

Introduction:

Peacebuilding in an era of pragmatism

LOUISE WIUFF MOE AND FINN STEPPUTAT*

The politics of international peacebuilding are undergoing a pragmatic turn. The era of liberal idealism and interventionism is closing, and while the contours of the emerging global order remain uncertain, a more pragmatic approach to the means and ends of peace appears to be on the rise.¹ Considerable academic work has gone into analysing the limitations of the ‘old’ liberal peace model, yet so far there has been only limited research on peace approaches that seek to move beyond the liberal framework. This special section addresses this void. It explores the growing pragmatism of contemporary peacebuilding policies and practices as they manifest themselves in the ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding, the related rise of complexity, hybridity and resilience thinking, as well as in the (re)turn to prevention, stabilization and pacification approaches. In doing so, the special section brings together debates which have been so far largely isolated, in a manner that highlights how distinct trends and approaches are part of a wider continuum of pragmatic responses to contemporary peace challenges. This provides the basis for connecting—and possibly looking beyond—discussions on the primacy of politics, the *realpolitik* of stabilization and the bottom-up focus on localizing and contextualizing efforts to sustain peace. In mapping this continuum—as well as the related pitfalls, promises and challenges—the contributors to this special section offer new conceptual and empirical insights into the steady pragmatism that increasingly seems to be shaping international interventionism in the so-called post liberal era.

Peacebuilding in crisis

As we are approaching three decades of post-Cold War interventions into conflict and post-conflict settings, peacebuilding has become one of the most complex joint practices in international affairs. It is also a practice currently finding itself ‘at

* The contributions to this special section elaborate on discussions initiated at the workshop ‘Beyond Liberal Peace? Exploring the Rise of Pragmatic Approaches to Peace’, organized by Louise Wiuff Moe together with David Chandler, and hosted by the Danish Institute for International Studies, 28–29 April 2016. The editors’ research for this special section has been supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) as part of the wider project ‘Overlapping spheres of authority and interface conflicts in the global order’, and by the Danish Institute for International Studies.

1 G. John Ikenberry, ‘The end of liberal international order?’, *International Affairs* 94: 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 7–24; Constance Duncombe and Tim Dunne, ‘After liberal world order’, *International Affairs* 94: 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 25–42; Beate Jahn, ‘Liberal internationalism: historical trajectory and current prospects’, *International Affairs* 94: 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 43–62.

a crossroad² as its key tenets and foundational norms have come under increasing discursive, as well as practical, pressure. Indeed, for some observers international peacebuilding is outright ‘in crisis’.³ This crisis, or critical juncture, sits within a wider ongoing reordering of the global political landscape. During the early 1990s, peacebuilding—epitomized by Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for peace* (1992)—temporarily became the prevailing form of western interventionism, promoting multiparty democracy, a free-market economy, and the rule of law, as the basis for sustaining what President George H. W. Bush termed ‘the new world order’. Yet, today, the contours of both the emerging world order, and the role and practice of peacebuilding, appear profoundly more uncertain.

Despite the initial international hegemony of the peacebuilding discourse in the 1990s, one decade later it was increasingly apparent that the desired effects of the latter, in terms of creating stability, development and peace, had mostly failed to materialize. And while new peacebuilding missions continued to be deployed as the means of assisting governments and populations in transitioning from civil wars, observers have increasingly questioned both the effectiveness and legitimacy of international peacebuilding.

Far from simply marking the transition to a ‘new’ and peaceful world order, the end of the Cold War sparked a series of new internal wars—often shaped by ethnic divisions and nationalism, with no peace agreement to refer to and no peace to keep. Thus, ‘minimum use of force’ and ‘consent’, as the foundational norms of United Nations peace operations, in fact encountered significant practical limitations from the outset. In turn, the transformative ambitions of international peacebuilding, aimed at supplanting the locally existing ‘non-liberal’ structures and elites through liberal institution-building, have not only faced major practical challenges on the ground but have also become the target of increasing critique. Several peace and conflict scholars, along with policy analysts, have pointed to considerable tensions existing between international peacebuilders’ fixed standards of state-based legitimacy and ‘good governance’, on the one hand, and local experiences and perceptions of what constitutes efficient and legitimate governance on the other.⁴ Thus the former is critiqued for having an overly programmatic and template-driven approach to international peacebuilding, due to which it is unable to sufficiently adapt to contextual challenges and aspirations—and thus lacks both legitimacy and efficiency.

The crisis of peacebuilding—and western interventionism more broadly⁵—arguably reached a peak as the failures and unintended consequences of the

² Roland Paris, ‘Saving liberal peacebuilding’, *Review of International Studies* 36: 1, 2010, p. 337.

³ Roger Mac Ginty, *International peacebuilding and local resistance: hybrid forms of peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); Tobias Debiel, Thomas Held and Ulrich Schneekener (eds.), *Peacebuilding in crisis: rethinking paradigms and practices of transnational cooperation* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁴ See e.g. Volker Boege, Anne Brown and Anna Nolan, ‘Building peace and political community in hybrid political orders’, *International Peacekeeping* 16: 5, 2009, pp. 599–615; Séverine Bellina, Dominique Darbon, Stein Sundstøl Eriksen and Ole Jacob Sending, *The legitimacy of the state in fragile situations*, Report for the OECD DAC International Network on Conflict and Fragility, 2009, http://www.institut-gouvernance.org/docs/the_legitimacy_of_the_state_in_fragile_situations.pdf; Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty, ‘Where now for the critique of the Liberal Peace’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 50: 2, 2015, pp. 171–89.

⁵ Simon Jenkins, *Mission accomplished? The crisis of international intervention* (London: IB Tauris, 2015).

interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq became increasingly difficult to ignore. These interventions combined a military approach with large-scale reconstruction, democratization and institution-building projects. As such they symbolized the culmination of a coercive form of liberal peace- and order-making, while profoundly failing to actually deliver liberal transformation and peace. Against this wider backdrop, from the 2000s onward, the criticism of liberal interventionism has been mounting, among both policy-makers and researchers. By now, the problems associated with peacebuilding approaches imposing external frameworks are well established, and researchers have engaged with them from a number of new institutionalist, postcolonial, Foucauldian and critical positions.

The special section departs from this critique, and takes a next analytical step by inquiring into alternative policy approaches that move beyond, or unsettle, the liberal peace model. In doing so we connect with emerging research agendas which—in focusing on for example the ‘robust turn’⁶, ‘geopolitics of peace’⁷ or ‘the local turn’⁸—indicate some of the possible new directions of peacebuilding. In different ways, the emerging strands of analysis connect the crisis of the liberal world order to shifts away from grand scale transformative peace and state-building exercises, towards more contextualized, realistic and arguably effective approaches to assisting conflict-ridden regions.

Following on from this, we adopt ‘pragmatic peace’ as a heuristic lens that brings into dialogue perspectives on the *realpolitik* of stabilization, the apparent retreat of liberal idealism, and the bottom-up focus on contextualizing efforts to sustain peace. These trends involve different sets of actors and politics that so far tend to be treated separately in largely isolated debates. Yet, seeing these distinct developments as part of a wider continuum of pragmatic responses to contemporary peace challenges, brings out the complexity and ambiguities that define the critical juncture at which peacebuilding currently finds itself. In this vein, the contributions to this special section, taken together, bring nuance exactly by revealing different, even apparently contradictory, aspects of contemporary peacebuilding as well as potential forms of ‘pragmatic peace’. Indeed, while the shared premise of the analyses presented is that international peacebuilding is undergoing a ‘pragmatic turn’, the contributors offer different diagnosis and prognosis. This reveals the flip sides of key arguments with regard to what this ‘turn’ might entail for the legitimacy, efficiency and future directions of peacebuilding.

Exploring the rise of pragmatic approaches to peace

The ambiguities of ‘pragmatic peace’, drawn out by the contributions to this collection, converge around at least three closely interrelated themes. The first is the issue of the relationship between international peacebuilding intervention and local

⁷ Charles T. Hunt, ‘All necessary means to what ends? The unintended consequences of the robust “turn” in UN peace operations’, *International Peacekeeping* 24: 1, 2017, pp. 108–131.

⁷ Roland Paris, ‘The Geopolitics of Peace Operations: A research agenda’, *International Peacekeeping* 21: 4, August 2014, pp. 501–508.

⁸ Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, ‘The local turn in peacebuilding: a critical agenda for peace’, *Third World Quarterly* 34: 5, 2013, pp. 763–83.

legitimacy. On the one hand, the anti-foundationalist connotation of ‘pragmatic peace’ indicates new possibilities for peacebuilding practice aiming to extend the engagement with existing capacities, structures and aspirations—rather than emphasizing external resources, norms and agendas. Resilience and complexity thinking thus indicate a welcome opportunity for new forms of more genuine engagement with local contexts.⁹ This also connotes a more realistic approach to the actually existing forms of local authority.¹⁰ On the other hand, however, the focus on local institutions and practices does not only have the effect of enabling locally-grounded agendas, it also constitutes the ‘local’ as the new object for interventions that variously seek to transform local structures, or pursue external agendas by ‘working with and through’ local institutions and elites. This presents new critical questions with regard to ‘bottom-up’ approaches to peace, power, accountability and effects on local orders. Especially in light of new trends of securitization and ‘light footprint’ peacebuilding-cum-counterinsurgency approaches which tend to use weakly institutionalized local settings—which put little accountability and few legal constraints on interveners—as their testing ground.¹¹

A second issue concerns the scope of ‘pragmatic peace’. Arguments that the current juncture of international peacebuilding is marked by an outright break with liberalism,¹² a retreat or a ‘post-intervention’ logic¹³ have become commonplace. While a focus on ‘pragmatic’ approaches might appear disposed to confirm such reading, the contributors all highlight instead, from different perspectives, how the pragmatic turn signifies an era where peacebuilding is adapting to past limitations. The contributions also show how ‘pragmatism’ offers new tools and discursive framings that, far from simply signifying a retreat, carry the potential for re-inventing and even expanding liberal interventionism.¹⁴ In brief, the ‘pragmatic turn’ thus both signifies the limitations of established peacebuilding, and offers new possibilities for re-thinking these limitations as ‘lessons learned’ for moving forward.¹⁵

The third issue concerns the relative continuity and change of peacebuilding practice in the wake of the ‘pragmatic turn’. The rise of complexity, hybridity

⁹ See Cedric de Coning’s piece in this issue: Cedric de Coning, ‘Adaptive peacebuilding’, *International Affairs* 94: 2, March 2018, p. 301–317.

¹⁰ See Finn Stepputat’s piece in this issue: Finn Stepputat, ‘Pragmatic peace in emerging governscapes’, *International Affairs* 94: 2, March 2018, pp. 399–416.

¹¹ See Louise Wiuff Moe’s piece in this issue: Louise Wiuff Moe, ‘Counter-insurgency in the Somali territories: the “grey zone” between peace and pacification’, *International Affairs* 94: 2, March 2018, pp. 319–41.

¹² See e.g. David Chandler, *International statebuilding: the rise of post-liberal governance* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 70.

¹³ See e.g. Colleen Bell and Brad Evans, ‘Post-interventionary societies: an introduction’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 4: 4, 2010, pp. 363–70.

¹⁴ See Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Troels Gauslå Engell’s piece in this issue: Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Troels Gauslå Engell, ‘Conflict prevention as pragmatic response to a twofold crisis: liberal interventionism and Burundi’, *International Affairs* 94: 2, March 2018, pp. 363–80; and Jan Bachmann and Peer Schouten, ‘Concrete approaches to peace: infrastructure as peacebuilding’, *International Affairs* 94: 2, March 2018, pp. 381–98, also in this issue. See also Louise Wiuff Moe and Markus-Michael Müller, ‘Introduction: complexity, resilience and the “local turn” in counterinsurgency’, in Louise Wiuff Moe and Markus-Michael Müller, eds., *Reconfiguring intervention: complexity, resilience and the ‘local turn’ in counterinsurgent warfare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

¹⁵ Louise Wiuff Moe, ‘The strange wars of liberal peace: hybridity, complexity and the governing rationalities of counterinsurgency in Somalia’, *Peacebuilding* 4: 1, 2016, pp. 99–117.

and resilience thinking signal new developments in both the practice and conceptualization of peacebuilding—to the extent that previous determined-design approaches to planning and ‘building’ peace are de-emphasized in favour of new inductive approaches aimed at sustaining capacities for peace.¹⁶ Another emerging characteristic of the pragmatic turn is a gradual move beyond the state-centrism that characterized the liberal peace model. In this regard, the ‘pragmatic turn’ has opened new and expanding roles for non-state actors (on both the local and the international ends of the spectrum) in the context of peacebuilding interventions. This, in turn, challenges the basic concepts of governance and authority on which the liberal peace model is based, and has sparked innovative conceptual shifts aiming to provide more accurate analyses of emerging ‘governscapes’. This includes the ‘not-always so liberal democratic forms of authority’ that for better or worse often are key governance and security providers in conflict affected settings.¹⁷ Meanwhile, debates on the contemporary transformations of peacebuilding at times depreciate the continuity that subtly connects contemporary developments with past forms of interventions. For example, the rise of resilience and hybridity thinking in peacebuilding is often cast as an indication that ‘post-liberal’ forms of peace and intervention are emerging.¹⁸ Yet pragmatic engagement with not-so-liberal actors and attempts to bolster local resilience as an alternative to large-scale intervention are not wholly new features of liberal interventionism. Rather, ‘turning local’ has been a historically re-occurring approach whereby such interventionism has sought to come to terms with its own limitations.¹⁹ In this regard, while investing in resilience is a new policy trend with an aim to sensitize and contextualize international peacebuilding, it can also be traced back to much earlier pragmatic precepts of ‘peacemaking’, figuring in the accounts of colonial administrators describing the reasoning informing pacification campaigns in the early twentieth century.²⁰ ‘Pragmatic peace’, in this respect, might be understood best as occupying an ambivalent position, between new prospects of more contextualized and endogenous peacebuilding and echoes of past colonial governance.

With this special section, we do not provide clear-cut answers or set out a ‘clearly defined pragmatic alternative’²¹ to the conventional liberal peace model, nor do we claim to offer a complete coverage of the range of issues that surround and shape the crisis and future prospects of peacebuilding. Rather, taken together, the articles present an ambivalent and critical engagement with the gamut of experimental approaches that converge on the ‘pragmatic turn’ in peacebuilding; an engagement that draws attention to the positive and innovative potentials, while also offering perspectives that make it possible to identify the pitfalls and

¹⁶ See e.g. de Coning, ‘Adaptive peacebuilding’, pp. 301–317 in this issue; and Louise Riis Andersen’s piece in this issue: Louise Riis Andersen, ‘The HIPPO in the room: the pragmatic push-back from the UN peace bureaucracy against the militarization of UN peacekeeping’, *International Affairs* 94: 2, March 2018, pp. 343–61.

¹⁷ Stepputat, ‘Pragmatic peace in emerging governscapes’, pp. 399–416 in this issue.

¹⁸ See e.g. Oliver Richmond, *A post-liberal peace* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁹ Moe and Müller, ‘Introduction’.

²⁰ Moe, ‘Counter-insurgency in the Somali territories’ pp. 319–41, in this issue.

²¹ Andersen, ‘The HIPPO in the room’, pp. 343–61, in this issue.

risks of this ‘turn’. With this outlook, we also aim to inspire further enquiry into the intricacies of the new and emerging trajectories of peacebuilding.

The special section is organized as follows. In drawing on insights from complexity theory, Cedric de Coning makes the case for what he coins ‘adaptive peace’; an approach where peacebuilders, in collaboration with local communities and people affected by conflict, engage in a structured process to sustain peace by utilizing an inductive methodology of iterative learning and adaptation.²² De Coning’s proposal is aspirational in arguing for a system change in the practice and theory of peacebuilding and in suggesting that, with the ‘pragmatic turn’, the ground is fertile for such change. He identifies ‘adaptive peacebuilding’ as one such emerging approach and analyses its foundation in complexity theory, its interlinkage with the concept of resilience, and its relationship with the principle of local ownership. De Coning shows how the approach is relevant for the emerging concept of *sustaining peace*, by emphasizing how adaptive peacebuilding embraces uncertainty, focuses on processes rather than end-states, and invests in the resilience of local institutions.

Louise Wiuff Moe’s analysis, in turn, cautions against too readily embracing interventions ‘turning local’.²³ Based on an empirically grounded analysis of interventions into the Somali territories—where the limits of the dominant state-centric stabilization paradigm have been particularly evident—she reveals a trend whereby peacebuilding and counterinsurgency increasingly converge around a shared pragmatic interventionary discourse. This discourse reinvents historical pacification practices centred on ‘bottom-up’ support to local coercion wielders and securitized institution-building. From this perspective, ‘pragmatic peace’ comes with effects on local orders that are in fact far from peaceful. This serves as a reminder to closely examine the specific geopolitical and policy contexts in which the terms of the debate on ‘pragmatic’ approaches circulate—as well as the different intervention agendas with which such proposals become entwined.

Louise Riis Andersen’s contribution keeps with the theme of the militarization of peacebuilding, but focuses on the contestation of this development at the level of UN bureaucrats.²⁴ Andersen takes her point of departure in the 2014–15 report of the High-level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), which she interprets as a deliberate push-back from the international civil servants in the UN against the Security Council’s robust turn to stabilization. At a time when the roles and functions of UN peacekeeping are shifting and the Security Council has furthered a militarized version of pragmatic approach, the bureaucrats behind the HIPPO report have produced an alternative, ‘more UN-like, yet still pragmatic, vision for the future of UN peacekeeping’ operations in the 21st century.²⁵

One of the proposed pragmatic alternatives to robust peace operations is a renewed focus on conflict prevention. Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Troels Gauslå Engell unpack the international community’s preventive diplomacy *vis-à-vis*

²² De Coning, ‘Adaptive peacebuilding’, pp. 301–317, in this issue.

²³ Moe, ‘Counter-insurgency in the Somali territories’ pp. 319–41, in this issue.

²⁴ Andersen, ‘The HIPPO in the room’, pp. 343–61, in this issue.

²⁵ Andersen, ‘The HIPPO in the room’.

Burundi as it developed in 2015–16.²⁶ Known within the international community as ‘early warning’ and ‘early action’, the monitoring and knowledge production that such preventive endeavours entail can also be perceived ‘early aggression’ by the governments under scrutiny. Their analysis of the unintended effects of this case of conflict prevention leads Jacobsen and Engell to suggest that the recent return to conflict prevention may be understood, not as a retreat from liberal interventionism, but rather as a pragmatic response to its purported crisis. Thus, even though conflict prevention falls short of military intervention, it nonetheless leaves significant interventionist footprints.

Jan Bachmann and Peer Schouten look at infrastructure, which has become a pervasive yet generally understudied element of stabilization and peacebuilding operations.²⁷ With its focus on measurable, visible and ‘concrete’ results—and its seemingly technical and uncontroversial nature—road building fits perfectly with a pragmatic retreat from the high ambitions of political and governance reforms. However, aligning with Jacobsen and Engell, Bachmann and Schouten reveal how, far from constituting a retreat, these projects are expected to transform socio-political dynamics of conflict and to enhance chances for peace. Analysing different cases, the authors show that effects are far from uniform, and suggest that research needs to develop novel theoretical approaches to grasp this form of pragmatic peacebuilding.

Finally, in reflecting on the different forms of ‘pragmatic peace’ on offer—hybrid orders, resilience and non-state actors—Finn Stepputat argues that such approaches bring about analytical and normative challenges that are difficult to deal with within conventional state-centric liberal peace framework.²⁸ As an alternative, the article develops the notion of ‘governscapes’ as a framing device. This can help examine, first, the uneven ways in which the use of force and forms of governance circulate, spread within and beyond state boundaries and, second, how pragmatic peacebuilding approaches play into emerging landscapes of authority and governance. He argues that pragmatic peacebuilding approaches place too little emphasis on the capacity for using violence that characterizes many of the non-state actors that exercise some kind of authority against or alongside state authorities.

²⁶ Jacobsen and Engell, ‘Conflict prevention as pragmatic response to a twofold crisis’, pp. 363–80 in this issue.

²⁷ Bachmann and Schouten, ‘Concrete approaches to peace’ pp. 381–98, in this issue.

²⁸ Stepputat, ‘Pragmatic peace in emerging governscapes’, pp. 399–416, in this issue.

