

The WPF Seminar Series

The World Peace Foundation, an operating foundation affiliated solely with The Fletcher School, aims to provide intellectual leadership on issues of peace, justice and security. It believes that innovative research and teaching are critical to the challenges of making peace around the world, and should go hand-in-hand with advocacy and practical engagement with the toughest issues. It regularly convenes expert seminars to address today's most pressing issues. The seminar, "New Wars, New Peace: Security Perspectives" was held October 29 & 30, 2012.

This seminar note is organized around prominent themes that emerged throughout the seminar. Participants' responses were non-attributable for a more thorough discussion.

New War, New Peace: Security Perspectives

Seminar Note

29 – 30 October 2012

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

OVERVIEW

Over recent decades, the intensity and incidence of war—and indeed the very nature of organized violence—have been changing. On the basis that Mary Kaldor's *New and Old War* (first published in 1999) provided a seminal explication of these transformations, this seminar used the opportunity of the third edition of her book (2012) to explore important aspects of contemporary conflicts from a security perspective.

Central to the discussion was an expanded exploration of Kaldor's concept of new wars.

Cases examined in light of this concept and security threats were: Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia. The seminar also examined the implications of drones and cyber warfare.

Several important themes emerged:

- The limited utility of tactical innovation in counterinsurgency without attention to strategic-level political dynamics;
- The need to problematize the nature and role of the state, rather than present statebuilding as an unproblematic solution, and to examine the concept of "ungoverned spaces";
- Consequently, the standard policy approach whereby security is the first step, followed by governance and development can be counterproductive. The three tasks should instead be addressed in parallel;
- The blurring of lines between political violence and crime, both in terms of non-state actors and state responses;
- The far-reaching implications of the United States' widening use of drones for targeted killings.

What is “new” war?

“New wars” are not *new occurrences*: rather the “new wars” paradigm provides a different lens with which to understand armed conflict and seek solutions. One way to conceptualize the distinction between “old” and “new wars” is a difference in “ideal types.” The Clausewitzian “ideal type” of war is a military contest of wills between states, tending to an absolute in which each mobilizes the maximum effort to compel the other to submit. “New wars,” on the other hand, represent different and diverse “ideal types” of war, for example where conflict is a joint enterprise among different groups, for whom benefiting from the continued armed conflict is an end in itself. Ongoing armed conflict can also be a mode of peripheral governance. As Kaldor puts it, the inner tendency, is not “war without limits, but war without end.”

These interests might be purposeful engagement in violence that is considered to have value in and of itself—for example to inculcate martial values or pursue *jihād*. It could be creating and sustaining ethnic identities—hardening the separation of groups in a way that favors certain power relationships to the benefit of key leaders. Armed conflict can also be method and pretext for seizing assets, pursuing a business opportunity, or managing a frontier. Armed groups in these contexts could define success, even victory, as continuing to fight.

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A different array of actors is also involved: traditional state armies remain engaged, but they operate alongside irregular militias, non-state belligerents, criminal gangs and international forces. They are empowered by new technologies and cross-border relations that participate in producing new conflict dynamics. Local allegiances are increasingly pivotal, particularly in contexts where the national government is unable to exert its authority or where its means of exerting authority are inherently unstable.

For Kaldor, supporting rule of law is the crucial step for buttressing societies suffering from armed conflict or chronic instability.

Tactical Successes and Political Strategy

The U.S. war in Iraq demonstrates the environment of “new war” and the challenges of an effective response. In this case, the U.S. decided to collapse the Sunni-dominated Baathist state following the announced end of major combat in 2003; thereby fueling a civil war that empowered new actors. Tribal and sectarian identities took on greater salience and played a pivotal role in the patterns of violence. Acknowledging this, U.S. Marines in Anbar Province reconfigured the clear-and-hold pacification strategy used in Vietnam and began engaging with the local population including sheiks, training police units, and responding to local grievances. They identified partners among the tribal militias that comprised much of the insurgency, enabling the isolation of international jihadists.

However, we need to ask whether successful tactical innovations were the principal cause of U.S. success, or whether parallel and unrelated political developments drove that success. The tactical reforms coincided with the “Sunni Awakening,” as well as regional power politics and internal shifts within Iraqi politics and society, which together generated a reduction in violence and a significant improvement in the security environment.

There is a danger that improved counterinsurgency is itself mistaken for a political strategy, even a solution. In Iraq, tactical innovations could not be effectively translated into political strategy; instead, success was defined as tolerably decreased violence and the empowerment of pro-U.S. factions rather than sustainable peace. Likewise, in the name of institutional learning, successes in Iraq were then elaborated as new counterinsurgency strategy and transferred to Afghanistan, regardless of significant contextual differences.

Other cases presented at the seminar followed roughly similar patterns: military actions achieve gains, but consolidation and post-conflict state-building efforts falter. We lack conceptual frameworks to inform and guide policy on the dilemmas posed by these situations.

In particular, academic discourse on conflict and peacebuilding often fails to explore the interests and motivations of actors operating within conflict zones, relying largely on econometric studies. Theories of state weakness, elite-capture, and greed and grievance help to understand the causes and conduct of war, but they may not in themselves be sufficient to explain in-country variation. Instead, it may be a convergence of all of these factors. The failure to understand the rationales, interests, and motivations of armed actors contributes to incomplete or failed peace negotiations and can undermine subsequent peacebuilding efforts. In particular, international efforts to broker peace and promote democratization may not serve the interest of all armed groups, some of which may be shut out of the new political dispensation.

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Peacebuilding: from Sequencing to Simultaneity

Dominant linear models of security and development prioritize security, followed by governance and socio-economic development. The idea is a sequence of measures designed to enable conflict and post-conflict success: end the conflict, implement programs designed to produce a peace dividend, hold elections and support the governmental leaders who emerge victorious. But the reality of states that preside over internal conflicts suggests otherwise. Security-first strategies may in fact reinforce malign patterns of patrimonial and corrupt governance, and development efforts cannot succeed on the basis of such modes of governance. In other words, sequencing peacebuilding does not work; the challenges of security, development and governance arise simultaneously and develop in an interlocking manner. It is therefore essential to tackle these issues together.

Debates over tactics and sequencing, most notably around U.S. counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan have failed to consider the integrated nature of security, development and governance. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan provide a potential model for reintroducing civil governance apparatus and moving beyond traditional security-based COIN approaches, but unless there is improved governance at higher levels, and notably progress in eliminating corruption, such teams may not be effective. Likewise, counterinsurgency campaigns often collapse around the task of holding and building, which is by no means limited to the case of Afghanistan. In Colombia, a relatively successful counter-insurgency framework generated tactical victories and displaced armed actors from the more populated parts of the national territory to marginal areas. However, even here, establishing state institutions in these areas has proven to be more difficult.

Military and civilian actors differ on what to prioritize and how to sequence policy interventions. In practice, security and local development objectives are usually prioritized, while governance is seen as a longer-term endeavor. However, in Afghanistan, the focus on “getting security right” as a precursor to

Rather than prioritizing and sequencing challenges to address, it is critical to move forward on multiple fronts simultaneously.

tackling development and governance challenges may in fact be undermining US strategic goals—including security itself. Governance failures and corruption in the Afghan administration constitute some of the main drivers of Taliban recruitment, thereby facilitating popular support for the Taliban insurgency. Most worryingly, in an effort to rapidly rebuild the state without questioning the motives and allegiances of domestic actors, the international community may be enforcing entrenched patterns

of patronage-based governance that undermine long-term security and development.

The Nature of the State

Across the cases examined, three key insights emerged that cast doubt on the dominant state-centered model for peace-building: first, many citizens in areas of chronic instability experience the state as a predatory force—often only one among several others—in their society. The state should not be imagined as a benign entity. A classic instance is Somalia: for many Somalis, the absence of a central government is preferable to a return to dictatorship. Second, the state’s presence in many of these cases is limited to key urban centers; twenty miles outside town there is no sign of government. Neither of these points implies that governance, understood as processes of decision-making and social administration, is lacking. Third, there are no purely “ungoverned spaces.” Rather, alternative systems of governance exist, based on structures ranging from local community authorities to criminal cartels, some of which may contain greater capacity for contributing to peacebuilding than liberal state-based models. Consequently, the concept of “ungoverned spaces”—and especially that they ipso facto present a threat to the international order—needs to be examined critically.

Somalia, a country synonymous with “ungoverned spaces,” is a case in point. Somalia’s crisis is often dated as beginning in 1991, but it is much more accurate to push this date back another ten years, when the last government under Siad Barre was facing mounting rebellion, and responded with repression and warlordism. For many Somalis, the last few years of the Barre regime were the bloodiest period of recent history. To locate the central problem in Somalia as the lack of a state misses the deeper point that the experience of the state itself was profoundly problematic. As a result, Somalis continue to resist the imposition of a central government, and international efforts to create such a government are seen as supporting the re-creation of a predatory state. Therefore, even perceived successes can rarely be sustained. Recent efforts that pushed the Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujaheddin (“al Shabab”) out of the main cities offer a tactical military success, but without commensurate companion engagement with the competing and overlapping forms of governance that Somalis have developed in the absence of a central government, these may prove to be only short term progress.

In this way, Somalia may share traits with Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Iraq and Afghanistan. In each of these countries the state is closely identified with corruption, predation and abuse—the very pathologies that international engagement seeks to end. In these countries, government effectiveness is often confined to the capital city and perhaps a few other towns, and the state develops in isolation from the communities it is imagined to benefit. In such contexts, citizens expect very little of their state.

In fact (albeit controversially), it is possible to describe the Afghan state as a vertically integrated criminal organization that functions as a protection racket, extracting resources and dispensing the ability to capture rents. As such, the Afghan state is not a “weak state” per se, but chooses not to govern, primarily concerning itself with the business of extraction. It is a resilient regime with the trappings of a sovereign state that fails to deliver public goods for its citizens—scoring low on indices of good government (and high on indicators of “state failure”) but is effective at staying in power. It even manipulates its “weakness” to extract international support, well aware that U.S. security cooperation comes with fewer governance-related strings attached than longer-term development assistance. In this context, international actors’ support of individuals known by Afghans to be corrupt erodes the initial goodwill of the population, whereby strengthening the hand of the Taliban insurgents. When corrupt intermediaries are legitimized by international intervention, this drives a wedge between the internationals and the population. Ultimately, this reflects a lack of political vision on the part of the interveners, to the detriment of fostering structures of accountability that challenge institutionalized impunity at the highest levels. Thus, international state-building efforts too often rely on a paradigm that willfully overlooks the reality of the exercise of state power—and how citizens interact with their state.

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The concept of “ungoverned spaces” arose in discussions of Somalia, Colombia and elsewhere. In both statebuilding discourse and the frameworks driving the war on terror, the idea of a territory without a

form of recognizable government, struck fear into the hearts of policymakers. However, analysis of local governance in Somalia and of the modes of governance in peripheral areas of Colombia, indicate that the very idea of an “ungoverned space” is a misnomer, as forms of authority always exist. Moreover, some of these forms of authority can be effective in delivering limited public goods, including security, to the populace.

Criminal and political violence

Three key factors at play in the conflicts under consideration blur the line between criminal and political frameworks: 1) the significance of illicit trade; 2) the development of new technologies; and 3) the subsequent inadequacies of legal paradigms to respond to the above. Each of the three areas involves a range of actors, invariably including non-state agents, state representatives and international powers.

First, illicit trade of otherwise legal or illegal resources plays an ambiguous role in many of the conflicts studied. In some, it is unclear the extent to which trade is a means to enable continued fighting or fighting continues to enable illicit trade. Further, it is not just combatants who are implicated: illicit activities such as drug production may constitute livelihoods for populations, and may prosper during peacetime. Efforts to eliminate “criminal enterprise” may misunderstand or underestimate the challenges facing populations emerging from conflict or the absence of constructive government. In any case, such trade rarely thrives without at least some complicity among representatives of the state.

Second, just as new forms of mobile weapons of mass destruction decisively altered the analysis of the actors that constituted a threat to international powers, new state-developed tools are irreversibly altering the scale and patterns of warfare. An important example is the development within the U.S. military arsenal of drone warfare. Proponents note that casualties from such weapons can be reduced through new technologies. Drones allow for considerable information gathering and targeted individual strikes, thereby minimizing the potential for collateral damage. However, such technologies are currently deployed to strike individuals in countries against which the U.S. is not in a state of war—Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. They are used as a means of assassination, raising major legal problems that have yet to be addressed adequately. While the U.S. currently has a near-monopoly on drone technology, it is only a matter of time before other countries develop similar capabilities, underlining the importance of developing an international legal regime to govern their use.

The development and deployment of cyber technology for offensive purposes is another technological innovation. Cyber-attacks such as that of Russia on Estonia in 2007 may swamp technical systems or retrieve protected data. While such an attack may have lethal consequences, the mode of assault is, in itself, a non-lethal mode of attack, prompting some to question whether it counts as warfare at all. Cyber warfare has the additional element that it is currently almost entirely unaccountable.

This leads up to our third point, that the blurred line between political and criminal frameworks for the violence, responses and peacebuilding measures of new wars are posing extraordinary challenges to the

existing international legal regime. What frameworks should apply: International Humanitarian Law, domestic criminal law, human rights law, or something not yet developed? The heated debates initiated in response to U.S. policies of the War on Terror—addressing matters such as extraordinary renditions, the refusal to apply to the Geneva Conventions to captured “terrorists,” and use of torture—have only scratched the surface of the quandaries that new wars pose to legal codes designed to monitor and regulate use of force.

In conclusion

In the more than a decade since Mary Kaldor published the first edition of *New and Old Wars*, debates about what, if anything, is “new” in “new wars” were matched by questions about whether the violence she described even constituted war at all. The continued vibrancy of the debates, however, illustrates the need for re-examining assumptions about conflict. Without doubt, Kaldor’s concept has been the crucible for a seminal debate.

The experiences of the intervening years, including the diverse conflicts engendered by the “war on terror,” hybrid political-criminal violence in different parts of the world, and chronic violence embedded in the resilient governance of “weak” patronage-based or “political marketplace” states, have posed serious challenges to the intellectual and political frameworks that guide engagement in armed conflicts, peacebuilding efforts, and international legal regimes. The World Peace Foundation seminar points to some important emergent agendas, including especially the intersection between international security agendas and patronage-based states that prey on their citizens, and the use and abuse of new technologies in conflicts by actors ranging from the U.S. government to rogue states and criminal cartels.

Note: Additional information about this seminar, including short essays by several participants, can be found on the World Peace Foundation blog, Reinventing Peace, <http://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/>.

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