The Convergence of Peacebuilding and State Building: Addressing a Common Purpose from Different Perspectives

Peacebuilding and state building have been discussed in the past as concepts having a difficult relationship with one another, at times involving trade-offs and even dilemmas. Analysing this relationship on the basis of relevant OECD/DAC documents, this briefing paper argues that the two concepts have in fact increasingly converged, representing today two different perspectives on one underlying problem. Regarding their positive vision, their action-guiding principles and even the areas of engagement they suggest, they are now largely congruent. This surprisingly high degree of common ground most likely reflects lesson-drawing from past state-building efforts and the older peacebuilding debate. Consolidating the two strands of the debate into one common framework and moving "from fragility to resilience" could be a logical way forward.

For many years, development actors have – sometimes forcefully, sometimes tacitly – agreed that the concepts and politics of peacebuilding and state building are mutually exclusive. Peacebuilding would focus on immediate needs arising from proximity to violent conflict, thus seeking to prevent an outbreak or a return to violence and supporting peace processes in society. State-building, in contrast, would emphasise the longer-term developmental goal of an effective and responsive state. The two approaches, it was said, sometimes lead to difficult trade-offs or dilemmas: Will strengthening state capacity, for example, always be a contribution to peace if in a war-torn country the government in power is notorious for its uncompromising stance towards an armed opposition? And what does a peace settlement that comprises an amnesty for some, but usually not all, crimes committed during a civil war mean for the claim of justice that weak states often need so badly? These are but two examples of the difficult choices which peacebuilders and state builders can be faced with.

In the past, development agencies have often discussed the agendas of peacebuilding and state building in separate organisational units that did not always engage with each other. Recently, however, there have been moves to bring the two debates closer together. Within the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), for example, the working groups on fragile states and on conflict prevention have been merged into the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF). But is this solution viable given the alleged incompatibility of peacebuilding and state building?

The aim of this Briefing Paper is to provide some insight by discussing the evolving relationship between peacebuilding and state building as expressed in OECD/DAC documents that represent the latest available consensus among development agencies (see Box 1). This approach comes with an important restriction. DAC documents represent a consensus of the government-related *development community*. In terms of concepts and terminology, both peacebuilding and state building are discussed in different ways within the traditional foreign policy and security communities as well as in academic and public debates. When concentrating on development policy documents, thus, we do not deny the legitimate existence of alternative conceptions that differ from those discussed here.

Departing from a brief assessment of the conceptual evolution of peacebuilding and state building, our analysis compares both terms with respect to three major categories: (1) the perspective each of the concepts adopts with regard to certain end goals (peace or state); (2) the "positive visions" they refer to with regard to properties of the political system (structural stability or resilience) and their action-guiding principles; and (3) intersections and differences with regard to areas of engagement.

The analysis presented here does not support the widespread notion that peacebuilding and state building are in any important respects at odds with each other. While they do represent different perspectives on very

> **Box 1:   Main OECD/DAC papers on peacebuilding and state building**
>
> *OECD/DAC* (2001): Helping prevent violent conflict: the DAC guidelines [builds on, and includes, the 1997 OECD/DAC guidelines on conflict, peace and development co-operation]
>
> – (2005): Preventing conflict and building peace: a manual of issues and entry points
>
> – (2007): Fragile states: policy commitment and principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations: DAC High Level Meeting, April 2007
>
> – (2008): Concepts and dilemmas of state building in fragile situations: from fragility to resilience (OECD/DAC Discussion Paper)

similar underlying problems (i. e., fragile social peace and the destruction of political order), they are largely congruent as regards their positive vision and action-guiding principles and, likewise, overlap when it comes to areas of engagement suggested by each of them. Even where there are no explicit overlaps, complementarity is more likely to prevail than competition. Statements which imply that peacebuilding and state building are competing concepts, representing opposing poles of a continuum, or which regard one of the concepts as a subset of the other usually refer to earlier conceptions or to those from outside the development policy arena. More than anything, peacebuilding and state building are separated by the historical and political contexts within which each of them has evolved. It is useful to be aware of these contexts in order to better understand the origins of statements that emphasise tensions and trade-offs.

The evolution of the concepts

The roots of the contemporary concept of peacebuilding can be traced back to efforts by the United Nations in the late Cold War period to help end collective violence within as well as across states. Peacebuilding evolved into a broader development concept during the 1990s – i. e., in the face of civil wars and inter-ethnic violent conflict that could no longer be attributed to superpower rivalry. In 1997 and 2001, respectively, the DAC produced major development policy documents representing the donor consensus of the time.

State building, as a term denoting external contributions to the process by which a state emerges, came into prominence with U.S.-led military interventions after September 11, 2001, in Afghanistan and Iraq. More recent debates have increasingly pointed to the limits of external involvement and instead emphasised the importance of domestic actors.

The recognition of the complexity of peacebuilding and state-building efforts had similar effects in both debates, with the conceptualisation of state building in influential recent papers echoing the development of the peacebuilding concept a decade earlier: both concepts, as they evolved, exhibited a tendency to broaden and balance their focus (see Figure 1). Peacebuilding initially exhibited a strong emphasis on interventions targeting civil society in the phase of violent conflict and the immediate post-conflict period. Soon, however, peacebuilders recognised the interdependence of different stages of peace and conflict. They broadened their view of peacebuilding to the whole spectrum from the prevention of violent conflict to the long-term formation of sustainable conflict management in post-conflict societies – including a more prominent role for the state. Similarly, state building has in more recent documents abandoned its initial focus on the reconstruction of political institutions in the immediate "post-breakdown" (usually post-conflict) period, and begun to include the task of working against fragility at various stages and with various actors, acknowledging the role of civil society.
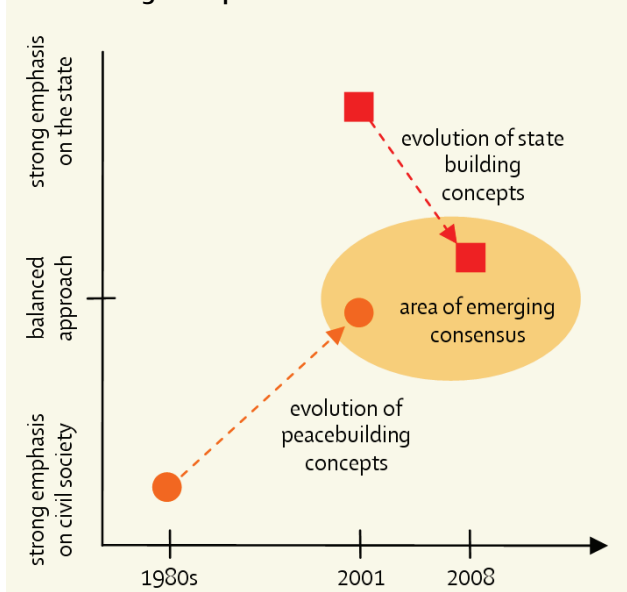
Concentrating on either one of these two developments, some authors have suggested to conceive of peacebuilding as a subset of state-building activities while others, conversely, have considered state building to be a part of peacebuilding. We argue instead that just as peacebuilding evolved into a general concept of addressing issues of imminent, ongoing and past violent conflicts, state building has evolved into a generic concept for all kinds of measures geared towards countering different degrees of state fragility. This, at least, is the understanding that can be derived from the relevant DAC documents on each of the two issues (see Box 2). It is the definitions given in these documents – reflecting the current state of the debate within the donor community – that underlie the analysis below.

Different perspectives

The most relevant difference between peacebuilding and state building is the overarching perspective they adopt. While the building of states is a task of enormous instrumental value for such end goals as peace, (human) security, and a rule-based framework for socioeconomic development, it should not be considered a goal in itself. Modern states have been instrumental in advancing these goals, but they have also been the source of tremendous grievances. Peacebuilding, conversely, is concerned with bringing about an element of favourable development itself, both for individuals and for a social entity; thus, peace can justifiably be regarded as an end goal (alongside other goals, such as poverty reduction, that are not in the focus of peacebuilding) rather than an instrument. In short, while peacebuilding is a multi-faceted single-purpose task, state building can be characterised as a multi-purpose, instrumental task.

Beyond the issue of instrumentality and purpose, there is a widespread perception that peacebuilding and state building differ with regard to their respective level of "intrusiveness". As a consequence of recent interna-

Figure 1: The evolution of peacebuilding and state building concepts over time

tional events, state building is often considered to be more concerned with promoting the self-interest of intervening powers while peacebuilding, often under the aegis of the United Nations, appears as a rather "non-partisan" operation in the interest of a population affected by violent conflict. Although such images may resound with adherents of a traditional understanding of peacebuilding as a social movement with considerable scepticism vis-à-vis the state, the documents analysed here do not support this view. In fact, as discussed below, recent state-building documents explicitly denounce the idea of imposing an external design.

Convergent visions and principles

Despite obvious differences in context, wording and focus, peacebuilding and state building share a largely common point of reference, namely situations of fragile social peace and the destruction of basic elements of political order. Moreover, the two concepts are strikingly similar with regard to the positive visions expressed: "structural stability" in the case of peacebuilding; and "resilience" in the case of state building. Both terms refer to properties of a socio-political fabric that enable it to absorb internal and external pressure for change through adaptive processes that do not tend to disrupt but rather help preserve the social contract embodied in the existing institutional make-up.

Likewise, there are clear overlaps in a number of guiding principles, indicating a common understanding as well as a likely transfer of experience and lessons from one debate to the other. Shared basic principles include, inter alia, the recognition that external influence will always be limited; that negative fallout from interventions should be considered ("do no harm"); that development actors should assist, rather than replace, local institutions; and that all involvement should be planned for the long term while simultaneously allowing for timely and flexible reaction to changing circumstances. Consequently, both debates stress the importance of establishing comprehensive analytical capacities and using them appropriately. Many analytical instruments that more recent state-building strategies refer to – such as peace and conflict impact assessments or scenario building – were originally introduced in the context of efforts to make peacebuilding more effective.

In one respect, however, tensions remain: In DAC documents on peacebuilding, liberal democracy appears as the preferred institutional blueprint, while recent state-building documents (including DAC 2008) recognise a diversity of possible political arrangements to generate legitimacy. Early state-building concepts, at least in the political sphere, had been as explicit as peacebuilding in favouring liberal democracy and even more explicit in giving preference to building state institutions almost as a goal in itself (see Figure 1). Recently, however, deliberations among DAC donors have become more concerned with functional requirements of resilient statehood in a rather flexible approach, pointing at questions of legitimacy in general and at the overall political process. Their conception of peacebuilding, by contrast, exhibited considerable continuity in its explicit preference for the liberal democratic paradigm.

In its most recent formulation at the DAC level, state building is conceived of as a process that occurs at three consecutive levels: At the first level, which is concerned with overarching political processes, reaching clarity over basic institutional arrangements is supported. At the two following levels, governance programming and policies in key sectors, state and society can then actively engage in shaping policies. The idea is to thus create an institutional layout that is better adapted to local needs than an imported form of government.

The peacebuilding perspective, in turn, by having a predetermined preference for the liberal democracy paradigm, pays less attention to the process of negotiating institutional arrangements. Avoiding a universal ranking of priorities, it focuses immediately on policies. It is difficult to argue, though, that these are fundamental tensions between the two concepts, as the DAC has not released major peacebuilding guidelines since 2001 and any update would likely reflect the same lessons from major external interventions that recent state-building documents have already integrated.

Overlapping areas of engagement

Looking at the general employment of instruments, both peacebuilding and state building include socio-economic recovery, security sector reform, strengthening civil society and good governance measures. Still, some differences persist. Decentralization, taxation and fighting corruption figure much more prominently on the state-building agenda. Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), gender issues and emergency relief play a significant role in peacebuilding. These differences can be explained by the primary context each approach originally referred to: consolidation of state capacity and early stages of post-conflict reconstruction, respectively. Yet there is no compelling reason to assume that those differences constitute insurmountable incompatibilities. Rather, dilemmas and trade-offs are inevitable within each of the two concepts as they present themselves today as wholesale approaches for solving fundamental issues of social order that always incur some social costs.

Both perspectives advocate context-specific forms of engagement. Peacebuilding perspectives usually define context by conflict stages; state-building perspectives, in turn, by degrees of capacity and willingness. In spite of these differing approaches of categorization, similarities abound. Both concepts agree that windows of opportunity in post-conflict phases should be taken advantage of. The primacy of diplomatic and military means during peaks of violence is unchallenged. Mediation is advanced as a tool to address "submerged tensions" or "political divisions". Both approaches suggest strategically reducing development aid for authoritarian governments, balancing the "opposing risks" of legitimising an unwanted regime and increasing the population's sufferings.

Slight differences exist only with regard to the degree to which internal or external actors are expected to drive the transformation process. In an interesting twist that may come as a surprise in the light of quite intrusive state-building enterprises within the past decade, the most recent DAC documents on state building call explicitly for a "light footprint". They caution against, for example, the dangers of untimely elections in fragile or even post-conflict situations. DAC peacebuilding documents up until 2001, by contrast, while far from advocating a "heavy footprint", argued for tackling the "causes of structural conflict" even in difficult situations, preferably including the introduction of liberal democracy. Again, this difference, rather than being an inevitable contrast between the concepts, is probably best explained by lessons learned over the last decade.

Conclusion

Both peacebuilding and state building have expanded their scope over time. Current DAC documents address virtually every single aspect and phase of political conflict and the formation of social order, sharing an ever-growing number of instruments and activities. It seems fair to say that the concepts have increasingly converged. Although there is a widespread perception that peacebuilding and state building are distinct concepts representing opposite poles of a continuum and certain differences between the concepts do exist the tendency in some recent scholarship and policy documents to emphasise dissimilarities cannot be sustained.

Where trade-offs between, or even the incompatibility of, the two concepts are stressed, such judgements cannot be justifiably based on an impartial analysis of the latest available consensus among development agencies, such as the DAC documents compared in this paper. Rather, the overriding finding is that peacebuilding and state building, as conceived by the DAC, ultimately address a common purpose from different per-

spectives. Focusing on that purpose is the best way to ensure that the different perspectives of peacebuilding and state building generate compatible or complementary approaches of engagement.

That is not to say that all concerns regarding dilemmas or trade-offs in contexts of peacebuilding and state building are *per se* unfounded. However, the challenges will not generally result from tensions between concepts. Rather, these dilemmas are typical of the societal processes that underlie the contexts in which both approaches operate. Both generate winners and losers in every society. Just how a society deals with such a situation, how much it is prepared to use the state as an instrument to promote the winners' interests at the expense of the losers, to what extent elites fuel or mitigate the tensions arising from social and political change – the answers to these and other questions are not predetermined by choosing either a peacebuilding or a state-building perspective. Rather, they need to be negotiated by local actors regardless of how the international community designates its efforts. Likewise, the choice of donor instruments that best support local processes for peace and resilience needs to be based on a thorough analysis of risks and benefits. Such analyses may yield conflicting results depending on available sources, external actors' political preferences or other issues unrelated to the conceptual debate.

Consequently, future discussions should not contrast these debates but instead seek a consolidated approach to their common challenge. "From Fragility to Resilience" is a phrase that can pave the way to defining a common cause. This would allow international donors to continue their search for the instruments best suited for concrete situations of state fragility and violent conflict under a common framework.

Dr. Jörn Grävingholt
Senior Researcher in the Governance, Statehood, Security Department at DIE

Dr. Stefan Gänzle
Researcher in the Bi- and Multilateral Development Cooperation Department at DIE

Sebastian Ziaja
Researcher in the Governance, Statehood, Security Department at DIE