Peace-building after Afghanistan: Between Promise and Peril

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As national contributions to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan decline, and the operation draws down, the contributing states will face the new task of recalibrating their role in peace-building, now in the aftermath of an operation gone awry and that no one wants to see repeated. It may be that the campaign in central Asia engenders an 'Afghanistan Syndrome', whereby future involvement in stabilization and reconstruction, never mind counterinsurgency, is purposefully avoided. Yet for several reasons, passivity over the long term will be difficult to sustain. In terms of profile, many states, particularly in the West, view themselves as active contributors to 'international peace and security' and will resist downgrading these ambitions entirely. More generally, the slow shift in Europe and elsewhere from territorial defence to a growing role in expeditionary operations, often conducted to build host-nation capabilities, stabilize war-torn countries, and consolidate peace, suggests a role in precisely these activities. Going further, inactivity or circumscribed involvement in the face of crisis, severe human-rights abuses or state weakness may not always be politically feasible or even desirable. Nations with a history and continued interest in international peace-building will thus toe a fine line, between contributing effectively to such efforts yet avoiding another intervention on the scale and complexity of Afghanistan.

This raises the question of where, under what circumstances, and to what ends these governments will deploy their forces. Prior to Afghanistan, from Somalia to the Balkans in the 1990s, peace-building efforts were predicated on certain conditions, whether implicitly assumed to obtain or expressed openly as prerequisites for action. In doctrine and planning, the principles of *neutrality* and of *impartiality* were made lynchpins of international humanitarianism.[1] These operations were also framed as *consent-based*: the intervening force was in the affected country by invitation, not to impose its will. The perceived benefits of adhering to these principles were manifold: an 'impartial' intervention would be less inflammatory, lower the risk of escalation, help ensure domestic political support (or at least acquiescence), and plausibly boost the image of the intervening government as a contributor to international stability. Looking back on what exactly went wrong in Afghanistan, some governments may seek to restore these principles as operating conditions so as to manage the complexity of future interventions.

This temptation is understandable, but confronts two fundamental limitations. Firstly, while the principles of impartiality, of consent-based operations, and of not using of force except in self-defence can be germane to some peacekeeping environments, they are inadequate for the task of building peace in *contested* rather than

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permissive settings. In these interventions, adherence to various peacekeeping principles has resulted in interventions so unobtrusive as to have negligible impact on the ground; elsewhere, their strictly limiting effect on the latitude of the intervening force has made them 'dangerously susceptible to manipulation by the parties to a conflict' and, in many cases, untenable.[2] Problematically, these 'contested environments' are precisely where most interventions are likely to occur: the need for foreign troops in the Balkans – that traditional, and relatively risk-free outlet for the 'peace-building urge' – has all but dried up, and there appears to be little interest among the most enthusiastic 'peace-builders' for the benign peacekeeping-type missions conducted by the United Nation. Europe, for example, currently accounts for only eight per cent of deployed blue helmets. Furthermore, even if 'permissive' operating environments were insisted upon, as a means of limiting risk, this would be to rely precariously on the intervening government's ability to control the operating environment and the ability and willingness of more robust military partners to step up when necessary. History has not been kind to these types of interventions.

Secondly, and more profoundly, the dominant understanding of the 1990s peace operations is fundamentally flawed, as are the principles derived from these experiences. Revisiting some of the interventions now understood as 'benign' or as having offered a 'permissive operating environment' reveals that they too presented many of the complexities also confronted in Afghanistan and Iraq. It follows that the division between 'peace operations' and 'counterinsurgency' *in practice* is often less than it is made out to be, and that we punish ourselves by separating them so starkly in theory, concepts, and planning.[3] This is not to suggest that 'peace-building' be subsumed as a concept, or outright replaced, by that of 'counterinsurgency': each term has its own connotations, plays to a different audience and implies a distinct strategic backdrop and intent. Nonetheless, it is necessary to recognize that *any* military intervention intended to bring peace to war-torn lands will, *however termed*, be a deeply political endeavour, requiring careful engagement and understanding. As an injunction, this may appear banal or commonsensical, yet it is precisely to hover above the political realm that the peacekeeping principles have so often been invoked, as a means of intervening without getting embroiled, yet often at the expense of operational effectiveness.

All of this raises questions about the future of peace-building, particularly for those states eager to carve out a relatively risk-free and wholly benign niche in this area. How do states seeking to contribute to international peace and security in this manner best prepare, conceptually and practically, for challenges far more demanding than originally envisaged? This article proposes three broad steps: first, revisit critically the assumptions and principles that underpinned the 1990s peace support operations and that continue to hold sway and influence today; second, acknowledge and understand the significant demands that modern peace-building places on intervening governments and armed forces; and third in light of these challenges, consider, as appropriate, more modest means of participation which are at once politically and financially sustainable but can nonetheless play an important role in bringing peace to war-torn lands.

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The False Promise of 'Permissive Environments'

Throughout the 1990s, interventions to build peace tended to be limited to those scenarios that promised a 'permissive' environment: a relatively stable area of operations in which intervening forces would aid an ongoing transition from war to peace. Given that these interventions – in the Balkans, Haiti, and Somalia – were predominantly humanitarian endeavours that did not relate to critical national-security interests, the intervening countries purposefully avoided situations that might lead to armed confrontation. At the onset of the Kosovo operation, for example, Bill Clinton made it clear that 'If NATO is invited ... our troops should take part in that mission to keep the peace. But I do not intend to put our troops in Kosovo to fight a war'.[4] Similarly, the Clinton administration's 1994 PDD (Presidential Decision Directive) on multilateral peace operations specified 'that the United States will only commit ground troops with a peace enforcement mandate and with robust forces, after a peace agreement has been signed'.[5] This conditionality was also prevalent within Europe, and grounded in the continent's comparative lack of independent military capability and generally higher enthusiasm for peacekeeping duties. Indeed, when European governments first intervened in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force, it was largely assumed that this was to be another peacekeeping operation – what Europe did best.[6]

Under closer scrutiny, the emphasis on seeking out and operating in 'permissive' environments emerges as patently suspect. The problem is not so much that the idea no longer applies but that it never had much value, as post-war environments, where peace-building activities are presumably most needed, are seldom permissive. The misunderstanding relates partly to the term 'post-conflict', which suggests an environment where war has ended and given way to peace. As Mats Berdal has argued, it is more common for one conflict, upon its conclusion, to fuse into a new competition over resources, political power and security, one that can take violent forms.[7] El Salvador is an instructive illustration. The belief that the negotiated end to the decade-long civil war in 1992 would lead to sustained peace encouraged the internationally mediated demobilization of both the former guerrilla movement and the security forces, the two dominant war-time actors. Yet although the war was formally over, its passing engendered new security risks: due to the rapid liberalization of the country's economy and rise in unemployment; the large groups of recently demobilized fighters with no prospects other than war-fighting; and the settling of scores between former fighters embittered with elements of the peace signed by their respective leaders at Chapultepec. The post-conflict security deficit gave way to a violent crime wave: in 1995, El Salvador saw an estimated 8,500 murders, significantly more than the average annual war-time death toll of 6,250.[8] Similar 'post-war' periods of insecurity were seen in Guatemala and Panama, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and more recently, Afghanistan and Iraq; indeed the transmutation of forms and types of violence following the formal conclusion of war can fairly be said to be a typical peace-building challenge.

What then of those missions in the 1990s – the US-led operation in Haiti, KFOR's peacekeeping in Kosovo and the EU intervention in Macedonia – where

permissiveness was arguably a key feature? In all cases, special circumstances applied, or were made to apply. In Kosovo, the international community made an exceptional investment to keep violence at bay, deploying substantial resources per capita and 15–20 peacekeepers for each thousand inhabitants of Kosovo.[9] Even then, the international force was unable or unwilling to check the 'rising tide of violence and crime' and the mass exodus of Serbs following the cessation of NATO combat operations in 1999.[10] As Michael Boyle notes, 'the OSCE reported 348 murders, 116 kidnappings, 1,070 lootings and 1,106 cases of arson within the first four months of their mission' and 'within five months, KFOR had recorded over 400 murders, of which 33.8 per cent had Serb victims'.[11] Similarly, the March 2004 riots in Mitrovica showed that 'the challenge facing well-equipped, properly resourced and numerically superior forces was at times more than they could handle'.[12] Accounts of German soldiers responding to ethnic Albanian rioters by barricading themselves in the police station and refusing to act, even when called on by German policemen, elicited accusations of 'failure and even cowardice'.[13] The political climate, reinforced by a heavy armed presence, had produced a *comparatively* peaceful environment, but once violence erupted Western peacekeepers were unprepared and unable to respond appropriately.

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Elsewhere, permissiveness was maintained by isolating the intervening troops from the political predicaments and security risks that they were ostensibly in the country to address. During the American military deployment to Haiti, the army leadership 'kept force protection at the forefront' and failed to change this policy 'to reflect ... the sense of the mission'; much as intended, no US casualties occurred.[14] Meanwhile, the exit strategy in Haiti was precisely defined and occurred on schedule, leading one scholar to suggest that 'the exit strategy became the mission'.[15] Adding nuance, others contend that 'the key conditions for departure – basic order, the return of Aristide, and the conduct of a presidential election resulting in a peaceful transfer of power – were met' but add that the scorecard looks good only because of 'the Army's tendency to focus on process and the successful execution of specific jobs, rather than the long-term political objective' and 'that little in Haiti had fundamentally changed in terms of the big picture'.[16] James Traub notes, for example, that 'the military made no serious effort to disarm rival factions, which ensured that violence would flourish as soon as the troops left ... and the troops left quickly'.[17]

Finally, interventions such as that into Macedonia in 2001 are not entirely relevant to the present context, as conflict there never truly emerged but was forestalled. While this is to be celebrated and examined more closely, it does not provide many useful precedents for post-conflict peace-building. Moreover, the intervention was aided by the National Liberation Army's limited ambitions, not to overthrow the government but merely to secure greater rights for the country's ethnic Albanian population; by the country's small size; by the EU's ability to use future membership as leverage on the local elite; and, finally, and as in Kosovo, by the heavy force presence in the region. These conditions contributed to a permissive environment, yet they are also highly unlikely to apply in peace-building operations.

Instead, the norm in these situations is that a permissive environment is *worked towards* rather than presumed to obtain. Rather than 'permissive', areas emerging

from war are more helpfully thought of as *contested*, as the conflict deemed to be over fuses into another conflict over political control and access to resources. This raises the question of how such an environment can be *rendered* secure. Here, lessons, both positive and negative, can be drawn from recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. What these campaigns demonstrate is that to achieve a secure environment for troops and populations alike, it has almost always been necessary to abandon another traditional pillar of peace-building, namely that of impartiality.

The Seductive Myth of Impartiality

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Peacekeeping and peace-building operations have long operated by the principle of impartiality: intervening troops do not engaging as combatants but as objective referees there to check infractions of a particular order.[18] They do not pick a side, other than the side of peace. Clearly, this principle has not fared well during the campaign in Afghanistan, where NATO troops gradually became involved in a counterinsurgency campaign to defend an unaccountable and corrupt central government. Even in the 1990s, however, when the principle was a lynchpin of peace operations, its underlying assumptions were deeply flawed. Specifically, the assumption of impartiality often failed to obtain once troops were deployed, forcing the intervening governments to respond to unforeseen operating conditions whose complexity had been downplayed during planning.

In Somalia, the UN deployed for a humanitarian operation that would benefit the local population, yet encountered an intricate and violent conflict in which the ostensibly benign interests of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) clashed with those of warlord Mohamed Farrah Aideed and his militia. The ongoing insecurity and attacks on UN staff led the Security Council to deploy a robust task force (UNITAF) to enable the uninterrupted provision of aid and pave the way toward UNOSOM II, a larger mission with a broader mandate, bordering on state-building. The rest of the story is familiar: when UNITAF targeted Aideed's bases and weapons sites it designated itself a combatant in the country's struggle for power and embroiled itself in an escalating confrontation.[19] This confrontation culminated in the shooting down of two American Blackhawks in October 1993 and a bloody firefight in Mogadishu, after which UNISOM II was soon terminated.

In Bosnia in 1994, the UN again entered on assumptions of impartiality yet faced a state of affairs that did not lend itself to such preconditions. The UN decision to send peacekeepers to maintain 'safe havens' in eastern Bosnia was borne out of humanitarian concern for civilian populations and sought to render those zones, at least, 'free from any armed attack or any other hostile action'.[20] In the midst of civil war, this well-intentioned action faced violations from both sides, presenting the commanders and elected leaders of the intervening states with stark choices. When Serbian forces incrementally infiltrated the havens, where they conducted ethnic cleansing, amounting to genocide, the UN peacekeepers were unwilling and unable to act: unprepared and with no clear mandate, the peacekeepers did nothing. Only after the remaining peacekeepers were removed did the UN take action, bombing Serb positions, by which time any pretence of impartiality had been abandoned.[21]

Both Somalia and Bosnia challenge the notion that military force can be applied impartially, without designating an enemy.[22] Operations to build peace in war-torn states can seldom assist without also disturbing local interests and attracting retaliatory action. This relates to the central ambiguity of 'peace': whose conception of peace is reinforced, and at whose expense? In the words of St Augustine, 'There is no one who does not love peace ... It is for the sake of peace that men wage wars and even brigands seek to keep the peace with their comrades'.[23] This fundamental insight did not inform the 1990s' 'peace operations'; instead, the politically driven desire to maintain impartiality allowed difficult decisions to be postponed and forced troops to adapt haphazardly to ever-evolving operational conditions, often with suboptimal or even catastrophic results.

A more effective means of managing the contested environment of war-torn areas is to locate and work with host-nation partners who can help meet very partial mission objectives, to wit, a specific form of stability that excludes certain actors, and is self-sustaining following the withdrawal of foreign troops.[24] The merit of taking sides in this manner is well illustrated by the British intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000. Initially deployed to evacuate British and other European citizens from the war-torn country, the in-country force commander, Gen. David Richards, saw an opportunity to side directly with the government in Freetown against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). From then on, British forces were involved in a number of decisive confrontations against RUF; they also helped train Sierra Leone's army and provided assistance to the local UN peacekeeping mission, so that the country's new-found stability could be sustained following the British withdrawal in 2002. It was by taking sides in this manner that the British intervention was able to help determine the evolution of the conflict, and its aftermath.

In interventions such as these, partners are commonly looked for at the state level, and efforts made to work through a central government, whose functions and procedures mirror those of the intervening countries. In Sierra Leone, such a partnership was possible, but elsewhere, where the central government is weaker, less accountable, or not entirely committed to the intervening powers' agenda, the location of suitable partners for peace is more difficult. In Iraq following the invasion of 2003, for example, the rapid and largely unconditional incorporation of various sectarian leaders, each with their own armed militia, into the heart of the central government, provided the American presence in the country with a contradictory mandate, both to work with Iraq's formal structures of power and to limit their sway, as most had been corrupted into sectarian-driven agents of insecurity. The case points to a fundamental dilemma of conducting peace-building in a country where the central government is itself obstructing that peace. To the extent that this dilemma was addressed in Iraq, it was by working with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to remove or ideally prosecute 'highly sectarian and/or corrupt leaders within his government's senior ranks'; through the continued professionalization of the Iraqi security forces and by working on building stability from the bottom up, through more localized partnerships with sub-state actors, based on a close reading of the local environment.[25]

In Anbar province in late 2006, for example, the US Army's 'Ready First' Combat Team conducted a thorough study of the local population. The study

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indicated a possibility of forming an alliance with Sunni tribes against the extremist group al-Qaeda in Iraq, whose growing power and coercive potential the local tribes wanted to check. Around the same time, a similar partnership was emerging in northwest Baghdad. Here too, the local US Army unit had conducted a careful study of the population, which suggested that the Sunni leaders of this ethnically mixed region were siding with al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) as an imperfect security guarantee against the incursions of Shia death squads, often linked to the central government. This understanding of the local perspective offered an opportunity to partner with the previously alienated Sunnis of that area: American troops helped them curb Shia violence and thereby drove a wedge between these fighters and AQI, while building bridges with the local communities. In the following year, these types of pacts were formed elsewhere in Iraq as part of the American-led 'surge'.[26]

The need for these partnerships was twofold. First, there was clearly a limit to what foreign forces could achieve by themselves, isolated in a foreign land, and faced with linguistic and cultural differences. Second, and more profoundly, foreign forces do not operate in a vacuum. As Ken Menkhaus has shown in relation to Somalia, even in the direst of circumstances, the absence of formal institutions and structures does not preclude bottom-up initiative and coping mechanisms that, on aggregate, can produce local capacity, systems and power balances.[27] The activities of foreign forces in such environments will in all cases be more successful when they are sensitive to and engage with these pre-existing actors and structures. Again, this underlines the need for a deep understanding of the local environment, its people and their fears and aspirations, not least because such an understanding allows intervening troops to gauge the local legitimacy (and accountability) of those actors willing and able to support stated mission objectives.

Such partnerships are rarely without risk, and often a product of some level of desperation (starting with the impossibility of working through a strong, accountable and legitimate central government). In the case of Iraq, American forces overlooked the Sunni tribes' involvement in organized crime and smuggling because they shared a more immediate interest in the stabilization of their local neighbourhoods, and were largely perceived as legitimate by the relevant populations. Another risk with these partnerships was that the bolstering of local groups would weaken the central government that the broader intervention was meant to support, or prompt a new competition between periphery and state. In this instance, the aim of ending the cycle of violence took precedence, illustrating the broader point that in counterinsurgency as in peace-building operations, the choice is seldom between 'good' and 'bad' alternatives but between approaches that all represent some degree of risk.

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Consent, the Use of Force, and Legitimacy

If the operating environment is contested rather than permissive, and intervening forces must take a side rather than hope to mete out force impartially, it follows that the third principle of peace-building – that of maintaining the consent of all sides – also requires closer scrutiny. Throughout the 1990s, such consent was deemed a prerequisite for intervention, one that would ensure that deployed soldiers

were not targeted by those elements resisting their presence. The problem was that consent, much like the notion of a permissive environment, was typically discussed as 'an absolute quality' that you either possessed or lacked.[28] In this framework, the use of force was posited as the determining factor between the two: once this supposed Rubicon was crossed, consent would shatter and the operation would shift from one of peace-building to one of war. In turn, this encouraged passivity, lest the actions of intervening forces alienate the local population or elites and deprive the intervention of the needed support.

This tendency was apparent during the initial phase of British operations in Basra, following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, when in the absence of plans or strategic guidance British forces instinctively fell back on principles derived from various peacekeeping experiences in the 1990s.[29] To maintain the goodwill, read consent, of the population that they had come to liberate, British troops adopted a light footprint, eschewing checkpoints, curfews and other population-control measures. On a tactical level, this hands-off approach may have prevented a far greater and immediate inflammation of the Iraqi south, yet the failure to establish security and control the now leaderless province led to mass looting and criminality and ceded the initiative to various sectarian militias. The British military did conduct sporadic patrols, but their presence was too transient to have a sustained impact. Similarly, the isolated operations against select targets, however discriminate and discreet, were also insufficient; absent a more robust engagement framework, one that actively worked toward guaranteeing public security, they were a tactical solution on a strategic problem. British commanders spoke highly of their troops' ability to 'smile, shoot, smile', something learned in previous peacekeeping experiences, yet by this very association it was an approach ill-suited to the problem faced in Basra. Indeed, it falsely assumed that the targeted spoilers were a finite minority; that eliminating the latter would in itself guarantee a permissive environment; and that the rest of the people, those 'smiled' at, would invariably smile back so long as they were not unduly interfered with. In this situation, consent was more likely to be gained by adopting an active rather than passive stance, by securing infrastructure, providing security and preventing mass theft.

Later in the campaign, the search for consent would again encourage passivity. In 2006, senior British commanders came to interpret the instability in Basra as stemming from a nationalistic struggle against occupying forces, which would, by this logic, cease with their disappearance. The argument was that the British troops were 'creating a spurious but tangible legitimacy for violence, and for Iranian interference in support of such violence', and that to 'free Basra from its cycle of violence', it would be necessary 'withdraw our permanently based forces from Basra city, and to put the Iraqis in the lead'.[30] Interestingly, a similar argument was emerging within the American senior command, with the commanders of both Multi-National Forces–Iraq (MNF-I) and CENTCOM arguing that American forces constituted 'an "antibody" in Iraqi society' and that greater consent for the American project in Iraq would be achieved if they drastically lowered their visibility and let their Iraqi counterparts manage the rising instability.[31] Consent for coalition operations was to be achieved through the absence of coalition forces.

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Both interpretations belie an easy determinism regarding the possibility of gaining local support for ongoing foreign-led operations. What they fail to acknowledge is that intervening troops can foment a range of reactions depending on their own actions. This premise was to be validated later in the campaign, through the application of various counterinsurgency approaches that fostered new partnerships between coalition forces and the local communities, based on shared interests and common objectives. British, though primarily US, troops were critical to the success and later consolidation of the Iraqi Army's Operation Charge of the Knights, which dislodged the militias that had seized control of Basra, much as American troops, deployed on the streets together with Iraqi units, were instrumental to the security gains experienced in parts of Iraq from late 2006 to 2008. In much of Anbar province, the American troops that assisted the local tribes in their fight against AQI grew to be more trusted than the Iraqi political leadership in Baghdad, itself a problem, but nonetheless indicative of the many and varied ways in which consent, or support for an intervention, can be built.

The extent to which the use of force and consent are *not* mutually exclusive is amply illustrated by the fortunes of the significant German presence in Afghanistan. Sensitive about the use of force by its soldiers, the German government imposed various 'caveats', or restrictions, on their operations. At their peak, the use of force was authorized only for defensive purposes, so that soldiers were barred from firing except when themselves under fire (and then only after a lengthy warning); helicopters were not allowed to fly except during daytime; dismounted patrols were prohibited; troops were not allowed to deploy to more contested areas; and German forces were barred from shooting fleeing assailants, even in the limbs.[32] Typically, the caveats were a means of shielding the intervening troops in the hope that set objectives could nonetheless be met. Not only has this assumption proved false, but so has the concomitant idea that by being *very* careful about the use of force, an intervening force will neither alienate the local population nor cause escalation into outright conflict. Whereas the German government may have had a vested interest in employing only the minimum use of force, the ensuing inability of its troops to assert themselves and to engage with the local population left leeway for various destabilising elements to establish themselves. Violence is thus spreading, and the German along with other like-minded European governments are facing an old adage: 'you may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you'.[33]

The point here is not that the use of force, particularly if indiscriminate or heavy-handed, is independent to the perceived legitimacy of an intervention, but rather that interventions intended to build peace in contested environments require the authority and ability to establish, together with local partners, a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, so as to set the conditions for sustained security. The consent of the local population is not a function of how much force is used, but of how it is used and why. This leads to the notion of 'population security', which has gained currency as a result of the recent rediscovery of counterinsurgency, and illustrates, in three related ways, how the use of force and consent can be linked. First, a local population that is protected from attack is more likely to support or at least acquiesce with their protectors. Conversely, a population at the mercy of threats and intimidation, by adversarial groups or the intervening force itself, is unlikely to perceive as legitimate either the

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intervention or the local actors it seeks to bolster, but instead organize itself for self-protection by joining or supporting the dominant local actors, whoever they may be. Second, sustained population security is often an indispensable foundation for a sustained partnership with the local population, availing pools of untapped capacity and capability as well as flows of intelligence, all while depriving adversarial movements of these same advantages. In the words of one American commander, 'no amount of money or kindness, and no number of infrastructure programs, will facilitate winning over the populace if COIN [counterinsurgency] forces cannot provide security to the population. Without security, nothing else matters'.[34] Third, population security allows the local government to function, civilian agencies to operate, and economic development to occur, all of which can help make the security gains self-sustaining. For all this, providing population security is highly demanding. As the American military found in Iraq, security cannot be provided from afar, or only during certain hours: a sustained presence among the local population is usually required to maintain influence and protect allies, at least until local security forces are stood up.

Consent can also be a function of how well intervening forces and host-nation partners meet those needs of the local population that go beyond security: for political representation and inclusion, for welfare or economic development.[35] Certainly, the prolonged failure of the British military in Basra to restore essential services turned much of its population against the coalition, even though the Iraqi south was comparatively stable. More generally, unemployment has in some contexts been found to provide military-age men with an incentive to join armed or criminal groups as a means of remuneration, and economic development is therefore held as a possible means of sustaining security. Finally, strengthening mechanisms for local-level governance, when sensitive to pre-existing power balances, and local perceptions of legitimacy and accountability, can enable peaceful political mobilization and help address local grievances, while countering accusations of colonial repression. The relationship is not causal: more non-military assistance will not by force mean greater local support, particularly where the former is unfocused, uncoordinated or unresponsive to local needs. And even when well conceived, these tasks are difficult to carry out successfully. Even so, they are also typical to interventions in countries where formal institutions are weak or nonexistent. In such settings, intervening forces have often been required, in concert with local actors, to reinforce or momentarily take over various public services, from sewage treatment and water filtration to the organization of local elections and the kick-starting of the economy or initiation of reconstruction. Redressing these shortfalls is not a matter of charity, but a means of engaging communities, supporting pre-existing capacity, and winning allies and friends.[36] And while securing these goods does not guarantee any form of 'victory', failing to do so can undermine stated objectives, particularly if these require public support for the intervention and for the political actors it seeks to defend.[37]

Preparing for Future Peace-building: Possibilities and Constraints

Much as the traditional principles of peace-building need to be rethought, governments embarking on such missions must also think more closely about the challenges

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presented by intervention and how best to prepare. Rather the treat the permissive peacekeeping missions of the 1990s as paradigmatic, more instructive precedents are found in the campaigns of Iraq and Afghanistan. While the origins and circumstances of these campaigns are clearly *sui generis* and unlikely to be repeated, future operations can be expected to call for similar capabilities and skills, if on a smaller scale: to build local capacity, to interact with local populations, to counter irregular threats, to operate in a linguistically and culturally foreign environment, and to ensure security. Most profoundly, whether termed peace operations, counter-insurgency campaigns or stability operations, efforts to build peace in contested settings are, across the board, conducted to support a political order that is stable, self-sustaining, and deemed preferable to the *status quo ante*. This level of ambition imposes distinct requirements, shirked only at the expense of mission objectives.

Three challenges emerge as particularly germane. First, whereas peace-building calls for substantial diplomatic investment and civilian expertise, intervening governments have been reluctant to invest in such resources or deploy them on short notice or for long periods. Even the EU's 'supposed civilian power', a source of pride among European governments, has been found to be 'largely illusory', with EU members needing 'to make a serious effort to improve their civilian capabilities if their words ... are to sound anything other than hollow'.[38] Pending such an investment, the armed forces of intervening governments have, and will again, be tasked with various political and reconstruction tasks for which they are untrained and generally unsuited.

One solution to this dilemma, put forward in United States defence policy, is to ensure that civilian agencies undertake civilian tasks *as far as possible* but that the military, with its resources and deployability, retain ownership and readiness for those components that exceed civilian capacity.[39] This theoretically fills any capability gaps, yet raises several concerns: how thin can and should the military be stretched; does the military's usurpation of civilian responsibilities deter the development of a civilian alternative; and how does this affect relations with non-government organizations (NGOs), who typically resist working with military forces? It is a highly imperfect arrangement, yet the dilemma is typical of peace-building operations, and will remain so until civilian capabilities are developed.

Second, it is not clear that the armed forces are appropriately trained or prepared for the tasks of peace-building. Beyond the set of civilian duties foisted on uniformed soldiers, the military challenge is itself formidable. Sent to a foreign and unfamiliar land, intervening armies are asked to assume the functions that exceed the capacity of the host-nation government, all while building its capabilities so as to enable an eventual transition to local authority – all of this in an environment replete with irregular threats, criminal groups, and pervasive insecurity, and with few resourced civilian partners to lean upon. Furthermore, even if these challenges are met, the intervention and the actors it supports will fail unless the local populace sees them as legitimate, requiring a nuanced understanding and engagement with local fears and aspirations, actors and structures. It is often said that 'peacekeeping is no job for a soldier, but only a soldier can do it' – in retrospect, even this foreboding statement seems overly optimistic.[40]

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Gen. (ret.) Sir John Kiszely captures some of the bewildering demands placed on soldiers engaged in what he calls 'post-modern' operations: they must possess the ability to 'apply soft power as well as hard . . . work in partnership with multinational, multiagency organizations, civilian as well as military . . . master information operations and engage successfully with the media; conduct persuasive dialogue with local leaders . . . mentally out-manoeuvre a wily and ruthless enemy; and, perhaps most often overlooked, measure progress appropriately'.[41] As Kiszely adds, these competencies require an understanding of 'the political context; the legal, moral and ethical complexities; culture and religion; how societies work; what constitutes good governance; the relationship between one's own armed forces and society; the notion of human security; the concept of legitimacy; the limitations on the utility of force; the psychology of one's opponents and the rest of the population'.[42]

It is difficult to see how the needed attributes can be mass-produced in armies that are also, some say mainly, intended to fight and deter major conventional threats. The American military's institutional reorientation toward counterinsurgency since the Iraq War provides some indication of helpful steps that can be taken. Participation in civilian educational programmes and experience with administration and governance have been found to help sensitize military leaders to the civil-military complexities faced in theatre.[43] More generally, formal military instruction – training, doctrine, and educational curricula – that explore, replicate and prepare for in-theatre challenges has also proved constructive.[44] A more foundational means of preparation lies in reforming the military's force structure to boost those skill-sets often needed in theatre. In this regard, several European nations have an advantage in their gendarmerie or *carabinieri* units, which represent standing constabulary forces with experience and training for civil affairs, policing, and advisory operations. Even so, the requirements for peace-building, as for counterinsurgency operations, are expansive and specific, calling for not just military police, civil affairs, and trainers and advisers, but also for engineers, medics, area experts, linguists, and psychological operations (PSYOPS), to name but a few competences. Furthermore, having the relevant units represented in the force is not the same as having them organized and tasked with conducting specific mission components. By one estimate the US Army had 37,350 troops trained for various stability operations tasks in Iraq in May 2003: 17,230 engineers, 10,400 military police, 7,280 medical, 1,800 civil affairs, and 640 PSYOPS staff.[45] The problem was not primarily a lack of expertise; rather, the troops had not been organized for stabilization tasks and did not perceive them as part of their mandate.[46]

Whereas the American military has been able to incorporate some new priorities alongside its 'core competences' since the Iraq invasion, this process has worked best when the new capabilities could be added alongside, rather than displace, more entrenched priorities. This ability to add without removing has been a temporary luxury, stemming from supplemental defence budgets, but one that cannot last indefinitely and will eventually give way to some very difficult decisions.[47] Beyond the United States, the problems of budgetary constraints and flexibility are all the more apparent, particularly in today's financial environment, and the need for trade-offs acute. In general terms, what is needed is a bottom-up review that aligns

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the armed forces' intended roles and responsibilities with their configuration and preparation, a radical (and therefore also very unlikely) undertaking that furthermore requires broad consensus on national strategy, self-perception, and ambition.

Compounding this issue for smaller states is the problem of capacity, as even a well-configured and able force must also be appropriately sized for its area of operations, so as to maintain influence and sustain security gains until local forces can take over.[48] Studies of counterinsurgency suggest a tentative minimum of '20 counterinsurgents per thousand residents', but this ratio is highly context-dependent and purely illustrative.[49] What is clear is that while deploying a large number of troops is never strategically decisive, the effects of undermanning a stabilization effort are almost always catastrophic. In Basra, where Britain downsized from 46,000 to 10,500 troops in the three months following the initial invasion, they lost the ability to provide security directly or to oversee events in the province, and had to rely on unaccountable local security forces.[50] The resulting security vacuum led to looting and instability, prevented much-needed reconstruction and the delivery of basic services, prompted discontent, and provided space for various Islamist militias to establish themselves. The British never regained the initiative. Similarly, a lack of troops in Afghanistan has forced coalition forces to retreat from cleared areas or move on before accountable host-nation forces can be deployed. As Gen. Stanley McChrystal, former ISAF commander, has noted 'once you clear something and don't hold it, you probably didn't really clear it. It has no staying power. In fact, I would argue that it's worse, because you create an expectation and then you dash it'.[51]

Finally, perhaps the ultimate requirement for a force engaged in expeditionary operations is adaptability, or the ability to respond to unfamiliar circumstances and threats. Some challenges feature in many peace-building and stabilization operations, and the above has elaborated on some of them, but in Leo Tolstoy's words (while intended for a widely different context) 'each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'. With each attempt to bring peace to a war-torn area, intervening forces will face a unique web of informal structures, security complexes, and political actors. Norms and definitions of legitimacy will differ. Even with the best intentions it is difficult to predict what capabilities and knowledge are needed. This explains in part the frequent missteps taken early in interventions. Yet as Brig.-Gen. H.R. McMaster notes, while 'it is impossible to predict precisely the character of future conflict... the key is to come close enough to be able to adjust as new challenges to security emerge'.[52] This puts the onus on developing a 'learning organization', one that promotes bottom-up communication, questions its assumptions, and develops new approaches to unanticipated challenges.[53] Yet this, in turns, places great intellectual and organizational demands on any intervening force, and across the ranks.

This leads to the third and most fundamental challenge behind effective peace-building interventions: the need for sound strategy, and for that strategy to be resourced over a protracted period. As the Afghanistan campaign illustrates forcefully, the formulation of a campaign plan among allies is fraught with political tensions, resulting, in many cases, in a strategy of lowest-common denominators or one incoherent in its aims and objectives. 'Strategy', Eliot Cohen writes, 'is the art of

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choice that binds means with objectives. It is the highest level of thinking about war, and it involves priorities (we will devote resources here, even if that means starving operations there), sequencing (we will do this first, then that) and a theory of victory (we will succeed for the following reasons)'.[54] In contrast, strategy-making for Afghanistan has been undermined by the disparity of aims among NATO members, and the varying mandates they bring with them from their constituents. Anatol Lieven identifies five strategic-level goals, pursued simultaneously: victory against the Taliban; the creation of a functioning Afghan state; counter-terrorism operations against al-Qaeda; counter-narcotics; and the preservation of NATO. 'Each goal has been set by powerful Western forces, and indeed real Western needs', he adds, yet the division of labour is unfortunate, as the goals are contradictory: 'The problem is that the West . . . lacks institutions and leaders capable of choosing between these goals, and coordinating a strategy in pursuit of the most desirable and achievable ones'.[55] Nor is there much agreement on how each separate goal should be achieved – how to control the heroin production, how to achieve security, and so on – or on the degree to which Western activities in Afghanistan truly relate to the national security interests of the intervening countries.

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Matching Ambition with Capability

If international interests and engagement in peace-building persists despite these difficulties, the participating governments will need to make clear decisions about how and what to contribute, based on a realistic assessment of what these operations have historically required and what can, in a financially austere environment, be provided over prolonged periods. The range of options is wider than commonly thought, yet the key lies in finding a means of contributing that is significant yet manageable, both politically and in terms of capability and capacity.

Given the troop requirements alluded to above, well-trained infantry units can be the most valuable contribution that a medium-sized state can make to a multinational peace-building effort. Yet the deployment of standing units to 'own' an area of operations is also the most demanding form of participation, signifying greater visibility and risk along with the full range of challenges associated with direct intervention. For many states seeking a role in peace-building, the sheer numerical requirements of sustaining a presence abroad that exceeds brigade or even battalion strength will be too demanding, given the need to rotate, rest, and retrain the force.

Operating as a junior troop contributor also introduces political challenges relating to unity of command. Again, the British experience in Iraq is instructive, as Britain's efforts in the south were hamstrung by its lack of national-level authority. In many areas – the currency, economic policy, the role of local security forces and of local government – the British were reliant on guidance from Baghdad, as these were national-level issues. As it happened, the lack of strategic direction in Baghdad and of British influence over decision-making there translated into a problematically vague framework for British policy and activities in the Iraqi south. Operationally, meanwhile, some British officers feel that 'Basra was always an "economy of force" operation... with very few if any Corps (i.e., American)

assets given to MND(SE) (i.e., British). It was partially a case of insufficient British resources, but normally this would be made up by Corps assets; in Basra it never was. Instead Corps assets went only to those divisions who were fighting AQI or those in Baghdad'.[56] These difficulties would presumably be compounded were the British presence itself an amalgam of several smaller, multinational contributions.

Based on these challenges, many smaller and even medium-sized states may justifiably avoid large-scale participation in future operations. This need not signify expeditionary impotence. Indeed, a potentially valuable alternative is the deployment of 'niche capabilities' that are needed in theatre and enhance the conduct of operations by others. The range of options is wide: the 2006 EU deployment to the DRC alone included a total of 12 countries contributing various niche capabilities, ranging from fixed-wing tactical airlift, fighter detachments and helicopters to medical unit, combat service support companies, signals detachments, and anti-riot and force-protection companies.[57] While these contributions were often less politically ambitious or risk-prone, they provided important augmentation to the wider force. Studies of niche capabilities needed in a stabilization campaign such as Afghanistan generally emphasize military police/law enforcement units, helicopters, linguists, human intelligence specialists, detainee operations, force protection, engineers, explosive ordinance units, transport, logistics, and medical teams.[58] These units can be provided by states that want to participate but whose ambitions or capability will not allow for the deployment of combat troops.

The trouble with niche capabilities is that they are not always particularly meaningful; some are little more than shows of political support and have negligible operational effect. The campaign in Afghanistan also reveals the difficulties in linking supply to demand and the lack of coordination among contributors, resulting in overlap and duplication. Depending on their scale and purpose, the deployment of niche capabilities may also fail to satisfy the contributing government's desire for participation. Deploying a medical team or a handful of specialists might be sufficient for small states such as Malta or Cyprus, but not for larger, yet still resource- or politically constrained states such as Germany, Holland or Sweden. For these mid-sized states, the key lies in finding a more significant, yet still limited means of participation.

An answer may be found in the provision of trainers and advisers. The task of raising the numbers, competence, and legitimacy of local security forces is a key mission component, as it allows for a local means of consolidating prior security gains, and can culminate in the withdrawal of external forces *as well as* sustained stability. Indeed, it has been argued that foreign forces 'cannot defeat an insurgency; the best they can hope for is to create the conditions that will enable local forces to win it for them'; accordingly recommendations have been made for the US Army to develop its own Permanent Army Advisory Corps and for NATO to stand up a dedicated 'Military Advisory Force'.[59] In this regard, the experience of various European constabulary forces is instructive, as these units are often well versed with training and assistance missions; in Iraq, for instance, the Italian *carabinieri* took a leading role in training the Iraqi police force in a range of civil-military areas, ranging from crowd control, civil disturbances, law enforcement, and criminal investigations.

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A lesson from recent experience, however, is that standing up competent local security forces is an art all in itself, requiring specific instruction, adequate capacity and, often, an ability to live and operate with host-nation forces.

Because advisory work places the host-nation's troops in the vanguard, and allow those of the intervening country to take a backseat, they are commonly perceived as an 'easier' or less risk-prone means of participation. In the American context, such conclusions are often based on cursory comparisons between Iraq or Afghanistan, where coalition troops help provide security and have suffered several casualties, and El Salvador, where for nearly ten years a mere 55 American advisers provided guidance to local security forces and suffered less than 30 casualties (while also safeguarding the country's new-found democracy).[60] These types of comparisons are however deeply unhelpful, as they consider neither the circumstances nor the independent effectiveness of each intervention. In El Salvador, the intervening force worked alongside an established, if dysfunctional, government and military, while in Iraq and in other 'post-conflict' engagements, local institutions are typically weaker or simply non-existent. Such factors limit the applicability of an exclusively advisory approach.

Furthermore, the operational approach adopted in El Salvador was not effective in meeting strategic objectives. It was mostly to avoid 'another Vietnam' that the United States government limited its presence and barred its advisers from accompanying the El Salvador Armed Forces (ESAF) on operation. The result was a lack of leverage and oversight, manifested in ESAF's continued human-rights abuses and lack of professionalism. As the American military has found in Iraq and in Afghanistan, these problems can be mitigated by accompanying the units being mentored on operations and, even, living and staying with them too. It follows that advisory operations require specific and extensive preparation. Nor are these tasks light in terms of force requirements: the number of advisers necessary for Afghanistan and Iraq had been put at 20,000; others say that number is barely sufficient for Iraq.[61] These considerations, and the other pitfalls of advisory work – most specifically the unhelpful tendency to train foreign security forces for conventional combat operations rather than for the roles and responsibilities they must initially assume – should be carefully assessed before this ostensibly 'easier' operational contribution is considered.

Beyond niche capabilities, another means of delimiting military involvement in a mission is to participate only in some of its specific phases. One example would be to provide quick-reaction forces to assist peace operations with force protection or to protect UN missions from sudden deteriorations in security, a role akin to that played by the French-led EU force in Operation Artemis, deployed to eastern DRC in 2003, or the British force sent to Sierra Leone in 2000 as part of Operation Palliser. Political conditions permitting, EU battlegroups or the NATO Response Force could serve a similar function.

The benefit of these types of operations is that by sticking to a strictly defined mandate and a pre-defined exit-strategy, the deploying force is shielded from the full demands of intervention. Yet by the same token, the effectiveness of these interventions relies on the ability to transfer demanding follow-on responsibilities to competent partners with greater staying power. Operation Artemis illustrates the

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point. The French-led Interim Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF) spent three month in Bunia, in which time it re-established security in the war-torn city and drove out militia elements, before handing over to the Ituri Brigade, a newly created 5,000-strong unit within MONUC (the UN force in DRC). On these merits, the operation was deemed a success, yet IEMF's limited mandate, temporally and geographically, meant that its effects were transient. As a later UN report found, 'the strict insistence on the very limited area of operations – Bunia – merely pushed the problem of violent aggression against civilians beyond the environs of the town, where atrocities continued'.[62] Moreover, IEMF's security gains needed to be sustained by a competent follow-on force, yet despite MONUC's expansion in July 2003, it remained ill-equipped and undermanned for the scale of the country and the complexity of the problems facing it.[63] As a result, the situation in Ituri had by 2004 deteriorated, casting doubt on the wider, long-term significance of Operation Artemis.[64]

Similar problems, with different solutions, presented themselves in Sierra Leone; key here was the British military's ability to adapt its mandate, sustain its involvement, and secure a more successful transition to the local UN force, UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone). As noted above, the British operation in Sierra Leone grew from an evacuation mission to a much more ambitious effort to support UNAMSIL, assist the Sierra Leone Army and prepare for humanitarian tasks, all this against domestic concerns over 'mission creep'.[65] By extending its mandate and helping to train up the forces that would provide for security following its departure, the British force helped prevent a return to full-scale war. Even following its withdrawal, Britain maintained a 140-strong force in Sierra Leone to advise the army and has remained one of the country's greatest bilateral donors of aid.

Here too, the results are far from incontestable and there are signs that the root-causes of the conflict remain unresolved.[66] Nonetheless the point remains: 'the effectiveness of military force depends crucially on the clarity of overall political objectives, reflected in coordinated and properly resourced follow-up action to consolidate short-term achievements'.[67] So while a contingency operation can have immediate security effects, they are rarely strategically decisive. Results achieved in the clearing phase must be consolidated, either by the intervening force or by an able and willing third party, the absence of which is often what prompts the contingency operation in the first place. When these third-party forces are unable or unwilling, the intervening government will need to weigh the benefits of sticking to a limited mandate against the requirements of operational effectiveness. Once again, the desire to shirk the full complexity of peace-building operations should not be confused with a ready ability to do so.

Conclusion

How can states intent on peace-building, on stabilising countries emerging from protracted conflict, best conduct or contribute to such missions? Much can be learned from previous experiences in the 1990s, but the right lessons must be drawn. First, operations to stabilize war-torn territories seek to produce a political state of

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affairs that is deemed preferable to the *status quo ante* and is furthermore self-sustaining. These operations are therefore by definition highly demanding. Second, to presume that an intervention can be rendered less demanding if it is said to be impartial is to underestimate the effects of sending a foreign armed force into a politically contested area. The choice here can be between refusing to designate an enemy, and thereby having limited effect, or engaging to the extent necessary to meet operational requirements. To aim for a convenient midpoint between these extremes is a tempting yet dangerous compromise. Finally, a permissive environment and local support for the intervention cannot be assumed to obtain or to remain static, but must be striven for and maintained through the implementation and resourcing of an appropriate strategy.

Rather than revert to the 1990s image of beret-wearing peacekeepers, modern peace operations are better understood by studying the operations conducted and challenges faced in Afghanistan and Iraq. The salience of these operations goes beyond 'counterinsurgency': they demonstrate the demands of operating in an urban environment, in a foreign language and culture, against irregular adversaries, and with the aim of bringing stability to war-torn districts all while developing the local means needed to render those gains permanent. Building peace after war, in other words, is never easy, and requires an investment and strategy that is appropriate to the task. Even then, there are distinct limits to what exogenous efforts at peace-building can hope to achieve.

Here, the desire of governments to play a meaningful role in future campaigns confronts the complexity of modern operations: the notion of sending peacekeepers to the Balkans no longer provides a fortuitous middle ground. The key in future operations will be to contribute in a way that is meaningful but also sustainable politically and in terms of capability. A range of options is available, from the deployment of combat troops to smaller 'niche capabilities'. There are also means of limiting involvement to specific functions, by providing advisers, or by participating only in specific phases, for example the 'clearing' phase. Yet while these forms of involvement preclude the direct involvement of combat troops in protracted campaigns, recent experiences demonstrate that, although one step removed, they too present significant challenges. As importantly, marginal contributions depend on the willingness of greater powers to undertake the more demanding of tasks, a division of labour that introduces complicated issues of unity of command or that may not even apply.

Finally, before future peace-building activity is contemplated, there is a need to query how serious the states involved are, in fact, about these types of undertakings. Certainly, the lack of investment by most governments in the relevant instruments, the lack of strategic thinking going into these endeavours, and the low financing allocated to them, suggest a low overall prioritization of peace-building.[68] This raises the broader question of why modern states engage: to answer to domestic pressures to 'do something' in the face of crisis; to establish a higher international profile; to demonstrate commitment to 'strategic interests', however defined; or, in fact, to help achieve results on the ground? These motivations augur variable levels of investment, which may explain why commitment has so often fallen short of operational requirements. Assuming at least a desire to be effective in future peace-building efforts, what

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matters most is that the operations being contemplated are engaged with on their own terms, and are not artificially simplified to fit domestic or other political agendas. This in turn raises the broader question of whether and how convincingly peace-building has been linked to the national interest of the states and governments engaged in the related activities. Further intellectual investment on this end may be the most useful first step in addressing the down-river problems of commitment, capability, and performance.

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