

# ESEMINAR SUMMARY

Centre for Security Governance

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**CSG eSeminars**  
*assemble leading experts and practitioners to discuss global security issues and challenges in an open and interactive virtual space.*

## CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ON PEACEBUILDING AND STATEBUILDING: NEW CHALLENGES, SHARP DIVISIONS



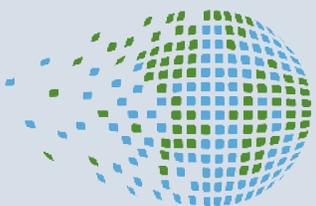
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## Is Peacebuilding Dying?

On January 28, 2015, the Centre for Security Governance (CSG), in cooperation with the Balsillie School of International Affairs (BSIA) and Wilfrid Laurier University's Global Studies department (WLU) hosted the first in a series of eight online seminars focusing on the theme of "Contemporary Debates on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding." The first event in the series brought together a group of eminent scholars to examine the question: "Is peacebuilding dying?" The panelists debated some of the fundamental questions facing the peacebuilding community:

- What are the main fault lines in the current academic and policy discourse on peacebuilding?
- Why have liberal peacebuilding models succeeded in some cases and failed in others?
- What is the state of the peacebuilding model after troubled interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya?
- How can current approaches to peacebuilding be reformed?
- Have alternatives to peacebuilding emerged and what are they?
- What is the future of international peacebuilding and are we heading toward post-liberal models of peacebuilding?



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## Introduction

CSG Executive Director Mark Sedra's introductory remarks focused on the new pressures and challenges facing the contemporary peacebuilding model, which emerged at the end of the Cold War and is rooted in liberal peace theory. The peacebuilding model, which encompasses parallel liberal transitions in the political, security and economic spheres, has had a mixed record of success. In fact, the high ambitions of the model have rarely been realized in practice. This has been demonstrated by peacebuilding experiments in several conflict-affected countries over the past decade, most notably Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan. Not only did these cases represent a watershed in Western peacebuilding policy, but also spawned dangerous new conflict drivers and spoilers, such as the Islamic State. This tumultuous period for international peacebuilding has produced a vibrant academic discourse that has challenged the very core of the current peacebuilding model. This discourse is gradually influencing policy makers and undermining accepted truths of peacebuilding orthodoxy. The accepted truths of peacebuilding are increasingly being challenged in official and unofficial forums, including the United Nations, national capitals and non-governmental organizations. There is little doubt that the field of peacebuilding is in a state of flux and its future direction remains unclear.

## About the eSeminar Series

The Centre for Security Governance eSeminars are a series of virtual meetings that bring together experts and practitioners from around the world to discuss security sector reform (SSR) and related themes, issues, and case studies. The eSeminars are open to the public, and includes an eSeminar Summary report and eSeminar Videos. For information on upcoming eSeminars, please visit <http://www.secgovcentre.org/events>.

Series Editor: Mark Sedra

Report Authors: Mark Sedra and Caitlin Vito

Report Editor: Antoine Vandemoortele

## About the CSG

The Centre for Security Governance is a non-profit, non-partisan think tank dedicated to the study of security transitions in fragile, failed and conflict-affected states, a process also known as security sector reform. A registered charity based in Kitchener, Canada, the CSG maintains a global network of research fellows from a variety of backgrounds, including practitioners, research analysts and academics, and partner organizations from the public and private sector engaged in SSR.

Centre for Security Governance

Tel: +1 226 241 8744

Email: [info@secgovcentre.org](mailto:info@secgovcentre.org)

Web: [www.secgovcentre.org](http://www.secgovcentre.org)

SSR/RC: [www.ssrresourcecentre.org](http://www.ssrresourcecentre.org)

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## Summary of Presentations

### *Speaker 1 – Dr. Paul Jackson*

Dr. Paul Jackson opened his remarks by discussing the track record of liberal peacebuilding. While he agreed that pinpointing genuine success stories is a struggle, Jackson also noted the difficulty in dividing peacebuilding initiatives into “successes” and “failures.” The road to democracy and peace is difficult and few democratic institutions conceived of and implemented during peacebuilding initiatives end up functioning exactly as designed. However, there are pockets of success where particular institutions and structures in post-conflict countries have experienced notable change. One example is police reform in Sierra Leone, where a peacebuilding initiative offered real change for certain sections of the population.

The interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya have had a substantial impact on the peacebuilding field. One of the immediate short-term effects of these interventions was that they sucked donor resources out of other less geopolitically charged conflict-affected areas. Present in Sierra Leone during the onset of the Iraq war, Jackson witnessed a massive shift of resources away from southern African countries. The failed interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya came to be seen as cautionary tales of grand peacebuilding interventions, lessons of “what not to do” rather than a model

for future peacebuilding strategies. Jackson underlined that the dominant legacy of these exceptional cases will likely be that “military-led security sector reform and democracy at the end of a gun is a very problematic model.”

Jackson stressed that peacebuilding is not a modern concept and is continually being reformulated, noting, “if peacebuilding is dying, it is taking a hell of a long time to do it.” Jackson raised the critical question of why practitioners are not learning from the historical lessons of peacebuilding. One critical lesson that has seemingly gone unheeded is the need for peacebuilders to develop a keen sense of their own limitations, especially in light of the long and arduous experience of state formation in Western countries over the past several hundred years.

A key question posed by Jackson was, how willing and able are international donors to work alongside non-liberal, non-state institutions, actors and norms? Peacebuilding practitioners are coming to realize that these other systems and structures cannot simply be ignored in conflict-affected environments with limited statehood. People on the ground rely on them for security, justice and development, and are often forced to choose between competing state and non-state institutions. Jackson argues that the most effective way of intervening in these situations is to help people navigate parallel institutions in a way that they feel is most beneficial for them.

Jackson also touched on the structure and management of donor peacebuilding missions, noting that the practice of relying on short-term placements and tight rotations of implementing staff, constrains their ability to accumulate local knowledge and engage the local context effectively. There is a need to alter the management strategies of donor agencies on the ground in order to better equip them to drive change in complex and fluid conflict-affected environments.

Participants raised a number of important questions during Jackson's presentation. Michael Lawrence asked whether hybrid alternatives to liberal peacebuilding emerge on the ground and whether international actors have alternative intervention models other than the liberal peace. Branka Marijan responded by stating that "whether they acknowledge it or not donor/intervening countries are already responding to these hybrid alternatives." He explained that there has been a lack of effort to try to understand local alternatives to the state, perhaps because such investigation takes time and involves significant cost on the part of donors.

### *Speaker 2 – Dr. Anna Jarstad*

Dr. Anna Jarstad discussed the role of the democratic peace thesis as the intellectual underpinning of the liberal peacebuilding model, arguing that it is a big leap from the correlation between consolidated democracy and inter-

state peace to a theory that democracy should be imposed from the outside. Jarstad emphasized that liberal ideas and norms are not the sole preserve of the West, but rather are held and expressed by societies around the world in different forms. There are many examples of organic democratization processes in conflict-affected and fragile states that have emerged without the tutelage of Western donors. Supporting such local initiatives is not an act of imposing democracy, but empowering indigenous movements. Jarstad noted that peace movements might not explicitly refer to democracy, but rather to the values that the West normally associates with democracy, such as inclusion, justice, participation. This is important because in criticizing the liberal peace model, we must be "careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater."

The most fundamental constraint facing peacebuilding missions is that they are invariably exogenous processes, despite the fact that to be successful they need to be locally owned and driven. According to Jarstad, to improve the practice of peacebuilding, practitioners need to investigate what local people expect from peace and democracy assistance and what indigenous peacebuilding activities are already in place before launching an externally driven peacebuilding agenda. Otherwise, international peace missions run the risk of being seen as outsiders and interfering with local ideas and structures. Currently, there is a narrow view of what democratization entails. Jarstad calls

for those in the peacebuilding field to “open up a bit and examine reforms in local forms of government” such as within chieftain systems of governance. This can include introducing elections to non-state forms of governance as a way to foster greater legitimacy. There is a need to examine more carefully what is going on at the local level in terms of democracy and peacebuilding.

Jarstad noted that the belief that democracy will provide a safer world is so deeply embedded that there is a risk of turning a blind eye to the fact that the road to democracy can have perverse effects and lead to violent conflict. Efforts to pursue peace can sometimes hinder democratization and vice versa. Despite research highlighting challenges in trying to achieve peace and democratization simultaneously, contemporary missions still aim to achieve both goals in parallel. Practitioners muddle through, aware of the limitations and sometimes having to choose between the two. They are constrained by the need to show short-term results, even though peacebuilding is a very long process. Jarstad discussed the tension between democracy, which builds on the notion of competition, and power sharing, which is designed to foster cooperation and reconciliation. In a power-sharing government context, former wartime enemies are expected to coexist in government, which brings risks of stalemate and inaction. However, power sharing is the price that must sometimes be paid for ending an armed conflict.

Nonetheless, little is known about the long-term consequences of power sharing on peace and democratization. In the live discussion board, Branka Marijan suggested one potential consequence: “power sharing limits the emergence of new parties given the balancing between ethnic groups.”

In light of the difficult conditions facing war-to-peace transitions, she emphasized the need for realistic expectations for peacebuilders. In her concluding statements, she reminded participants that peacebuilding takes time. It takes decades, even generations, to overcome the legacies of civil war. Practitioners must have realistic expectations about what peacebuilding can achieve and show more ambition in seeking to understand local peace and conflict dynamics. It is clear that pathways to actual peace differ a great deal from country to country. Although peacebuilding missions contain similar components, their local contexts differ greatly. Local society can resist and shape international interventions. Investigating what local people expect from peace and democracy is an essential element of peacebuilding that is needed to analyze what “success” and “failure” look like in practice.

### *Speaker 3 – Dr. Roger Mac Ginty*

Dr. Roger Mac Ginty sees peacebuilding as not necessarily dying, but rather in a “medically induced coma.” He noted that for structural reasons, international organizations and states

are quite content with limited forms of peacebuilding; however, these forms of peacebuilding operate in deference to the imperatives of state sovereignty, security and stabilization. Mac Ginty stressed that peacebuilding is a plurality where one must speak of peacebuildings. It must be acknowledged that peacebuilding has saved and improved many lives. He stressed that the positive impacts of peacebuilding are often under-celebrated.

Peacebuilding is a term that exploded on the scene with the 1992 report, *Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*. Since then, a shift has taken place, with greater attention paid to the social aspects, or “soft issues” of peacemaking, such as social inclusion, reconciliation and identity. These values became embedded in peace accords, which had previously focused on harder security issues like border protection; security sector reform (SSR); and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). In spite of this policy innovation, Mac Ginty remains skeptical of the peacebuilding concept, which, he argued, “promises much and delivers little in reality.” In the academic community, the peacebuilding concept is the subject of much academic discussion and debate, though the discourse is limited by the fact that this work tends to “come from white folks from the Global North.” Moreover, peacebuilding as a concept is shaped by global political economy, as think tanks and the academic community from countries in the Global North typically set

the agenda for study and analysis.

Examining the track record of peacebuilding initiatives, it is clear that in practice, peacebuilding often does not accomplish the goals it sets out for itself. Mac Ginty noted that in many cases the old elites remain in power. Significant changes in gender relations are rarely seen after peacebuilding processes. In many instances, such as Kosovo, El Salvador, Mozambique and Northern Ireland, initial enthusiasm with democracy is followed by apathy, as demonstrated by declining voter turnouts. Typically the election following a peace agreement sees very high participation rates, but is followed by a steep decline in participation as people come to realize that their daily life has not dramatically improved.

Peacebuilding agendas are shaped by power. Power dynamics drive peacebuilding agendas toward a focus on statebuilding and stabilization rather than more progressive notions of reconciliation and intercommunity dialogue. The international system in the era of peacebuilding is dominated by the same powers and international organizations captured by a coterie of powerful Western countries, resulting in an emphasis on the state, traditional ideas of sovereignty and maintaining the status quo.

Peacebuilding suffers from a number of distinct problems. First, the concept struggles to think beyond the state to embrace non-state political order and governance. Second, it

is rooted to a narrow program of neo-liberal social engineering that misses opportunities to promote peace and could trigger new forms of conflict and instability. Third, contemporary approaches to Western peacebuilding have normalized the use of violence, as seen in the air war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria by the U.S. and its allies. There was no serious policy discussion about alternatives to a bombing campaign to deal with the threat posed by the Islamic State. Bombing from the air has become the “default position” of Western states. The general public, however, is unaware of what these bombs are doing and militaries do not seem to be under democratic pressure to report what they are doing. The use of violence in the name of peace by intervening states has become normalized and uncontested.

It is important to look beyond grand international interventions when examining peacebuilding, looking for everyday peacebuilding and civility that happens within communities, city neighbourhoods and public spaces. One of the problems in the academic and policy world is that it is hard to see the “rear-door of peacebuilding” or informal peacebuilding of everyday civility and toleration, which does not use the terminology developed by academia and policy makers. The focus is mainly on formal peacebuilding rather than informal peacebuilding. When we look at informal peacebuilding, there is a more positive story to tell. Practitioners in the Global North are poorly equipped to see this everyday peacebuilding.

## Discussion Questions

The online seminar concluded with a question-and-answer session moderated by Dr. Mark Sedra, which raised key issues and themes in regard to the future of peacebuilding.

## Issues and Themes

### **Engaging the Non-State: Local and Informal Actors**

Mac Ginty emphasized that it is inevitable that countries receiving peacebuilding assistance will feature cultural and political norms that contrast sharply to those in the West. It must likewise be acknowledged that others often perceive Western ideas as unusual or even offensive. Jackson urged practitioners to move beyond labelling the non-state as “good” or “bad.” In negotiating with non-state actors, Jackson argued that the role of the international community should be to work from the bottom-up, engaging communities and groups at the grassroots level to support peacebuilding processes. One area where international donors have achieved some headway in engaging non-state and informal actors is the justice sphere. In many conflict-affected societies, non-state justice structures are far more popular than state courts as a mechanism to resolve disputes and adjudicate grievances. There is a growing willingness among donors to accept that the state does not have a monopoly on violence or the rule of law and must

accept the existence of different forms of dispute resolution. In such environments, the goal of donors can be better served by a strategy to de-conflict formal and informal justice structures and promote complementarity in a plural system, rather than seek to sideline the informal and establish the dominance of state bodies and formal legal frameworks.

Jarstad highlighted countries that have been free of conflict for more than 20 years in order to emphasize the positive impacts of informal multi-ethnic mobilization and cooperation outside of the state. This often takes the form of demonstrations demanding democratic and societal reforms. For instance, since the end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, space has gradually grown for ordinary citizens to engage in the political sphere. For a long time, Bosnia-Herzegovina was a frozen conflict; however, current developments point to a possible breakthrough.

### **The Separation between Statebuilding and Peacebuilding**

One of the seminar participants, Dr. Ndubuisi Nwokolo, posed a critical question to the panel: what differentiates peacebuilding from statebuilding efforts in fragile, failed and conflict-affected countries? Jackson noted that the two concepts are inextricably intertwined, but nonetheless different. However, the problem lies in the fact that international interventions often treat them as one in the same, using

the terms interchangeably. Jackson went on to draw on a quote from Jarstad: “settlements do not end conflicts; they are simply agreements to continue bargaining under consensually defined rules of interaction.” Recent experience has shown that violence can experience a rise after the signing of peace agreements, as political spoilers emerge and crime rates rise. Peacebuilding processes themselves can drive conflict as their attempts at re-engineering conflict-affected societies can create new rifts and resentments. Any degree of societal change in a society is bound to trigger conflict, at one level or another. Accordingly, the key is to contain and mitigate that conflict and bring it to an end as soon as possible.

Mac Ginty explained that statebuilding has supplanted peacebuilding on donor agendas, largely because it is easier to do. Statebuilding involves measurable technocratic projects such as restructuring ministries and training civil servants. The “softer” aspects of peace, such as reconciliation and political accommodation, are far messier and more difficult to accomplish in defined time periods. Fundamentally speaking, the dominance of statebuilding over peacebuilding in the donor lexicon reflects a lack of imagination from policy makers and practitioners who have typically been unable to “think beyond the state.” Even in cases where the state has been a source of conflict, instability and injustice, peacebuilders consistently default to an emphasis on expanding the capacity of the state.

## The Role of Research in the Peacebuilding Field

Jarstad argued that peacebuilding must always be understood as a local project. Accordingly, one of the principal roles of researchers is to increase understanding of the local context and the potential for successful organic peacebuilding strategies. Mac Ginty argued that first and foremost, peacebuilding research should be humble; there are limits to the degree external researchers can develop a nuanced understanding of local peace and conflict dynamics in a transition country. Research should be subversive and open to challenging existing power structures and peacebuilding orthodoxies. It should be innovative and participative. It is important that the peacebuilding field and its research cadre evolve from one dominated by “rich, white people from the Global North” into something more inclusive and accommodating of different ideologies and perspectives. Jackson agreed with Mac Ginty’s emphasis on the local and on the need for humility. Researchers must be wary of trying to be useful to governments. Research should not be started with the mindset of confirming government policy. Most importantly, Jackson stressed that locals must not be treated merely as data points or sources but as people. In some ways, academia has become removed from the human aspect of research, which is problematic and dangerous.

## Conclusion

The first installment of the CSG’s eSeminar Series on “Contemporary Debates on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding” focused on the imposing challenges facing the liberal peacebuilding model, and the potential for the emergence of new approaches more attuned to local realities and long timelines. One of the common themes that emerged in the panel presentations and debate that followed was that successful peacebuilding must go beyond initiatives addressing elite interests, promoting stabilization and the development of state institutions. It must engage the everyday interactions that make up a society — what Mac Ginty called “the informal peacebuilding of everyday civility and toleration.” To recognize this everyday peace, scholars and practitioners must exercise humility and seek to learn from their interactions with local communities, rather than assume that they already have all the answers. In many ways, it entails a cultural change in how policy makers, practitioners and researchers approach peacebuilding. Without such change, Western peacebuilding projects will continue to struggle to stimulate sustainable change. The peacebuilding model may not be dying, but it is hardly in good health and only a change in mindset can restore its vitality.

## About the Presenters

**Dr. Paul Jackson** is Professor of African Politics in the International Development Department at the University of Birmingham. He is a political economist working predominantly on conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. A core area of interest is decentralization and governance and it was his extensive experience in Sierra Leone immediately following the war that led him into the area of conflict analysis and security sector reform.

**Dr. Anna Jarstad** is Associate professor at the Department of Government, with a focus on International Politics. Her research focuses on the nexus of democratization and peacebuilding in war-torn societies, especially in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Kosovo, Macedonia, and South Africa. She specializes in power sharing as a form of conflict management and has led a quantitative data collection on power sharing with Desirée Nilsson and Ralph Sundberg and has conducted several case studies.

**Dr. Roger Mac Ginty** is Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute, and the Department of Politics at the University of Manchester. His research has been on peace processes, political violence, and local responses to international peace-support interventions. He has conducted field research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Jordan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Uganda and the US.

## Additional Information

Archived video of the event is available online at:

<http://www.secgovcentre.org/eseminar-contemporary-debates-on-peacebuilding-and-statebuilding>

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**The Centre for Security Governance (CSG)** is a non-profit, non-partisan think tank devoted to the study of security and justice issues in fragile and conflict-affected states. It is a registered charity located in Kitchener, Ontario.

**The Balsillie School of International Affairs (BSIA)** is an institute for advanced research, education, and outreach in the fields of global governance and international public policy. Founded in 2007 by philanthropist Jim Balsillie, BSIA is an equal collaboration among the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University.

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85 Edwin Street, Kitchener, Ontario N2H 4N7, Canada  
Tel +1 226 241 8744  
[www.secgovcentre.org](http://www.secgovcentre.org)