Noref Book Review

The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations

edited by Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk (London: Routledge, 2009)

reviewed by Dr. Necla Tschirgi

This is an extremely timely study that is bound to stimulate considerable interest among academics and practitioners alike. Edited by Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk (who have individually made important contributions to the literature on peacebuilding,) the volume includes eleven chapters by a diverse group of scholars and researchers who share a common interest in examining the "deep contradictions" confronting international actors in postwar peace operations. The volume's authors engage seriously with some of the most critical academic and policy debates in the field—helping to move the frontiers of current theory and practice.

The volume's introductory and concluding chapters provide a useful framework not only for its thematic chapters, but also for an understanding of the recent history and future directions of international peacebuilding. The chapters cover a wide spectrum of topics grouped into five substantive sections: the domestic and international context of peacebuilding; security; political economy; institutional design; autonomy and dependence.

Each chapter is self-contained and deals with a distinct issue area such as "Foreign militaries, sustainable institutions and postwar peacebuilding" by David M. Edelstein, "Making Peacemakers out of spoilers: international organizations, private military training, and statebuilding after war" by Deborah Avant and "The dangers of a tight embrace: externally assisted statebuilding in Afghanistan" by Astri Suhrke. However, they all explore the contradictions, tensions and dilemmas that confront international peacebuilding from a particular thematic perspective.

A final chapter on "Statebuilding after Afghanistan and Iraq" by Miles Kahler provides particularly interesting reflections on the so-called "New York Consensus" on the new statebuilding model that found its ideological home at the United Nations.

Before turning to the volume's findings and their policy implications, it is important to note that the study uses the terms "peace operations", "peacebuilding" and "statebuilding" to refer to those complex multilateral peace missions (from Namibia in 1989 to Darfur in 2007) which were designed to stabilize countries emerging from internal wars. As used in the study, statebuilding is a "particular approach to peacebuilding, premised on the recognition that achieving security and development in societies emerging from civil war partly depends on the existence of capable, autonomous and legitimate governmental institutions." The study does not equate peacebuilding with statebuilding. Instead, viewing statebuilding as a key component of peacebuilding, the study focuses on the externally-assisted statebuilding agenda that evolved as part of the international peacebuilding project.

From a policy perspective, the study's main contributions can be summarized in a nutshell. The post Cold War international experiment with post-conflict peacebuilding has been fraught with many difficulties. These have been painstakingly-documented and increasingly taken on board by policy makers and practitioners through a series of institutional reforms, new policy development, and greater search for coherence, coordination and effectiveness. Yet, these efforts have fallen short of addressing

the difficult and deep contradictions inherent to post-conflict peacebuilding, particularly with respect to strengthening or constructing effective and legitimate state institutions as a foundation for security, human development, and other public goods within societies emerging from war. These contradictions and tensions are, in fact, part of the "conflicted" nature of statebuilding and lie at the root of the difficult policy dilemmas confronting international peace missions. They cannot be overcome through continual policy adjustments or additional resources since they are "embedded in the very idea of externally assisted statebuilding," namely:

1. Outside intervention is used to foster self-government.
2. International control is required to establish local ownership.
3. Universal values are promoted as a remedy for local problems.
4. Statebuilding requires both a clear break with the past and a reaffirmation of history.
5. Short-term imperatives often conflict with longer term objectives.

Although these contradictions exist at a relatively high level of abstraction, they are the source of the concrete policy dilemmas faced by practitioners. In other words, they are the "visible, policy-level manifestations of statebuilding's underlying contradictions." Among the various policy dilemmas covered in the book, the editors highlight five as particularly pertinent across the various chapters:

- The footprint dilemmas which relate to the degree of "intrusiveness" of international support;
- The duration dilemmas which relate to the length of the international presence;
- The participation dilemmas which involve the identification of appropriate local counterparts;
- Dependency dilemmas which are the by-product of the previous three dilemmas;
- Coherence dilemmas which involve organizational coordination as well as normative consistency.

Consistent with their argument that these dilemmas are inherent to peacebuilding, the authors do not offer concrete policy prescriptions to help resolve them. Instead, recognizing the need to move away from the "muddling through" characteristic of the two decade-long international experiment with peacebuilding, they call for careful analysis of the underlying tensions and contradic-

tions that give rise to these dilemmas as a way to manage them. Labeling this approach "dilemma analysis," Paris and Sisk urge practitioners to integrate it into all stages of their operations based on the assumption that many elements of statebuilding do not fit necessarily fit together and will often work at cross-purposes. Some elements might, in fact, interact in ways that can undercut the goal of establishing legitimate, effective state institutions in war-torn countries. Supplementing conventional planning processes, "dilemma analysis" allows planners and practitioners to make difficult choices based on a more realistic assessment of what is possible in particular contexts while balancing competing imperatives and managing expectations.

While advocating for more rigorous, rational and realistic analysis of post-conflict contexts for more effective international strategies, neither the editors nor the authors of this important volume lose sight of the fact that, in the final analysis, peacebuilding and statebuilding are political processes at both the local and the international levels and are inevitably shaped by competing agendas and interests which, too, have to be managed. However, based on its record to date, they rightly conclude that the future of peacebuilding remains uncertain while demands on the UN to field new missions continue to grow. In underscoring the multiple shortcomings of current strategies, "The Dilemmas of Statebuilding" offers a constructive "revisionist" approach that begins with acknowledging the inherent contradictions of the continuing international experiment with post-war peacebuilding and the limited ability of outsiders to effect far-reaching transformations in countries emerging from war.

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