

MULTISTAKEHOLDER PROCESSES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Anush Begoyan

This paper presents a summary of multistakeholder processes in conflict resolution conducted for the DiploFoundation. Due to the global consequences of contemporary conflicts, conflict resolution is one of the most important fields of international politics and one of the areas where multistakeholder co-operation can produce the most fruitful outcomes.

This report first supplies a brief theoretical introduction to current developments within the international system, to changes in the reality and the conceptualisation of the nation-state, and to resultant changes in the security system and the notion of national (state) interests. Via the prism of these developments, the paper examines the changing character of contemporary intra-state conflicts and their driving forces.

It proceeds to analyse the main actors and stakeholders involved in contemporary conflicts and to offer a preliminary classification of these actors based on the magnitude of their activities, the nature of their involvement, and their potential for conflict resolution and transformation. Here, the term *conflict resolution* covers processes of conflict management and conflict transformation.

Obviously, this report raises more questions than answers. More detailed and intensive research on the subject would provide criteria and categorisations for the examination of stakeholder involvement in conflicts; it would analyse possibilities for more productive multistakeholder initiatives in the resolution, management, and transformation of contemporary conflicts. However, at this stage one can draw some conclusions and recommendations to argue for more and wider multistakeholder co-operation in conflict resolution.

Evolution of Nation-States and the International System

With the end of the Cold War, the character of violent conflicts changed substantially. Currently, civil, intra-state wars of different scopes and dimensions affect almost a third of the countries around the world, while the number of pure, “modern” inter-state, military clashes has shrunk. This change includes not only a change in the ends and means of conflicts, but also a change in the actors involved and the agendas they pursue.

The reasons why this occurs and, subsequently, how it affects contemporary conflicts and the field of conflict resolution, lie in the changing character of the contemporary state. Compared to the classic Westphalian system of national sovereignty, the *post-modern state* has a complex inter-ethnic and inter-religious configuration, as well as political construction. Some political analysts perceive the current process of state transformation analysts as a failure or a malfunction of the state, apparently due to the emergence of two opposing trends. Both increasing levels of devolution and delegation of power to local authorities and increasing globalisation and transfer of control to global governance institutions decrease national sovereignty. Thus, some of the essential roles and purposes (in some cases even monopolies) of states are taken over either by local authorities or by regional or global inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as other global players.

Other analysts see this transformation as the evolution of the state as a political structure. They describe the post-modern state (usually coinciding with developed Western democracies and open market economies) as a higher and more advanced political edifice that enjoys all the benefits of an open system of inter-dependence and co-operation.

While some states seem to be moving from a modern to a post-modern structure, others apparently are regressing to pre-modern positions of internal strife, disorder, and turmoil. While post-modern states willingly give up some of their sovereignty in favour of power-sharing, thus enjoying the advantages of an open system of inter-dependence, pre-modern states fail to perform the basic functions of control over territory or provision of basic needs and basic conditions of security for their citizens.

Failed or failing states can be characterised by disharmony between communities that often grows into civil war, a collapsed or non-existent infrastructure, a high rate of criminal violence, highly corrupted governments, governmental bodies with clan or tribal structures, a lack of legitimacy and, in many cases, a failure of the government to exercise its authority outside the capital city. In the context of political and economic impotence, non-state actors play a bigger and more important role as providers of security, political goods, and economic opportunities (Rotberg, 2002). Pre-war Afghanistan and Sudan serve as illustrations of countries that have fallen into a pre-modern state.

This transformation of the state also implies changes in security concerns and objectives (the system of threats and fears along with the measures to overcome and defeat them) (Buzan, Weaver, and de Wide, 1997), and in the

perception of national interests that used to be automatically associated with state interests. Currently, national interest can be opposed to the interests of state regimes and the security of different groups, like national minorities and ethnic, religious, and other groups, on the one hand, and global security, on the other, may become the main focus of contemporary security systems.

Obviously, these rapid and substantial changes also affect the international system as a whole. The international system that we knew consisted of nation-states with sovereignty over their territories and a monopoly over the exercise of violence within that territory. Clear borders demarcated the domestic from the international, the authority within those borders from the anarchy of the international system. Nowadays, features of the international system either have changed or are in process of transformation.

In contemporary reality, we see a growing number of cases of anarchy within states – many processes, even if they are not chaotic, are still outside the control of states. Meanwhile, global governance becomes increasingly powerful and affects more aspects of our lives in social, political, and economic spheres. In some cases, the transparency of borders reaches a level where they become a vague notion and sovereignty is either a mere symbol or transformed to something requiring a new term.

The fact that today no clear borders separate these unevenly developed parts of the world has further complicated the overall situation. Post-modern countries of prosperity, peace, and democratic values intermingle with failed, pre-modern states throughout international relations.

One of the main causes and, at the same time, consequences of these changes in the concept and essence of nation-states and of the transformation of the international system, is the rise of new state and non-state actors. A growing number of non-state actors are becoming actively involved in, among other things, conflicts and the management and transformation of violent intra-state conflicts.

Dissection of Intra-State Conflicts: A Theoretical Background

Post-modern, intra-state conflicts differ greatly from traditional, inter-state conflicts fought between sovereign nation-states for political motivations, such as territory or sovereignty. In brief, contemporary warfare is a new form of violent conflict presenting a complex face that includes guerrilla and civil war, often with features of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Post-modern conflicts occur mainly because of individual or group motivations, on behalf of ethnic or religious groups, or nations. These are mainly armed conflicts (generally fought with small arms and light weapons) taking place within state borders, undertaken by non-regular (non-state) paramilitaries, such as mercenaries or terrorists (or “freedom fighters” by other standards of qualification). With the decentralisation of security, private entities started to provide security services of different dimensions and complexities, becoming part of the equation in violent conflicts.

Contemporary conflicts go beyond traditional military warfare and civilian populations may become deliberate targets of hostilities. These conflicts are fuzzy and difficult to control or predict as the motivations of warring parties and actors involved are vague, varying, or concealed. Obviously, this means that often more than two parties are directly involved in a conflict and almost all levels and groups within society are directly or indirectly affected by it.

The comparison between modern (traditional) warfare and contemporary, post-modern conflicts is summarised in *Table 1*.

TABLE 1 – The Changing Character of Contemporary Conflicts:
A Comparison of Modern and Post-modern Warfare.
(Based on Møller, 1996)

Modern:	Post-modern:
Who? ➤ Conscript professional	➤ Militias, terrorists, child soldiers
On whose behalf? ➤ The state	➤ Nation, ethnic, religious group, warlords
Against whom? ➤ Soldiers, civilians	➤ Civilians
Why? ➤ Political ends: territory, sovereignty	➤ Individual and group ends
How? ➤ Principles of war	➤ Guerrilla warfare, terrorism
By which means? ➤ Conventional weapons	➤ Small arms, non-lethal weapons, information systems

In the globalised world, no more borders distinguish so-called “zones of peace” (the prosperous and developed democracies of the West) from and “zones of turmoil” – globalisation enables a proliferation of threats with the same intensity as that of trade.

In sum, current conflicts are multistakeholder phenomena, involving a variety of actors, whether representing states or other entities. Consequently, as the state is no longer the main and only player involved in conflicts (it no longer enjoys a monopoly on violence), it also cannot be the sole actor in conflict resolution. This implies the active participation of a range of stakeholders in the process of conflict resolution, and the application of so-called “second track diplomacy.”

New Actors and Levels of Multistakeholder Participation in Conflict Resolution

Multistakeholder partnerships are a relatively new political phenomenon and have only recently become instruments for policy-making. Their emergence is linked to the rising stakes of the private sector and of civil society. NGOs, trade unions, mass media, and other groups representing different interests claim stakes in policy-making, made even more complex by the spread of ethnic and religious, national and trans-national movements on the one hand, and the increasing involvement of global actors in contemporary conflict resolution, on the other.

These developments entail a growing need for the representation of divergent interests in conflict resolution. Although new actors are usually classified according to their affiliation with nation-states (state or non-state actors), in order to examine their role in the resolution, management, and transformation of contemporary conflicts I suggest classifying them according to the scale of their activities and authority compared to that of the nation-state.

This implies two scales of multistakeholder participation in conflict resolution processes. The first is the participation of large international actors or stakeholders, primarily global or regional inter-governmental treaty organisations like the UN, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), or the Organisation for the Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE) – players larger than the state. The second is the scale of local actors and stakeholders, such as private business, civil society organisations, or national, ethnic, and religious groups. The second level of participation usually takes place with

the backing of a third party, either international NGOs dealing with conflict resolution and related issues or under the auspices of inter-governmental organisations.

The two levels of participation are different in many ways, because of their different objectives, stakes, and strategies. The involvement of the second level of stakeholders usually aims at resolving a particular small-scale problem and, accordingly, has only an indirect impact on a conflict as a whole. Alternatively, their involvement can be a process-oriented mission aiming to establish a better environment in general, facilitating a dialogue between conflicting parties. This practice is known within the conflict resolution community as “dialogue projects” or “trust building projects.”

The involvement of global players in conflict resolution typically has a more direct and bigger influence (positive or negative) on a conflict and its dynamics. These players can afford to engage in conflict resolution at any stage – starting from peace making (the cessation of hostilities), through peacekeeping operations (the implementation of cease-fires), to involvement in conflict settlement, as principal participants (negotiators, observers, arbiters, or mediators).

Hence, the main participants involved in the resolution, management, and transformation of contemporary conflicts may include a variety of global actors, actors from the private sector and the media, paramilitary, religious or other traditional leaders.

Global actors: global and regional inter-governmental organisations. As mentioned, in the contemporary international system, borders between so-called zones of peace and zones of war are fuzzy and difficult to define. Any local conflict has the potential to generate cross-border unrest. Due to far-reaching consequences, such as refugees or economic costs, contemporary conflicts have not only regional, but global affect, raising the stake of global players who may represent the interests of the international community as a whole.

UN peacekeeping and nation-building missions have a separate place in the system of multistakeholder involvement. UN involvement and its role in Kosovo and East Timor represent the culmination of international and institutional engagement efforts in conflict resolution. Even in the context of the legacy of UN involvement in Slovenia, Namibia, and Cambodia, these two examples represent a unique case.

Private sector. The private sector is one of the most important and most powerful stakeholders in contemporary conflicts, as it has access to and control over economic power – an extremely powerful lever in the global system. Business and conflict intertwine in two ways. The first is the

way in which conflict affects businesses, usually reduced to factoring in financial risks in relation to investment decisions. The second, the reverse influence of the political, social, and economic impacts of businesses and their effect on conflict dynamics, is less studied, but is a crucial aspect of that interconnection (Arowobusoye, 2005; International Alert, 2004a, 2004b; Haufler, 2002).

The media. The media is a potent stakeholder in the management of contemporary social relations, due to its power to reach, influence, and manipulate large audiences. It is also a powerful means of politicising issues and of generating division between sides of a present or future conflict. The power of the media, however, can be used not only for generation or escalation of conflict, but also for its resolution (Howard, Rolt, van de Veen, and Verhoeven, 2003; Melone, Terzis, and Beleli, 2002).

Para-military groups. The form of the participation of para-military groups in the processes of conflict resolution can be controversial. Along with the transformation of the means and forms of contemporary conflicts, the need arises to identify new military, political, economic, and social methods of influencing these groups and their role in conflict resolution.

Within paramilitaries, child-soldiers constitute a separate group. A special approach is required for their care and to the protection of their rights before, during, and after conflicts. More than 300,000 children under 18 years of age are ruthlessly exploited as soldiers in government armed forces or in armed opposition groups in ongoing conflicts (Amnesty International, 2004; Coalition to Stop the Use of Childsoldiers, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2004; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004).

Facilitation of the engagement of paramilitary groups in political processes and political dialogues seems to be one of the most effective tools for demilitarisation and, eventually, for conflict settlement.

Traditional and religious leaders. As contemporary conflicts are mainly intra-state conflicts fought around issues of identity, be they national, religious, or ethnic, traditional leaders and religious leaders have an important role to play. In situations of chaos and turmoil, they represent the forces that have the potential to unite and consolidate people.

Often the authority of these leaders is recognised across the conflict line. This power can effect either escalation or resolution of conflicts. Accordingly, this power and influence of traditional and religious leaders must be recognised and utilised by decision-makers and used to facilitate reconciliation and trust building between and within communities.

Conclusion

Current changes to the contemporary international system, the changing nature of the nation-state, changing notions of security and how to provide it, the transformation of the concept of national interests – all substantially reshape the nature and methods of contemporary conflicts. On the one hand, the *de facto* presence of new actors with their specific interests, agendas, and strategies, and, on the other hand, the absence of mechanisms for *de jure* recognition and accommodation of those interests, fuel more and more violence in different corners of the world.

Meanwhile, we are witnessing the rise of powerful global actors that represent bigger interests that are able (via access to financial, human, and military resources) and willing to play an active role in the settlement of intra-state conflicts. These global, intergovernmental organisations are the only ones with a legitimate mandate to intervene and seem to be the more potent actors in the resolution of conflicts.

Nonetheless, international NGOs seem to be more capable and skilled in terms of knowledge and competence. They are less constrained by politics, free from bureaucratic apparatus and procedures and are able to link theory to practice in their activities. These circumstances create optimum conditions for gathering and accumulating knowledge and experience. In addition, international NGOs working on these issues seem to be the only entities with access to global actors at the highest international level and, via their grassroots branches and/or partner organisations, to local groups.

Thus, the partnership between global players with access to resources and power and international NGOs with expertise and access to information from all levels and sectors of society has the potential to produce the most effective outcomes for conflict resolution. Meanwhile, the interaction between smaller-scale actors, such as civil society groups, media and others, is essential in terms of breaking down stereotypes and rebuilding dialogue and trust between conflicting parties.

Multistakeholder processes are a new phenomenon in politics in general and, in particular, in conflict resolution. While further research on the various stakeholders and multistakeholder partnerships is needed in the field of the resolution, management, and transformation of contemporary conflicts, one major conclusion can be drawn: it is no longer up to states alone to start or to stop violence. Multistakeholder partnerships are an important factor in the sustainable settlement of contemporary conflicts.

References

- Amnesty International. (2004).** Available from: www.amnesty.org/childsoldiers [Accessed 10 December 2004].
- Arowobusoye, O. (2005).** *Why they fight: an alternative view on the political economy of civil war and conflict resolution* [online]. Available from: www.berghof-handbook.net/articles/BHB53_Arowobusoye.pdf [Accessed 25 January 2005].
- Buzan, B., Weaver, O., and de Wide, J. (1997).** *Security: a framework for analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner.
- Coalition to Stop the Use of Childsoldiers. (2004).** Available from: www.childsoldiers.org [Accessed 10 December 2004].
- Haufler, V. (ed). (2002).** *Global compact policy dialogue on business in zones of conflict* [online]. Available from: www.undp.kz/img/docs/en/546.pdf [Accessed 25 October 2004].
- Howard, R., Rolt, F., van de Veen, H., and Verhoeven, J. (2003).** *The power of media: a handbook for peacebuilders*. Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, European Centre for Common Ground, and Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society.
- Human Rights Watch. (2004).** *Stop the use of child soldiers!* [online]. Available from: <http://hrw.org/campaigns/crp/index.htm> [Accessed 30 October 2004].
- International Alert. (2004a).** *Conflict-sensitive business practice: guidance for extractive industries* [online]. Available from: www.international-alert.org/pdf/pubbus/conflict_sensitive_business_practice_all.pdf [Accessed 30 November 2004].
- International Alert. (2004b).** *What role for oil majors for sustainable peace and development in Angola? A survey of stakeholder perspectives* [online]. Available from: www.international-alert.org/pdf/pubbus/role_oil_majors_angola.pdf [Accessed 25 November 2004].
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (2004).** Available from: www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/children [Accessed 10 December 2004].
- Melone, S. D., Terzis, G., and Beleli, O. (2002).** *Using the media for conflict resolution: the common ground experience* [online]. Available from: www.berghof-handbook.net/articles/melone_hb.pdf [Accessed 30 November 2004].
- Møller, B. (1996).** *Ethnic conflict and postmodern warfare: what is the problem? What could be done?* Paper presented to the conference on Anthropological Perspectives on the Roots of Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Valletta, Malta, October.
- Rotberg, R. I. (2002).** The new nature of nation-state failure. *Washington Quarterly*, 25(3), pp. 85-96.

