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Research Report

Supporting peace after civil war: what kind of international engagement can make a difference?

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Supporting Peace After Civil War: What Kind of International Engagement Can Make a Difference?

Summary

How can international actors effectively support peace after civil war? So far, empirical research has established that peacekeeping can be an effective instrument in maintaining peace, but little systematic knowledge exists on the roles that other types of peace support can play. International peacebuilding encompasses a broad range of activities beyond peacekeeping. It includes non-military support to increase security through disarmament, demobilisation, the reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, as well as security sector reform (SSR) and demining; support for governance to strengthen political institutions and state capacity; support for socioeconomic development to create a peace dividend through reconstruction, basic services, jobs and macroeconomic stability; and support for societal conflict transformation, including reconciliation, dialogue and transitional justice programmes.

This briefing paper presents the results of a comprehensive analysis of disaggregated external support in post-conflict situations, undertaken recently within the DIE research project “Supporting Sustainable Peace”. Analysing combinations of peace support provided during the first five years of 36 post-civil war episodes since 1990, we find that international peacebuilding can clearly make a difference. More specifically, our findings show that

- international peacekeeping is one, but not the only, means of support associated with sustained peace;
- contrary to concerns regarding the destabilising effects of democratisation, the majority of successful cases are in fact characterised by substantial international support in the field of politics and governance in democratising contexts;

- only *combined* international efforts across all types of support can help prevent renewed conflict in contexts of a high risk of recurrence; and
- countries that did not receive any substantial peace support experienced conflict recurrence within five years.

In light of these findings, we recommend the following to the international community when faced with post-civil war situations:

- Engage substantially in post-conflict countries. Our results show that international peacebuilding can be effective, even where there is a high structural risk of conflict recurrence. While success will never be guaranteed, countries that receive substantial international support often remain peaceful, whereas all countries that were neglected by the international community experienced conflict recurrence.
- Pay particular attention, and provide substantial support, to the field of politics and governance in post-conflict countries that begin to democratise. While it is well known that democratisation processes are conflict prone, our analyses demonstrate that donor engagement geared towards supporting such processes can help mitigate conflict and contribute to peace. When a post-conflict country has decided to embark on political reforms donors should offer governance support to help overcome potential destabilising effects of democratisation processes.
- Invest in an international approach that encompasses all areas of peacebuilding early on after the end of a civil war. Especially in contexts with a high structural risk of renewed violent conflict, the chances of sustained peace are increased by simultaneous support for security, institutions, livelihoods and societal conflict transformation.

Introduction

International peacebuilding efforts aim to prevent the recurrence of conflict in post-civil war societies. This is a difficult task; over half of these countries experience renewed armed conflict within a few years. By focusing on prominent negative examples, some observers have concluded that external support has largely failed. However, analysing a larger set of countries, we find that successful peace consolidation coincides with higher degrees of international engagement (Fiedler & Mross, 2017). This is in line with the peacekeeping literature, which finds that international engagement can make a difference. However, it is unclear which combinations of international support most effectively secure peace after civil war.

This briefing paper presents the results of a comprehensive analysis of external support in post-conflict situations. It distinguishes five areas of engagement: military peacekeeping, non-military security support, support for politics and governance, support for socioeconomic development and support for societal conflict transformation. We measure peacekeeping as the number of troops and approximate the other areas of peace support by official development assistance (ODA) commitments. Figure 1 provides an overview of the key activities in the four non-military areas.

The analysis distinguishes between more and less substantial support in each area of engagement. Furthermore, we take a country's predisposition for conflict recurrence into account, referring to both structural economic factors and characteristics of the previous war. We look at all countries in which a civil war ended in 1990 or later and understand peace as the sustained absence of renewed major armed conflict. This does not include cases of protracted conflict, such as Afghanistan, where the challenge is first to end major violence, before peacebuilding can aim to prevent a recurrence. We used Qualitative Comparative Analysis to identify combinations of international support provided to post-conflict countries. Four combinations emerged that constitute alternative

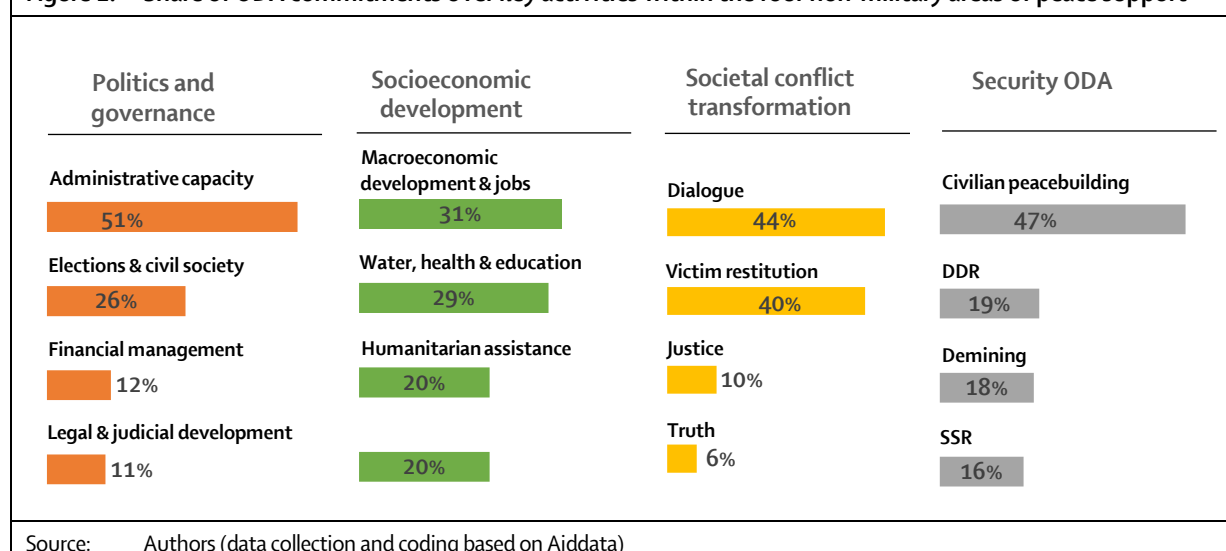
pathways to peace; they are presented in Figure 2. Case studies helped assess the plausibility of the results.

Improving security can contribute to peace...

We find two pathways to peace that are mainly characterised by security-related engagement: "protecting peace" and "securing peace". First, our findings confirm previous quantitative research that "protecting peace" through peacekeeping promotes sustained peace. Somewhat unexpectedly, this path is followed in only two cases – Mozambique and Tajikistan. In both countries, one party to the conflict used its initial grip on power to consolidate its position at the expense of free political competition once peacekeeping had contributed to stabilising the situation. Although major outbreaks of renewed violence were avoided in both countries, their long-term political dynamics give reason for concern and question the sustainability of this kind of support.

"Securing peace" is characterised by a substantial provision of non-military support (ODA) for security. Security ODA describes developmental activities connected to security beyond the military component of providing peacekeeping troops. Taking a closer look at the countries categorised under the path "securing peace" (Angola, Cambodia and Sri Lanka), it appears that this pattern is typical of authoritarian consolidation by a ruling party in the aftermath of military victory. International support for Cambodia after 1998, for example, reflected the political circumstances of a victor's peace. Having won the civil war in 1998, the government was largely able to dictate the terms of peace and be selective in opening the doors for external support. Whereas substantial non-military assistance for the task of humanitarian demining was welcomed, this was not the case for support in other peacebuilding areas that could have left a transformative imprint in the post-conflict phase. This pattern might be dictated more by necessity than by design. Rather than being instrumental in bringing about peace, international support went where it was allowed, helping secure a peace already won by the government. Questions need to be

Figure 1: Share of ODA commitments over key activities within the four non-military areas of peace support



asked about the longevity of a peace that is built on the increasing exclusion of political opponents.

...But so can supporting politics and governance

A third path revealed by our results is “institutionalising peace”. It does not include any type of security support. Instead, it is mainly characterised by support for politics and governance. This path is common to the largest share of cases, among them Indonesia, Nicaragua and Peru, demonstrating the importance of support for politics and governance in post-conflict situations.

Indonesia is a case that shows how developments in politics and governance as well as international support thereof can contribute to peace. Since the negotiated settlement in Aceh in 2005, Indonesia has remained relatively stable. One key factor has been a decentralisation process, initiated in 1998, that increased possibilities for participation at the sub-national level as well as direct control of resources by local government. This has reduced grievances and improved relations with the national government. The international community strongly supported decentralisation, both at the national level and in Aceh, which could explain why the pattern of international support focusing on politics and governance is associated with peace in this case. This explanation also applies to the other countries covered by this path: almost all experienced democratisation shortly before or after their respective civil wars ended and engaged in a process of devolution of government power. More generally, this path represents cases where donor engagement in the area of politics and governance supports a domestic reform process geared towards sharing resources and power through decentralisation. Overall, this pathway demonstrates that international engagement aimed at building political institutions and democracy – rather than just supporting security – can also contribute to peace after civil war.

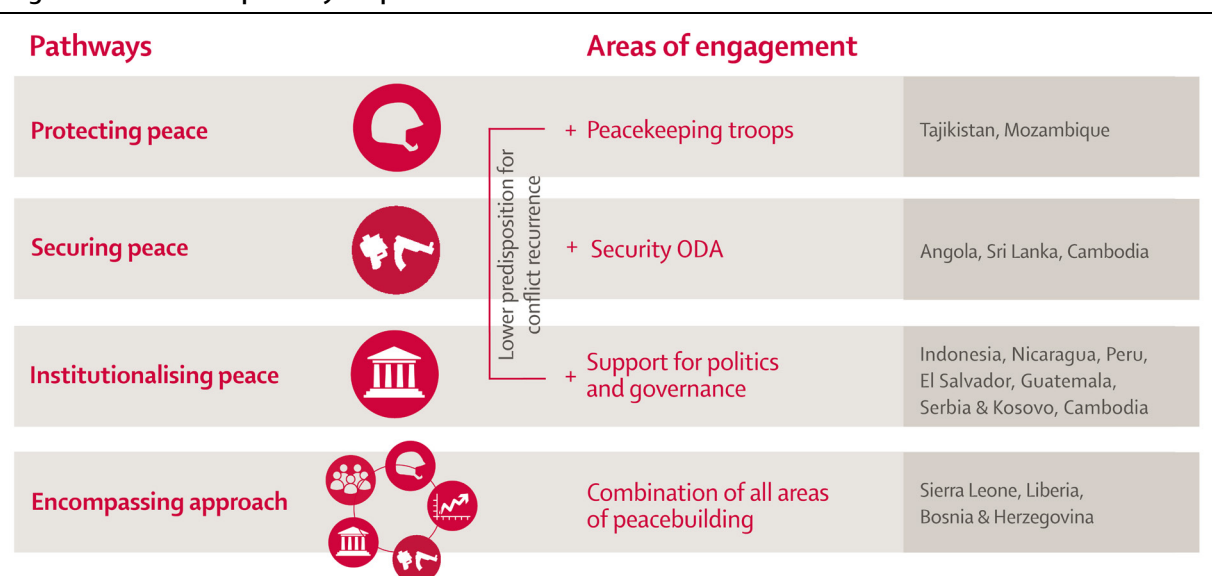
Difficult contexts require a comprehensive approach

A fourth path to peace identified by the Qualitative Comparative Analysis is the “encompassing approach”. With combined support across all areas of engagement, this is the only path to peace that applies to post-conflict countries irrespective of their predisposition for conflict recurrence. All three previous paths cover only cases with a low predisposition. An encompassing approach is observed in Bosnia, Liberia (after 2004) and Sierra Leone. It suggests that external support that embeds security-related efforts in support for politics, socioeconomic development and societal conflict transformation can contribute to peace and even overcome a negative predisposition.

The encompassing approach observed in Liberia was successful. Since the 2003 peace agreement, which ended 15 years of civil wars, Liberia has not experienced renewed violence. Domestic and international experts attribute this outcome in part to the large-scale, multi-dimensional international support provided after the peace agreement. The robust UN peacekeeping mission stabilised the situation by demobilising combatants and subsequently facilitating democratic elections. Substantial efforts to train and equip government institutions helped rebuild the largely defunct state, while humanitarian assistance tackled urgent socioeconomic needs. The internationally-supported Truth and Reconciliation Commission helped address perceptions of impunity.

More broadly, the encompassing approach applies to cases with complex conflict histories: all three civil wars – Bosnia, Liberia and Sierra Leone – involved several factions and were characterised by regional conflict dynamics, ethnic polarisation and atrocities against civilians. At the same time, all are small states, in which internationally mediated agreements ended the civil war, which in turn facilitated comprehensive international engagement. In sum, the pathway shows that it is important to embed international support for security in

Figure 2: The four pathways to peace



Source: Authors

broader developmental activities in combination with efforts to strengthen a country's political institutions and reconcile the war-torn society. These results are further supported by three high-risk cases where international engagement was only provided in some areas and a recurrence of conflict occurred.

Neglecting post-conflict countries paves the way for recurrence

The results clearly demonstrate that international peace-building can foster peace after civil war. This is underlined by the fact that all countries that did not receive any substantial support across the five areas of engagement experienced civil war recurrence. This comprises a total of 10 cases, including Chad, Liberia (after 1996), Ethiopia and Yemen.

One might assume that this can be explained by donors simply not engaging in particularly difficult contexts. However, four of these countries actually displayed a low predisposition for conflict and could have been regarded as "easy" cases. At the same time, almost one-third of our cases with a high predisposition nonetheless received substantial engagement in at least one area – hence, a clear pattern of international actors cherry-picking easy cases cannot be identified. That all cases that did not receive substantial support experienced recurrence, therefore, allows us to conclude that a lack of attention by the international community clearly paves the way for recurrence.

Strategy vs. context

Besides the question of whether external support contributed to countries remaining peaceful, another question is why donors provided a specific combination of support. Are the patterns of international support a conscious, strategic decision or did the domestic environment dictate which types of engagement were possible? Most patterns of support found in the analysis are best explained by the country context: all countries categorised under the path "institutionalising peace" experienced a democratic opening, making

donor engagement in the area of politics and governance possible. The "securing peace" countries, by contrast, were characterised by authoritarian tendencies, where donor engagement was limited to specific areas. The countries where an encompassing approach was observed were marked by particularly devastating civil wars, which created high needs for international engagement. Clearly the room for manoeuvre granted by domestic actors has a strong influence on the scale and scope of international engagement in most contexts. This could also explain why substantial support for societal conflict transformation is rare in most pathways. Case evidence suggests that this is mainly due to peace processes that were inclined to suppress open discussions of past atrocities in immediate post-conflict years. At the same time, open questions remain regarding the role support for societal conflict transformation can play and the quality of the peace that has been achieved by following different pathways.

Conclusion

For more than two decades, international actors have provided peace support for post-conflict countries. Our analysis shows that such support can make a difference. In particular, countries that receive no substantial support are prone to experience recurrence. The research also underlines the importance of country contexts, as they condition what types of support can be provided, and whether they are effective. In certain lower-risk contexts, one type of peace support alone can make a difference. For example, international support for politics and governance can contribute to peace in democratising post-conflict contexts. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the controversial debate about detrimental effects of democratisation on peace. Whether this holds true for support provided in autocratic contexts is less clear and warrants further research. With a view to supporting sustainable peace in countries with a high predisposition for recurrence, the results indicate that providing only selected types of support is not enough. International actors should instead take an encompassing approach that includes all areas of peace support.

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