Towards Vertically Integrated Peace Building: Bridging Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches

Workshop report by Timothy Donais

Introduction

On October 17, 2013, Waterloo's Balsillie School of International Affairs (BSIA) hosted a one-day workshop exploring the concept of "vertical integration" in the context of post-conflict peace building. The workshop, held in conjunction with the annual conference of the Peace and Justice Studies Association (PJSA) and organized under the auspices of The Centre for International Governance Innovation's research project entitled "Vertical Integration and the United Nations Peace-building Architecture," brought together scholars and practitioners from across North America to discuss how the concept of "integrated" peace building could be expanded to include not just international actors — as has been the practice to date — but also the governments and citizens of states affected by conflict.[1]
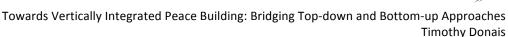
While much attention has been devoted to the challenge of *horizontal* integration — in particular, the need for greater coherence among the various actors engaged in peace-building activities within the UN system — the core premise of the day's discussion was that *vertical* integration is no less imperative. A vertical integration perspective begins with an explicit recognition that in the determination of whether peace-building processes succeed or fail, the agency of domestic actors matters at least as much as that of international actors; in this context, vertical integration refers specifically to the need for greater coherence and coordination up and down the chain of relationships that link international-, national- and local-level actors in peace-building contexts.

A number of recent developments in the field of peace building have made the discussion of vertical integration both timely and relevant. Most importantly, the so-called "crisis" of liberal peace building has raised profound questions about the conventional model of peace building, which relies heavily on the outside-in transmission of international norms and institutions, most notably democracy, human rights, free markets and the rule of law. In response to the unsettling of the liberal peace-building paradigm, recent scholarship has focussed increasingly on issues such as local ownership and hybridity, which have both highlighted the role and

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[1] See Appendix for the workshop agenda and list of speakers.

importance of local agency in peace-building contexts and underscored the dynamic and often unpredictable consequences of interactions across the international-local divide. At the same time, scholarship on state building has shifted from an earlier emphasis on creating and consolidating formal, state-level institutions towards a recognition that the challenge of strengthening state-society relations lies at the very core of the contemporary state-building challenge. The notion of vertical integration, therefore, generates a more expansive vision of the coordination *problématique*, and prompts a shift from a narrow emphasis on relations among international actors to a broader consideration of the triangular relationship among state, society and international community.

Session 1: Bottom-up Perspectives

The day's first session explored the concept of vertical integration from the perspective of grassroots or community-based peace-building efforts, and focussed in particular on the potential for microlevel peace efforts to have macrolevel impacts. Anita Ernstorfer of CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, a US-based non-profit, led the session with an overview of CDA's Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) initiative. For over a decade, the RPP has been studying peace-building effectiveness, and since 2007 has been analyzing the cumulative impacts of peace-building efforts across 16 different empirical cases. Of particular relevance to the question of vertical integration is RPP's exploration of the relationship between peace writ little and Peace Writ Large, and one of the RPP's key conclusions has been that all peace-building programs, whether community-based or national in scope, should be accountable to Peace Writ Large; in other words, even the most modest initiatives should be designed to connect and contribute to a larger peace-building project.

The RPP has also introduced key distinctions between "more people" and "key people," as well as between individual/personal change and socio-political change. While not all initiatives can be expected to cover all these bases as part of their programming, it is also becoming clear that strategies aimed at inclusive and participatory peace building need to consider the effects of such strategies on elite-level dynamics, while elite-based initiatives need similarly to be aware of, and ideally connect to, wider social processes. Similarly, while sustainable peace building requires transformation at both the individual and socio-political level, changing hearts and minds doesn't necessarily add up to sustainable socio-political change, just as the limits of institutional engineering at the socio-political level have been demonstrated across a range of contemporary cases. Consequently, finding ways to connect change-inducing processes, at both individual and socio-political levels and in mutually reinforcing ways, remains a key challenge for those seeking to ensure that often-disparate peace-building initiatives add up to more than the sum of their parts.

Ultimately, therefore, a key message of the RPP initiative is that peace builders need to pay more attention to linkages and convergences beyond and across individual projects, if such projects are to make a cumulative contribution to sustainable peace. Foreshadowing the discussion in Session 2 on systemic peace building, Ernstorfer emphasized a range of strategies

for building and strengthening both horizontal and vertical linkages across initiatives and across key actors (both domestic and international):

- *strengthening* conceptual linkages through the establishment of mutual understandings around both causes of conflict and theories of change, and developing shared policy frameworks across different operational actors;
- *identifying* and *encouraging* strong individuals and organizations that can act as connectors and facilitators across different levels and actors, and more generally doing more to acknowledge the imperatives of coordination, communication and networking among key stakeholders; and
- *working* towards shared, even joint, measurement of results and establishing mutual accountability mechanisms.

Kent State University's Landon Hancock followed with a discussion of local zones of peace in peace-building contexts. He began by contrasting top-down and bottom-up approaches, suggesting that while externally imposed zones of peace (the most notorious of which were the UN-decreed "safe havens" of the Bosnian conflict) have largely been failures, those zones which emerge organically from within conflict-afflicted communities themselves have enjoyed more success. While zones of peace have typically been associated with active conflicts, they are also increasingly visible in post-conflict environments. Zones of peace created during conflict, while initiated out of a rejection of armed violence, almost always see their scope expanded to include broader peace-building or community development initiatives, such as education, anti-corruption and/or domestic violence. Post-conflict zones may also come into being to address violence, but focus mainly on other peace-building activities. Hancock provided details of two such zones — one in El Salvador, which currently encompasses some 200 local communities, and the Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group in Northern Ireland, which bridges Catholic and Protestant communities — and illustrated the range of socio-economic and peace-building activities in which each has been involved.

As Hancock noted, two key dynamics are crucial to the viability, impact and sustainability of local zones of peace. First, the most successful are those that are initiated and managed by community members themselves; in this sense, genuine local ownership is crucial. In the same vein, the most successful zones of peace feature a high degree of internal cohesion among leading actors and a strong commitment to transparency in their activities; zones of peace also benefit from being grounded in strong, vibrant local traditions where such traditions exist. A second crucial dynamic is the relationship between community-organized zones of peace and the "outside world." While each context is unique, the viability of such zones clearly depends a great deal on ongoing negotiations with a range of armed actors, whose willingness to respect a community's commitment to non-violence is a basic requirement for success. At the same time, community-based zones of peace must also carefully navigate relations with elite actors at both national and subnational levels, at least some of whom may resist the idea of communities managing their own peace processes and may attempt to co-opt such processes for the own purposes. Finally, co-optation by external funders is also a key risk for zones of peace; as Hancock noted, the most successful examples — including the El Salvador and Northern Ireland cases — have managed to secure external funding without allowing their own agenda, priorities

or even personnel to be sidelined by donors who have historically been unable to resist the temptation to impose their own agenda and practices on recipient communities.

The session's final presentation was from Reina Neufeldt of Conrad Grebel University College, who addressed the challenge of navigating divergent value assumptions in the context of vertically integrated peace building. She began the discussion with a story of the ways in which value commitments generate tension across cultural lines. In this particular case, which revolved around an effort to establish a Church-based peace-building commission in Burundi, a clear yet unspoken divide emerged between the Burundian partners, who saw the project as a means to provide a nurturing space for personal spiritual transformation, and their US-based counterparts, who wanted a project with clear, concrete deliverables in order to appeal to donors and who were concerned with maintaining a clear separation between church and state. Ultimately, the concern with securing funding prevailed, and the focus on faith and spirituality lost out to a more conventional state-building approach.

For Neufeldt, the moral of the story is that peace builders seldom question the consequentialist, means-ends ethics that motivate so much external intervention in post-conflict contexts. This ends-centric desire to "fix" societies that outsiders presume to be broken — and the associated enlightenment notions of individualism, liberal rationality and market efficiency that peace builders carry with them — constitutes a discrete set of value choices that may, or may not, be shared by those in whose name we presume to act. In some cases, *ubuntu* ethics — emphasizing care for, and responsiveness to, the other — may in fact stand in stark contrast to more technocratic approaches to peace building that emphasize the maintenance of order and the construction of effective, efficient institutions. Ultimately, therefore, if we are serious about vertical integration in the context of peace building, we must also consider how to most effectively navigate the competing accounts of what constitutes "peace" or "justice" in any given context; in this sense, finding ways to reconcile the presumed universality of liberal norms, values and approaches with the inevitably particularistic nature of conflict-affected societies and communities constitutes an unavoidable challenge to any effort at vertical integration. The search for better answers to such dilemmas, however, may ultimately lead to more effective peace building.

Session 2: International Policy Trends and the Integration Challenge

The morning's second session examined vertical integration from the international community, assessing the extent to which international processes, multilateral actors and donor states are beginning to come to terms with the challenge of vertically integrated peace building. Erin McCandless from the New School's Graduate Program of International Affairs opened the session with an insider perspective on how vertical integration issues are currently playing out in the context of the ongoing International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS). The Dialogue represents a high-level effort to redefine peace building's terms of engagement across the divide separating conflict-affected states and the international community, and its key output to date — the "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States" — lays out a set of

principles clarifying both the means and ends of peace-building processes. Several of these principles — including "legitimate politics" (one of five so-called "peace-building and state-building goals"), "inclusive country-led and country-owned transitions out of fragility," and a commitment to using country systems and strengthening national capacities — speak directly to vertical integration. In this sense, how these principles come to be operationalized will be a crucial factor shaping the evolving relationship between state, society and international community in peace-building contexts.

In her talk, McCandless — who has served on an IDPS technical working group on "indicators" to measure the Dialogue's agreed Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals — illustrated how the Dialogue process exhibits many of the inevitable tensions that come from trying to redefine established patterns of engagement across a wide range of different actors, particularly when what is being renegotiated involves fundamental questions of legitimacy, authority, and influence. For example, the g7+ (a group of fragile and conflict-affected states and a driving force behind the Dialogue process given the group's dissatisfaction with peace building's conventional "rules of the game") has sought to use the process to reassert the primacy of national ownership over the design and implementation of peace processes. As a consequence, the g7+ member states have sought to assert their leadership in the process, even if achieving whole of government buy-in remains an ongoing challenge for them. Developing whole of society buy-in, illustrating both aspects of horizontal and vertical integration, has also presented challenges for both civil society and g7+ governments, as they seek to illustrate that rather than being an elite-driven process, the Dialogue is a response to the rising consensus that state-society integration lies at the very heart of effective state building and peace building. Vertical integration is also challenged by the fact that some g7+ governments have different beliefs about the appropriate roles of civil society than, for example, international partners from northern countries.

Despite the messy, complex and highly politicized nature of the discussions around whose voices matter — both in the Dialogue and in peace processes more generally — McCandless did note that international efforts to include space for civil society in the process have paid off and civil society involvement has increased as the process has unfolded. Beyond the political dimensions, however, debates around participation raise a host of additional issues, such as whether participation should be defined in the relatively narrow sense of consultation, or whether full participation also requires participants to have a voice in decision-making. Similarly, determining who participates, and how, can be difficult in time-bound processes — such as those surrounding the drafting of national fragility assessments, which have emerged as a key component of the Dialogue process — where real limits are imposed on the extent to which widespread consultation and participation are possible. Despite such challenges, however, the IDPS does represent the clearest contemporary example of an effort to address the challenges of vertical integration in practice, even as it struggles to develop a viable framework for strengthening state-society relations in the context of fragile and conflict-affected states.

For his part, Michael Lund of the UN Development Programme's Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Recovery focussed his comments on the relationship between horizontal and vertical integration, emphasizing that the former is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the latter. For the better part of the past decade, he noted, the UN system has devoted

considerable energies to the challenge of horizontal integration, and has made a particular effort to merge development and security mandates in the context of integrated peace support missions. Effective horizontal integration, in this sense, requires a strategic partnership — based on a shared vision and common objectives — between a peacekeeping mission and the UNDP-led country team. Achieving such partnerships means, in practice, reconciling fundamentally different approaches. On the one hand, peacekeepers tend to approach their tasks with a "thou shalt comply" mentality, the roots of which can be found in the chapter 7 mandates possessed by most contemporary peacekeeping missions, in the relatively autonomous character of such missions vis-à-vis host countries, and in the fact that peacekeepers often find themselves in the position of having to apply pressure on host governments in order to carry out their mandates. The notion of national ownership, Lund noted, is simply not part of the DNA of modern peacekeeping. The UNDP approach, conversely, is grounded in the need to build long-term development partnerships with host-state governments, and in the recognition that national ownership represents a *sine qua non* for sustainable development. Instead of being able to rely on international capacities, the UNDP paradigm is fundamentally dependent on national implementation structures and long-term national capacity development, necessitating a different relationship with national-level actors.

Clearly, reconciling the tensions that persist at the horizontal level not only among key UN agencies but also among the panoply of multilateral actors, donor-state agencies and international civil society actors that operate in peace-building contexts is a key element of the broader vertical integration challenge. If the diverse collection of external actors that operate under the broader heading of "the international community" in fragile and conflict-affected environments cannot themselves agree on a common approach towards dealing with host-state governments and societies, then the likelihood of making much progress along the vertical integration path is much reduced. Lund's presentation, ultimately, underlined the reality that there remains much dissensus among key international actors on a range of questions central to the peace-building *problématique*, such as where ultimate authority for the design and implementation of peace-building processes rests, and how to reconcile the inevitable differences in norms, goals and priorities that exist across the international-national-local divide. Coming to terms with how to manage and navigate such tensions remains central to meeting the challenge of both vertical and horizontal integration.

Wrapping up the morning's session was Robert Ricigliano of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who provided an overview of "systems thinking" as it applies to contemporary peace building. By trying to understand the complex and multi-faceted dynamics of post-conflict environments in terms of coherent, interconnected "systems," he suggested, systems thinking provides one way of conceptualizing the challenges of Peace Writ Large. It also provides a way of understanding the liabilities of project-based peace building, which relies both on an assumption that peace can be constructed piecemeal, on the basis of a series of discrete, independent projects and on a "have program, will travel" mentality that assumes that generalized solutions exist for context-specific problems. Almost by definition, "projectism" as an approach to peace building offers few solutions to some of the key problems of linking peace writ little to Peace Writ Large, such as the failure of individual initiatives to add up to more than the sum of their parts, the inability to anticipate unintended negative impacts and helplessness

in the fact of wicked and reoccurring problems, such as corruption, that are deeply entrenched within the conflict system itself.

A systems approach to peace building suggests that peace builders need to simultaneously up their game and scale down their ambitions. On the one hand, moving from a narrow focus on projects to a larger focus on systems demands much greater analytical capacity. It involves, as Ricigliano noted, an ability to listen to the system, work with it and learn from it; in this context, systems mapping (including the identification and diagnosis of feedback loops) and ongoing monitoring and evaluation should be essential tools in the peace-building toolkit. On the other hand, he noted, peace builders also need to accept that in chaotic environments, initiatives which attempt to maximize control and minimize contingency rarely work, while no amount of planning and assessment can overcome the reality of having to act before all relevant factors are known. More importantly, perhaps, systems tend to be highly resistant to imposed change, and therefore cannot be conceptualized as problems to be solved or structures to be repaired. Instead, peace-building interventions based on systems thinking should focus more on understanding and exploiting opportunities for positive change; in this sense, as Ricigliano noted, knowing which doors are ajar and which are shut is crucial. Starting from the approach of trying to work with the system, rather than attempting to radically restructure it, it may nevertheless be possible to address a small number of vicious but crucial dynamics that might lay the foundation for larger changes down the road. Ultimately, systems thinking may offer a more holistic approach to the problems of peace building, one which naturally incorporates both vertical and horizontal perspectives on integration, even if it simultaneously demands more big-picture thinking as well as more humility from peace builders themselves.

Session 3: Round Table Discussion

The afternoon session featured an open-ended and wide-ranging discussion, offering participants an opportunity to both react and respond to the morning's presentations and to push the discussion on vertical integration in new directions. In particular, many of the workshop's 30-odd participants attempted to respond to one questioner's challenge to identify some of the "creative edges" in the practice of vertical integration. Some pointed to the growing phenomenon of South-South cooperation in peace-building contexts — Brazil's involvement in Haiti being one example — as offering examples of such creative edges, while others noted how the experience of the Arab Spring has led to new thinking about how outsiders can support processes of positive political change. New technologies — such as widespread and inexpensive and mobile communications devices that enable "crowdsourcing" and other forms of decentralized information gathering — also offer new opportunities for bridging the divide between top-down and bottom-up. At the same time, making better use of "old" technologies, such as institutionalized mechanisms for the decentralization of power (and operationalizing the principle of subsidiarity) or the provision of support for actually existing, local-level governance structures, offer additional avenues for moving vertical integration from paper to practice.

The discussion of how to operationalize vertical integration was also, however, tempered by ongoing concerns about both the flexibility and the receptivity of international actors to such an

approach. In other words, while a strong case can be made that peace building requires careful consensus building among all relevant actors — at local, national and international levels — on both the means and ends of peace processes, there is no guarantee that international actors will willingly accept the loss of control that such a process necessarily implies. The issue, as was noted, has both bureaucratic and normative dimensions. On the one hand, the relatively short-term, project-based framework within which much peace-building work is carried out tends to privilege output over process, while international actors operate within bureaucratic structures, reporting requirements and accounting mechanisms that discourage flexibility and responsiveness to local context. In other words, outsiders' urge to control their "funding" and "their" projects — from program design to evaluation — continues in most cases to take priority over the need for learning by doing and sensitivity to local context and culture.

The normative issue — what kind of peace is to be built and who, ultimately, gets to decide such questions — poses an even larger set of questions about vertical integration, specifically around whether the broader goal is to improve or to transcend the existing liberal peace-building framework. For while it is clear that taking local culture, traditions, politics and "systems" into account represents an essential component of any improved peace-building practice, it is less clear whether — and to what extent — such accommodation requires abandoning the core liberal principles that have guided peace-building practice for over two decades. In other words, if listening to and working with, rather than against, local systems points towards peace processes that are illiberal and/or undemocratic, will international donors continue to be willing to remain engaged on such terms? While it might be the case that vertical integration can be achieved by combining an ongoing commitment to liberal norms with the flexibility to adapt such norms to local realities, there is also a real danger that this approach will lead to less-than-nuanced efforts on the part of international actors to co-opt national- and local-level actors into a larger peace-building project that remains externally-driven. In this sense, finding the proper balance between cooptation — which, as Hancock noted, can have the effect of destroying the very structures it aims to integrate — and uncritical respect for the autonomy of local systems and cultures, even if they diverge uncomfortably from international norms, remains key to crafting more effective peace-building strategies.

A final key theme to (re-)emerge from the afternoon's discussion concerned the place of the domestic civil society of conflict-affected states in contemporary peace-building processes. While one of the central critiques of the liberal peace-building paradigm is that is has become too focussed on the relationship between states and international actors (too often leaving the people of war-affected states as disengaged spectators), fully engaging domestic civil society actors as key "owners" of peace-building processes poses a special set of challenges. In the first place, civil societies by definition represent a remarkably diverse collection of actors and interests, and beyond the ongoing debates about the merits of engaging "good" civil society (i.e., human rights and pro-democracy groups) versus "bad" civil society (i.e., armed militants and hardline ethnic nationalists), there are the broader questions of how best to engage civil society actors and how much engagement is enough to ensure inclusivity. Secondly, as noted above, while strengthening state-society relations is increasingly recognized as a crucial component of any peace-building process, the reality is that state-society relations in most post-conflict situations start from a position of mutual distrust and suspicion; building relationships of trust, accountability and transparency from such starting points is necessarily an uncertain and

long-term endeavour. Nor is it always self-evident that conventional Western conceptions of the roles that civil society plays in a modern democracy — typically involving some mix of service provision, interest articulation and watchdog — is necessarily appropriate or workable for the non-Western contexts in which peace building is typically undertaken. Finally, from the perspective of international actors a key dilemma is whether to support the civil societies of conflict-affected states indirectly through state-level bodies (for example, encouraging the establishment of legal frameworks that facilitate civil society activity), or whether external actors should be working directly with, and providing direct support to, civil society actors as a means of fostering "societal ownership" as a necessary counterbalance to "state ownership."

Ultimately, while many of the key questions raised over the course of the afternoon session are resistant to easy answers, the discussion did suggest the outlines of a broad research agenda that could be productively undertaken under the vertical integration umbrella. By drawing attention to the complex set of relationships that exist across the state-society-international-community divide in any peace-building context, and to the multi-faceted ways in which questions of power, authority, agency and legitimacy play out in such relationships, the discussion also highlighted a range of important dilemmas that need to be worked through in order for a new, and hopefully improved, generation of peace-building praxis to emerge.

Appendix: Workshop Agenda

A pre-conference workshop held in conjunction with the 2013 PJSA annual conference

8:45   Introduction and Welcome — Timothy Donais, *Wilfrid Laurier University*

9:00   Session 1: Bottom-Up Perspectives on Building Peace
            Chair: Frances Fortune, *BSIA*

            1. Anita Ernstorfer, *Collaborative Learning Projects, CDA*
                "Peacebuilding Linkages: (How) Does It All Add Up? Findings from Cumulative
                Impact Case Studies of CDA/RPP"
            2. Landon Hancock*, Kent State University*
                "From Sanctuary to Peacebuilding: Local Zones of Peace"
            3. Reina Neufeldt, *Conrad Grebel University College*
                "Navigating Divergent Values in Vertically-integrated Peacebuilding"

10:30   Coffee Break

11:00   Session 2: International Policy Trends and the Integration Challenge
            Chair: Elisabeth King, *BSIA*

            1. Erin McCandless, *Graduate Program of International Affairs, the New School*
                "Emerging Policy Processes for Vertical Integration in Peacebuilding: The Case of
                the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding"
            2. Michael H. Lund, *United Nations Development Program*
                "Peacebuilding in Integrated UN Presences"
            3. Rob Ricigliano, *University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*
                "Systemic Approaches and Vertical Integration"

12:30   Lunch

1:30   Round table discussion: Bridging Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches
            Chair: Timothy Donais, *Wilfrid Laurier University*

3:30   Summary and conclusion