally acceptable and unacceptable, recognizing that in many cases there may be no comfortable resolution. It is in those situations – combining strategic

importance, humanitarian need, and ethical uncertainty – that continuous and honest analysis is so essential. The Forum for Peacebuilding Ethics offers an important new venue for this discussion.