

## *Introduction*

International peacebuilding interventions in post-conflict countries have become widespread since the end of the Cold War – yet they have often confounded expectations, ending in reversals and disappointment. The international community's approach to building sustainable peace in war-torn states rests upon the notion that an engineered process of simultaneous statebuilding and democratization can bring modern political order to post-conflict states. Indeed, the United Nations (UN) has, at great cost, made implementing that theory one of its signature undertakings in its transformative peacebuilding endeavor. But in all too few of the post-conflict countries in which this transformation has been attempted have real improvements in the quest for effective and legitimate governance been achieved. In turn, human security and global stability remain compromised by persistent political instability, weak and corrupt governance, and chronic underdevelopment in ostensibly post-conflict countries.

This book explains why international post-conflict interventions have fallen short of the weighty aspirations they embody. It reframes the peacebuilding puzzle by presenting a new theory of how domestic elites construct political order during and after peacebuilding interventions. A comparative analysis of the UN's transformative peacebuilding attempts in Cambodia, East Timor, and Afghanistan shows that while international peacebuilders want to build effective and legitimate government, domestic elites essentially do not. As is the case in much of the developing world, post-conflict elites use strategies to prioritize their own political survival and power that result in a neopatrimonial political order that better delivers on their goals. Peacebuilding interventions thus generate a set of unintended yet predictable effects. In all three cases, the UN's efforts at peacebuilding through elite settlement followed by a process of simultaneous statebuilding and democratization were co-opted by a small subset of domestic power-holders who successfully closed down the political space and stunted state capacity.

To be sure, each of these countries is better off than before the peace operations. Yet the goals of intervention have not truly been met. Instead, there are striking similarities in the patterns of neopatrimonial order that emerge in the aftermath of intervention. This book makes the case that the peacebuilding approach is, at least in part, itself responsible for the eventually disappointing governance outcomes that emerge in post-conflict countries.

This introduction briefly presents the core argument of the book, highlighting the theoretical advances it makes in the context of the existing literature on peacebuilding and discussing its significance in light of the contemporary practice of peacebuilding. It sketches the empirical dynamics associated with the interaction between international interventions and domestic elite incentives in Cambodia, East Timor, and Afghanistan. It then outlines the structure of the book.

## **The Politics of Peacebuilding**

The study of the processes and implications of peacebuilding has developed significantly over the past twenty-five years, alongside the evolution of actual policy efforts on the ground over that timeframe. A large body of work emerging from both the scholarly and practitioner realms has yielded valuable contributions in terms of exploring the multiple dimensions of conflict cessation and peacekeeping through negotiated settlements, defining peacebuilding and its many different dimensions, distinguishing the effects of different types of international peace operation, identifying some of the contextual factors necessary for success or explaining particular failures, and generating policy implications.<sup>1</sup> Yet there remain surprising gaps in the study of peacebuilding and related shortcomings in its practice. In particular, scholars and practitioners have tended to focus on the processes of peacebuilding, emphasizing the institutional contours of peace settlements and the mandate

<sup>1</sup> On peacekeeping and conflict cessation, see Fortna 2008; and Stedman, Rothchild, and Cousens 2002. On the multiple dimensions of peacebuilding, see Jarstad and Sisk 2008; Paris 2004; and Paris and Sisk 2009. On different types of peace operation, especially the machinery of international transitional administration, see Caplan 2005, 2012; Chesterman 2004; and Tansey 2009. On contextual factors conditioning peacebuilding success, see Autesserre 2010; Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Girod 2015; and Howard 2008. For policy implications, see Call 2012; Fukuyama 2004; and Ghani and Lockhart 2008.

and mode of implementation of peace operations. The most rigorous analyses have centered around what contextual factors condition the probability of peacebuilding success and failure, but they have largely neglected the conjunctural nature of the causal interaction between peacebuilding interventions and domestic political dynamics that truly determines whether a stable and lasting peace is achieved. Peacebuilding research has also been relatively myopic, focusing on the immediate question of whether international efforts help to establish peace and prevent a return to conflict, with much less attention to the aftermath of these interventions and the political dynamics and outcomes they set in motion.

This book, by contrast, approaches the study of peacebuilding through a historical institutionalist lens, viewing it as a hyperpolitical undertaking that interacts over time with the reconstruction of political order in post-conflict states. I illustrate that post-conflict elites react to, shape, and co-opt international interventions across countries in a sequence of recognizable patterns that undermine the quest for sustainable peace. The peacebuilding literature's analytical focus to date on the peace operations themselves – their mandates, mechanisms, and immediate outcomes – is partly a result of the recent nature of the surge in international attempts at peacebuilding. Now that enough time has elapsed from the wave of peacebuilding efforts initiated following the end of the Cold War, it is also time to focus more squarely on post-intervention outcomes in fragile and conflict-affected countries. This book takes on the least-studied aspect of post-conflict interventions by tying the implementation of peacebuilding interventions to what happens after the international community leaves. In doing so, it demonstrates that peacebuilding outcomes are best understood as the result of a dynamic contest between two alternative visions of post-conflict political order – that of the international community and that of domestic elites.

### **The Argument and its Significance**

Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has invested a great deal in what I term the UN's "transitional governance" strategy of transformative peacebuilding – a period of simultaneous statebuilding and democratization over which international peacebuilders govern in tandem with domestic elites. In each country

in which this approach is applied, it has resulted in new institutions intended to form the basis for effective and legitimate governance. But, in case after case, initial euphoria at the successful holding of elections and design of the formal institutions of the modern state has eventually turned into dismay at the poor governance outcomes that result. This book seeks to explain why – and, in so doing, to shed some light on how peacebuilding strategies might be improved. It does so by pursuing a comparative analysis of the UN transitional governance interventions in Cambodia (1991–1993), East Timor (1999–2002), and Afghanistan (2002–2005), conducted on the basis of fieldwork in each country and extensive complementary secondary research.<sup>2</sup> In each case, as in other post-conflict countries, the UN made reconstructing state capacity and building a democratic political system the explicit goals of a peacebuilding intervention.

The core contribution of this book is a new historical institutionalist theory about how post-conflict political order is constructed. It explains the unintended governance outcomes that emerge as a result of competing international and domestic visions of post-conflict political order at three critical phases along the temporal sequence of the peacebuilding pathway: the peace settlement that ends violent conflict; the implementation of a transformative peace operation; and the aftermath of the intervention. Elite peace settlements are intended to mark an agreement on a country's post-conflict future – but, in reality, they serve more as the terms upon which conflict continues by political means. A sharper understanding of elite political contest leading into and coming out of the conflict is crucial to understand how domestic elites embarked, in tandem with the international community, on reshaping post-conflict political order. In turn, the implementation of transitional governance, a process of institutional engineering intended to strengthen the state and initiate a process of democratization, becomes co-opted in practice by specific elites intent on entrenching their emerging grips on power. By choosing elites with whom to govern, peacebuilding interventions confer power upon them – and those elites use that power to enact subtle strategies of institutional conversion to their own ends. In the aftermath of intervention, finally,

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this book, I refer to and discuss the country case studies in the sequence in which the peacebuilding interventions occurred. In addition, following scholarly convention, I refer to East Timor by its anglicized name, rather than by its official name, Timor-Leste.

elites consolidate a neopatrimonial political order in which traditional, patronage-based governance co-exists with the formal institutions of modern governance.

Post-conflict states thus come to rest in a suboptimal political economy equilibrium that falls well short of the type of political order the international community aims to transplant through peacebuilding interventions. This outcome, as illustrated by the post-intervention political landscape of the three cases examined in this book, is characterized by discretionary instead of rule-bound law and policymaking, weak state capacity and poor service delivery, and attenuated democratic political practices. The cases illustrate, in subtly different ways, how the neopatrimonial political order that emerges in post-conflict states is perversely enabled by the transitional governance model's simultaneous pursuit of state- and democracy-building and its unique need for a domestic counterpart to aid in governance. In undertaking peacebuilding through transitional governance, the UN acts on an implicit theory about how best to change the domestic political game in order to create the foundations for sustainable peace. Yet, in practice, at each phase of the peacebuilding pathway domestic political realities trump international objectives.

In Cambodia, for example, the UN emphasized a quick route to elections to excise the Khmer Rouge, which was hostile to the peace process, from the legitimate body politic; but this tactic strengthened the hand of Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP). The UN's reliance on the CPP as its *de facto* counterpart in administering the country during the transitional period served to further entrench the CPP in the state apparatus, to the extent that even losing the country's first election was not enough to sever that grip. Since then, the struggle among Cambodian elites for an unassailable locus of power in the country has bloated the weak bureaucracy and oriented it toward patronage politics. Over time, Hun Sen and CPP elites have cemented in place a hegemonic regime, propped up by extensive and pervasive patronage networks, for which elections and the power-sharing formula stipulated by the constitution serve as window-dressing.

East Timor's major peacebuilding hurdle after the independence referendum was the hollowed-out state infrastructure left behind when the Indonesian government pulled out of the tiny nation. The UN peace operation there allowed only a limited degree of Timorese participation in executive governance of the country during the transitional period.

Moreover, its assumption that Timorese elites were united and its desire to maintain its neutrality in Timorese politics meant that the necessary elite political settlement was neglected. As a result, it mishandled the growing demands for increased “Timorization” by appointing as its preferred counterparts a small, yet powerful clique of revolutionary-era leaders who returned from a long exile to govern their country. These elites failed to translate their electoral mandate into inclusive policies for the Timorese population and the country’s reconstruction. Intra-elite schisms, in the absence of countervailing state authority, spiraled into renewed violent conflict. The country’s current leadership perpetuates a hierarchical governance structure as well as the reliance on patronage distribution for political support, a dynamic that has intensified on the basis of East Timor’s petroleum wealth.

In Afghanistan, the tension between state- and democracy-building was at the core of the international community’s dilemma in developing a peacebuilding strategy. It was framed as the struggle between the imperative to stabilize the country and the goal of giving the country, torn apart by many years of war, a new lease on democratic nationhood. The UN and the United States assumed that for the state to function at all, the loci of power held by the *mujahideen* leaders would have to be incorporated into the new government. Indeed, the country’s first contemporary president, Hamid Karzai, invited such warlords to serve in his cabinet and as his provincial governors. Once bestowed with this legitimacy, these well-resourced veterans of Afghan political society were adept in consolidating their own patron–client networks; and elites around Karzai mimicked their behavior in the struggle for political support. The result is a weak and fragmentary state that struggles to resource even the limited activities it undertakes and to protect its society against the predatory rent-seeking and violence perpetuated by entrenched political elites at both the central and subnational levels.

Post-conflict developing countries, such as the three discussed in this book, hardly offer the fertile soil necessary for strong and effective states to take root and flourish. Indeed, a reasonable null expectation is that international peacebuilding interventions will have no real impact whatsoever. Yet the evidence from post-conflict Cambodia, East Timor, and Afghanistan, as I demonstrate in this book, tells a more nuanced story. Remarkably similar transitional governance processes in each case were surprisingly successful in (re)constructing the minimal basis for effective state administration and enabling local elites to

come to some form of agreement on post-conflict institutional foundations. Elites in each of the three countries, guided by the UN, reached some consensus on a suitable administrative and democratic architecture for the local context and then held democratic elections to mark the endpoint of the transitional phase. Despite those successes in initiating the processes of statebuilding and democratization, however, each country has since faced significant challenges in consolidating effective and legitimate governance. This book argues that these hurdles are a result of the interaction between the international interventions and the domestic elites with whom they work.

These conclusions are by no means intended to damn peacebuilding efforts in their entirety. On the contrary, in each country, the political settlement has successfully prevented the return to full-scale violent conflict, a major achievement considering that post-conflict countries face a very high risk of renewed civil war in the absence of intervention.<sup>3</sup> This study is not a challenge to the comprehensive body of empirical evidence and relative consensus in the literature that international peacekeeping interventions help to maintain ceasefires and prevent a return to civil conflict.<sup>4</sup> In the three cases studied, as with the majority of the broader universe of countries in which the international community has mounted peace operations, political violence has been quelled, at least to some degree, by the international presence.<sup>5</sup> In addition, each country has recovered some measure of state capacity and political stability – each has increased revenue collection and the provision of public services and has held a series of elections. The point, rather, is to elucidate the difficulties in the complex endeavor of implanting state capacity and democracy in developing post-conflict countries within a short timeframe – and to make the case that a big part of the challenge is the logic underpinning the UN's transitional governance approach.

The theory and argument advanced here help to shed light on a number of crucial and practicable policy implications for reforming

<sup>3</sup> Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom 2008.    <sup>4</sup> Fortna 2004, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Although low-level political violence persists in Cambodia and East Timor, their civil wars were terminated through international involvement. Afghanistan, however, remains a country in civil conflict: there, the number of battle deaths per year fell below 1,000, the typical threshold above which a conflict is identified as a war, only in 2003 and 2004; otherwise it has remained above 1,000. UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, as presented in Gleditsch et al. 2002; and Themnér and Wallensteen 2014.

the practice of peacebuilding, detailed in the book's conclusion. A better understanding of how international peacebuilding objectives meet reality on the ground in post-conflict countries can help design better interventions in two major ways. From a theoretical perspective, it becomes apparent that some objectives may be simply too unrealistic to be retained in their entirety. It is a significant policy oversight to not squarely acknowledge that the different components of modern political order – stability, government effectiveness, and democratic legitimacy – emerge in different ways and are by no means always mutually reinforcing. In practical terms, nonetheless, it may yet be possible to adjust the manner in which peacebuilding is undertaken in order to prevent the undermining of core objectives. Second, viewing the peacebuilding pathway in temporal continuity and with an emphasis on elite incentives highlights, for example, that major policy setbacks have emerged from an overemphasis on specific institutional form, when instead the focus should be on the governance functions served at critical junctures on the pathway to peace.

### Structure of the Book

The first two chapters lay the foundation for the book's analytical approach and contributions. Chapter 1 discusses the utility of the study in light of the contemporary practice of international peacebuilding. It defines the main focus of inquiry, which is the UN's transitional governance approach to transformative peacebuilding, and situates the book's argument within the existing peacebuilding literature, highlighting its unique contributions. It then introduces the historical institutionalist lens the book adopts to better understand peacebuilding and describes the research design of the study. Chapter 2 develops the book's core theory that international interventions enable and are co-opted by post-conflict elites intent on forging a neopatrimonial political order. Linking scholarship on conflict and peace to that on political, institutional, and economic development, it builds a theoretical framework that outlines what we should expect to see of elites attempting to build post-conflict political order. It lays out the logic underpinning the book's narrative, which spans a sequence of critical peacebuilding phases that form the course of international interventions: the peace settlement phase, the transitional governance period, and the aftermath of intervention. This causal argument is



*Structure of the Book*

9

woven from a number of thematic threads concerning the manner in which elites negotiate and respond to moments of transition and shape institutions and political order coming out of those formative junctures.

The three chapters that form the main empirical body of the book then focus on each of these peacebuilding phases in turn, analyzing case material from Cambodia, East Timor, and Afghanistan at each juncture. This phase-by-phase narrative structure, in contrast to the more typical case-by-case approach, enables scholars and practitioners to better understand how critical junctures and path dependence contribute to the overall outcome of neopatrimonial political order in post-conflict states. Chapter 3 demonstrates how internationally mediated peace settlements in Cambodia, East Timor, and Afghanistan attempted to not merely bring an end to conflict but also to resolve the problems that created conflict at the outset. Through a comparative assessment of the politics leading into and out of the conflict, it demonstrates that these settlements are best understood as conditional elite pacts that initiate a new phase of elite conflict over the construction of political order. Chapter 4 focuses squarely on the peacebuilding interventions implemented by the United Nations in tandem with domestic counterparts. Based on the notion that statebuilding and democratization are mutually reinforcing, the UN attempts to implement both simultaneously to reorient domestic politics away from conflict. The chapter shows that there are, in fact, deep contradictions between these two processes and that they undermine each other when pursued together. In the three cases, conferring legitimate power and resources upon specific domestic elites enabled them to restrict political competition and dominate the process of post-conflict institutional design. Chapter 5 addresses the neopatrimonial political order that persists in Cambodia, East Timor, and Afghanistan in the aftermath of their international interventions, examining the consequences of the institutional decisions made during the transitional governance process. Through the historical institutionalist lens, it examines how power shifts and settles through the institutional system, paying particular attention to the manner in which domestic elites operate within and convert the institutional infrastructure to their own political-economic advantage. In all three countries, the neopatrimonial equilibrium has proven unfortunately resilient in undermining the quest for rule-bound, effective, and legitimate post-conflict governance.

The conclusion reviews the key findings of the book and discusses its implications for the future practice and study of peacebuilding. It probes the validity of the argument through a brief examination of other peacebuilding interventions. The bulk of the conclusion is devoted to a discussion of how peacebuilding might be improved on the basis of the book's findings. First, it disentangles the statebuilding and democratization imperatives that have been linked together in the pursuit of transformative peacebuilding. It then offers six targeted policy implications, along with a caveat, for improving peacebuilding practice. Finally, it reflects on the implications of this book for future research on peacebuilding and other challenges facing post-conflict developing countries.