Dilemmas of Democratization in War-Torn Societies

The Vail Symposium
March 27-29, 2006

A project of:
The Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden
The Graduate School of International Studies, University of Denver
in cooperation with
International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance)

Overview

The University of Denver’s Graduate School of International Studies will host a symposium in Vail, Colorado in March 2006 – together with the Uppsala University’s Department of Peace and Conflict Research and in cooperation with the intergovernmental organization International IDEA. The purpose is to build a research–to–policy bridge on perhaps the most pressing issue in contemporary international peace and security: How to promote sustainable democracy in war-torn societies as the most pivotal strategic objective in building peace.

Both policy makers and scholars have in the 1990s and 2000s found that war-to-democracy transitions present a set of thorny dilemmas for protagonists in the conflicts and for external peacemakers alike. How can societies shattered by war move towards democracy when the process of transition toward competitive party-politics, divisive constitution-making processes, and hard-fought elections also can exacerbate conflict among contending social forces?

The Vail symposium brings together a team of researchers who have evaluated in research a set of themes in which the war-to-democracy dilemmas are apparent: managing political violence, making over rebel forces into political parties, sharing political power, designing electoral systems, bringing together a devastated civil society, and the challenges faced by outside parties who engage in peacemaking, peacekeeping, and longer-term peacebuilding. The objective of the symposium is to bridge the divide between the theoretically informed research of this team and practical policy maker experience on the critical puzzles of war-to-democracy transition.

Participation at the symposium will feature a mix of 35 scholar experts, policy makers from international organizations, states, transnational non-governmental organizations, policy institutes, and development aid agencies. The results of the deliberations will be produced as a policy paper to share more widely the findings of the research-to-practitioner discussion. This project is generously supported by research awards from the Swedish Vetenskapsrådet (Research Council) and the Grant Program of the United States Institute of Peace. Additionally, International IDEA is graciously supporting the participation of practitioners in the Vail symposium.
The Symposium will result in these outcomes:

- Researcher-policy maker dialogue and networking on the complex challenges of international engagement to promote democracy in war-torn societies;
- Presentation and evaluation of a new comprehensive, policy-oriented assessment instrument for systematically evaluating democratization processes in war-torn societies (to be circulated to participants in advance);
- A policy report that summarizes the principal findings and recommendations of the symposium; and
- Integration of policy maker perspectives into the book that emerges from the Uppsala-Denver research project.

**Issues and Approaches**

How can the challenges of democratization and peacebuilding after violent conflicts be mitigated? In theory, democracy and peace reinforce each other. It has been assumed that also democratization and peace processes are parallel and mutually beneficial. However, researchers have identified a paradox; while democracy as a political system is associated with peaceful conflict management both within and between states, the road to democracy is often conflict-ridden. The conditions typical for war-torn societies, as well as the dynamics of the two processes of peacebuilding and democratization, contribute to this phenomenon. While non-violent conflicts are healthy features of any democracy, violent conflicts may undermine the foundations for a functioning democracy. Also after a peace deal is reached, the legacies of war remain.

This project explores this essential dilemma of democratization from two somewhat disparate strands of scholarly research: (1) democratic transition theory and practice, which has emphasized elite-negotiated democratization pacts, popular mobilization, political party transformations, neo-institutional constitution-making, electoral design and administration, and resurrection of civil society following authoritarian or exclusive rule; and (2) peacebuilding, with its emphasis on the imperatives of security, elite and public negotiation of comprehensive peace agreements, inclusion, demobilization of armed forces, external security guarantees, and reconciliation and healing for long-term conflict transformation.

The project presents findings on ways to better understand, and ultimately to manage, this central dilemma and a variety of sub-theme dilemmas that occur for protagonists and external parties alike when the simultaneous pursuit of democratization and peacebuilding clash.

**Themes**

The symposium is designed to assess these themes through a series of sessions that match researcher findings and policy-maker experience. Through the presentation of findings, the sharing of field-based experience, and dialogue among participants we hope this structure will generate new insights for both researchers and policy makers. Following introductory sessions that provide an overview of the research findings and introduce policy-maker concerns, sessions are organized around these themes.

- **Managing Security in Transitional Processes.** One of the most critical challenges in war-to-democracy transitions is achieving progress on the de-militarization of society that
characterizes times of war and the building of sufficient security to allow for democracy’s practice in a climate of fear, fear, and intimidation. The management of security raises a whole host of potential problems, challenges, and obstacles to democracy: the demobilization, return, and reintegration of former combatants, lingering threats of political violence, the need for election-related dispute resolution, and solving the “credible commitment” problem through the deployment of peace operations.

- **Political Parties and Electoral Processes.** When rebels lay down their arms, they often do so in the expectation that they might win at the ballot box what they fought for on the battlefield: they seek to transform into political parties. Likewise, during the war-to-democracy transition critical choices are made over electoral processes: the sequencing of elections, the electoral system formula, the nature of elections (e.g., to a legislature, constituent assembly, or both), and other critical election-related issues such as application citizenship laws. What are the principal findings from research and practical lessons learned on sequencing, shaping, and managing electoral processes in war-torn societies?

- **Power Sharing and Civil Society.** Because protagonists in today’s war rarely lose everything on the battlefield – instead, the war-to-democracy transition is negotiated – they usually end up sharing power either in temporary, transitional arrangements or in permanent, power-sharing based constitutions. At the same time, power sharing is essentially a coalescence of elites at the top, and one of the enduring concerns about power-sharing solutions are their top-down orientation, their perceived inflexibility, and the allegations that in many instances (because of the way modern wars are waged) they end up reinforcing ethnic, nationalist, or extremist tendencies. Civil society, on the other hand, is to be a cross-cutting (i.e., multicultural), conflict mitigating force in society that is destined to keep the state accountable. Is there an ideal powers-sharing design that solves the dilemmas that arise, and that allow for popular participation and the creation of multicultural civil societies?

- **Promoting International Democracy Building in War-Torn Societies.** Despite deep disagreements on a whole host of foreign policy issues among today’s great powers, there is a broad consensus among them (including the U.S., European Union, and in the policies of international organizations) favoring external action to promote democratization as a fundamental political strategy for nudging war-torn societies into peaceful management of their conflicts through democratic processes.
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Agenda

Monday, March 27

Afternoon  Participants Arrive

6:30pm  Reception and Light Dinner

Welcoming Remarks

Tuesday, March 28

8:30am  Breakfast

9:00-9:15  Welcome and Introductions

9:30-10:45  Session I: Dilemmas of Democratization, An Overview

Session Chair: Elizabeth Cousens, International Peace Academy

“Dilemmas of Democratization and Peacebuilding in War-Torn Societies”
Anna Jarstad, Uppsala University

“Dilemmas in Practice: Managing War-to-Democracy Transitions”
Lawrence Robertson, Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, USAID

Discussant: Elizabeth Cousens, International Peace Academy

Roundtable Discussion

10:45-11:00  Coffee and Tea Break

11:00-12:15  Session II: Managing Security in Transitional Processes

Panel Chair: Karen Feste, University of Denver

“Peacekeeping and the Dilemmas of Democratization of in War-Torn Societies”
Page Fortna, Columbia University

“Violence on the Path to Democracy: Dilemmas for Democratization in War-Shattered Societies”
Kristine Höglund, Uppsala University

Discussant: Johanna Mendelson-Forman, United Nations Foundation

Roundtable Discussion
12:15-2:00pm  
**Lunch**

2:00-3:00  
**Briefing and Discussion: The 2006 IDEA Handbook**  
*Democracy, Conflict, and Human Security*  
Timothy Sisk, University of Denver  
Sakuntala Kardirgamar-Rajasingham, International IDEA

3:30-3:45  
**Coffee and Tea Break**

3:45-5:00  
**Session III: Political Parties, Electoral Processes**  
Panel Chair: Carlos Juarez, Hawai’i Pacific University  
“From Soldiers to Parliamentarians: Can rebels change their stripes?”  
Mimmi Söderberg Kovaecs, Uppsala University  
“Elections in War-Torn Societies: Uncertain Turning Points of Transition”  
Benjamin Reilly, Australian National University  
Discussant: Sakuntala Kardirgamar-Rajasingham, International IDEA  
*Roundtable Discussion*

7:15pm  
**Symposium Banquet**

**Keynote Presentation**  
“Dilemmas of Democratization in War-Torn Societies: Implications for International Democracy Building”  
Massimo Tommasoli, International IDEA

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**Wednesday, March 29**

7:30am  
**Breakfast**

8:00-9:15  
**Session IV: Power Sharing and Civil Society**  
Panel Chair: Pauline Baker, The Fund for Peace  
“Power Sharing for Peace and Democracy?”  
Anna Jarstad, Uppsala University  
“Civil Society in War-to-Democracy Transitions”  
Roberto Belloni, Queen’s University Belfast  
Discussant: Pauline Baker, The Fund for Peace  
*Roundtable Discussion*

9:15-9:30  
**Coffee Break**
9:30-10:45  **Session V: Evaluating International Democracy Building in War-Torn Societies**
Panel Chair: Ambassador Gordon Smith, Center for Global Studies, University of Victoria
“International Engagement: Sanctions and Incentives for Peace through Democratization”
Peter Wallensteen, Uppsala University
“The Peacebuilding Commission and Democracy Building in War-Torn Societies”
Dr. Matthew Hodes, The Carter Center
Discussant: Massimo Tommasoli, International IDEA
Roundtable Discussion
Brief Break

10:45-12:00  **Session VI: Conclusions and Recommendations**
Panel Chair: Tom Farer, University of Denver
Remarks: Elizabeth Cousens, International Peace Academy
Pauline Baker, The Fund for Peace

12:00-12:15  **Concluding Remarks**

12:15pm  **Lunch**