

## Briefing Memo

### Peacebuilding and “Hybrid” Peace

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#### What is “hybrid” in hybrid peace?

Since the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the concept in his 1992 report “An Agenda for Peace,” peacebuilding has become a staple feature of the international community’s assistance towards societies in transition from conflict to stability. As it has produced a series of “unintended consequences” and “dilemmas,” however, peacebuilding has become a focus of vigorous debate in recent years which is also inspired by the introduction of new concepts. This commentary introduces one such concept: “hybrid” peace.

In his analysis of hybrid peace governance, Roberto Belloni defines “hybrid” as “a state of affairs in which liberal and illiberal norms, institutions, and actors coexist” (“Hybrid Peace Governance: Its Emergence and Significance”, *Global Governance* 18, no.1., January-March 2012, p.22). The key, of course, pertains to the relationship between the liberal and the non-liberal. In general, conventional forms of peacebuilding are modelled after liberal norms and ideals such as state sovereignty, democracy, market economy, human rights, rule of law, and transparency in governance (“liberal peacebuilding”). The concept of hybrid peace, in contrast, is designed to include, as part of strategies to achieve sustainable peace in post-conflict societies, diverse institutions and norms that deviate from the predominant, Western model of peacebuilding. More specifically, hybrid peace signals a willingness to accept and work with traditional institutions and values based on religious, tribal, and kinship connections, and to explore how they can be combined with those of modernity to bring a lasting peace.

#### Background to the emergence of hybrid peacebuilding

There are at least three factors that explain a growing attention to the hybrid peace concept in the peacebuilding context.

Firstly, there is an increasing awareness about the mixed records of peacebuilding. As witnessed in Timor-Leste, Kosovo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, active and large-scale peacebuilding engagement has not necessarily produced tangible returns in peace, instead ending in recurring conflicts and/or fragile statehood. This reality raised questions about the effectiveness of the predominant peacebuilding model. A second and related point revolves around more substantive

criticisms of liberal peacebuilding itself. These criticisms are levelled at, for instance, the introduction of economic reforms and elections (which trigger the resumption of conflicts, e.g., Ivory Coast), and at the granting of significant authority to international peacebuilding actors (who thereby cause frictions with the local actors; Bosnia). The problematic nature of the relationship between international donors and local actors in peacebuilding has come under scrutiny, in which context emphasis has been placed on the importance of local ownership. Hybrid peacebuilding takes this thinking one step further, calling for forms of assistance grounded in deeper understanding of the local society.

A third factor is related not so much to peacebuilding per se as to wider changes in international security. The 9/11 attacks underlined the issue of state fragility and its potentially grave implications, as a result of which major powers began to emphasize the security aspects of peacebuilding. Swift stabilization became a high priority, and the roles of traditional actors in conflict resolution and security provision received renewed attention in this context. However, this poses a problem for the liberal peacebuilding model because of its almost exclusive focus on formal modern actors. Hybrid peace promises to provide a more inclusive alternative in this regard.

#### **A paradigm shift in peacebuilding strategy?**

What implications, then, does hybrid peace have for future peacebuilding? Does it represent a sea change in peacebuilding strategy? Although it is still premature to draw any definitive conclusion, several points emerge from the discussion above.

On a positive note, hybrid peace allows us to regard peacebuilding as a more flexible and dynamic process. For one, as already mentioned, it enables a critical reassessment of the global-local relationship in peacebuilding. In peacebuilding debates, there is a tendency to draw a picture of international liberal actors, who attempt to introduce a comprehensive package of liberal reforms, and local actors who oppose and resent such initiative. This schema is based on crude ontological/epistemological suppositions pitting liberal/ international/ peaceful initiatives against non-liberal/ violent/ local movements. Hybrid peace suggests that this does not reflect the reality of peacebuilding. Since most “local” and “traditional” societies have been formed through interaction with modern systems over many years, they are in practice *already* constituted by both liberal and non-liberal elements (one can only recall the processes of colonization and post-colonial independence), and these elements (liberal or non-liberal) might or might not contribute to sustainable peace. Relatedly, some of the “traditional” institutions and norms such as custom-based justice systems may be compatible with, or even seen as part of “liberalism.” In sum, hybrid peace helps understand peacebuilding as a dynamic, multidirectional process that does not allow for the dominance of any one actor or initiative. A deeper and reflexive understanding of the local context is thus called for.

Hybrid peace also has the potential to imagine potentially diverse designs and

end-states of peacebuilding. Under the liberal peacebuilding model, the debate on a given situation tends to revolve around the extent to which the peacebuilding effort has pushed the society closer to liberal norms; and this tendency is still predominant. Hybrid peace perspectives, in contrast, suggest that the meaning of sustainable peace can differ from one society to another, because each society can reveal a unique hybrid of liberal and non-liberal elements. In other words, as the meaning of “peace” to be achieved varies in each society, so do the actual peacebuilding strategies.

### **Future issues and challenges**

However, hybrid peace is not without its problems. Two issues stand out in particular. One is related to the effectiveness of hybrid peacebuilding. It is an open question whether a peacebuilding strategy, based on the understanding of the hybridity of the local conditions, proves a better strategy. Whereas liberal peacebuilding has a relatively clear idea of what to achieve in order to bring stability and peace, hybrid peacebuilding stems from scepticism towards such universalist benchmarks. One can see, however, how this scepticism can turn itself into doubts about any attempt to evaluate the actual efforts. Even in the case of liberal peacebuilding, there are several conflicting approaches with different priorities given, for instance, to individual rights or, alternatively, the provision of public welfare and order. Since hybrid peacebuilding emphasizes unique local conditions and criticizes the one-size-fits-all approach of the liberal model, peacebuilding practices under this approach do not lend themselves easily to assessment using an exogenous framework or cross-case analysis. But to point out that the social conditions and the resultant peacebuilding efforts are “hybrid” does not make the concept a useful guide for a better implementation of the international assistance. Some kind of policy-relevant framework that could enable constructive assessment of the actual practices would be needed.

A second, related question is perhaps more fundamental: does hybrid peacebuilding represent a retreat of liberalism in the field of peacebuilding? As described above, hybrid peacebuilding is intended as a criticism of the mainstream liberal peacebuilding model. Whereas liberal peacebuilding argues that the implementation of liberal systems and values will lead to lasting peace, hybrid peacebuilding underlines the possibility that the introduction of liberal norms and institutions is not the only way towards sustainable peace. Here, the problem is the great ambivalence of the hybrid peace argument when it comes to its suggestions for the future of peacebuilding. On the one hand, hybrid peacebuilding can be construed as meaning the establishment of conditions for lasting peace through a proper combination of liberal and non-liberal systems and values. Insofar as this stance sees the merits of liberal institutions only in relation to the objective of sustainable peace, hybrid peace does appear to signal a retreat of liberalism from its erstwhile dominance as the only peacebuilding paradigm. On the other hand, it is possible to see hybrid peace as a renewed attempt to *expand* liberalism in peacebuilding. In the regard, hybrid peace

theorists like to point out the “discovery” of liberal elements within pre-modern norms and social resources. The suggestion here is to regard the idea of liberalism as one strand of universal thought that is therefore not limited to Western modernity, and to try to identify and foster such “liberalist” attitudes and practices regardless of their origins. From this angle, hybrid peacebuilding can be seen as entrusted with a role to extend liberalism in non-Western societies.

This ambivalence of hybrid peacebuilding has an implication that could influence the shape of the future international order. As mentioned, hybrid peace is still a new concept that requires further development; and it remains to be seen what impact it might have on the policies and practices of peacebuilding. Nevertheless, the concept does have the potential to bring an important new dimension to the peacebuilding debate and beyond.

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[Further readings]

Roger Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh (ed.), *Rethinking the Liberal Peace: External Models and Local Alternatives* (Routledge, 2011)

*Global Governance*, Vol.18, No.1, January-March 2012 (Special Issue on hybrid peace governance)

Oliver P. Richmond and Audra Mitchell (eds.), *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Practice to Post-Liberalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

David Chandler, “Peacebuilding and the Politics of Non-linearity: Rethinking ‘Hidden’ Agency and ‘Resistance’”, *Peacebuilding*, Vol.1, No.1, February 2013, 17-32.

Timothy Raeymaekers, “Post-War Conflict and the Market for Protection: The Challenges to Congo’s Hybrid Peace,” *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.20, No.5, November 2013, 600-617.

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