BUILDING PEACE AFTER WAR

MATS BERDAL
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REVIEW BY DAVID M. MALONE*

Mats Berdal, Professor of Security and Development at King's College, London, has, in the words of Alvaro de Soto "in work after analytical work … trained his sharp and inquiring gaze on numerous crucial aspects of the work for peace with a keen understanding of what is desirable, and what is possible." These lines from the jacket blurb, contrary to most such puffery, point to the strengths of this short volume, a summation and refinement of much of Berdal's thought over the past fifteen years.

Berdal, a Norwegian, who for years alternated between the IISS in London and the Centre for International Studies at Oxford (from which he obtained his D.Phil) is an insightful and unsentimental student of international efforts over the past two decades to tackle a variety of civil wars around the globe that filled the void created by the sudden end of the Cold War. Indeed, these civil wars (often fought through local proxies funded and armed by Washington or Moscow) represented both the wreckage and the sequellae of the Cold War. Berdal, as a young scholar who came on the scene just as the Balkans was rent asunder by Yugoslavia's implosion, was equipped with a deep understanding of cold war dynamics, which were at the core of his doctoral thesis. Since then, beyond the Balkans, he has focused on other conflicts that claimed the attention of the UN Security Council (UNSC) from 1990 onwards, involving Iraq, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Somalia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Cambodia, and Timor Leste. He, like me, learned a great deal from the early work on Sierra Leone (based on extensive travel and empirical observation there) of his friend David Keene, today teaching at the London School of Economics (LSE). Keen, among other important insights, drew attention to the resilience of societies at war, featuring coping strategies and economies that adapt and mutate, sometimes into large-scale criminal enterprises.

Berdal has a strong Canadian connection. Dominique Jacquin, his late wife, who died tragically during surgery four years ago, an exciting Africanist teaching at the LSE, was a Canadian, and Berdal maintains his ties with Canada, last year delivering a lecture in Ottawa on the topic of this book.

This volume, in terms of its contents, is a big book masquerading as an extended, wide-ranging set of three inter-connected essays, an illuminating introduction, and brief conclusion. It could readily have been inflated into a 600-page doorstop, even with fewer ideas on offer. However, that is not Berdal's style, which is deeply sophisticated and often

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playful in spite of the seriousness of his topic. He never talks down to his audience. His method of engagement is interrogative rather than didactic, but the close reader is left in no doubt where he stands.

In distilling his knowledge of country and regional cases of conflict, Berdal in this volume couches his analysis thematically in crosscutting fashion, making for dense if always elegant and pleasurable reading. The book rewards prior grounding in the civil wars of the past twenty years, in great power politics refracted through the UNSC, and in the factual, policy, and theoretical debates surrounding them. As a learning tool, this is thus a volume, although concise, more for graduate students than for starters.

One quibble: the book, one of the distinguished series of Adelphi Papers produced for many years by IISS, a number of them under Berdal's supervision when he served as Director of Studies there from 2000 to 2003, has no index. The copious end-notes are an education in themselves, however the absence of an index is particularly disconcerting in a volume working thematically across multiple cases.

Crisp, and to the point, the text, coming in at just over 200 pages, in its introduction discusses the vexing question of definitions. Where do peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding start and finish? UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali's seminal An *Agenda for Peace* of 1992, discussed each of these, suggesting a continuum between several or all of them, but we know today that overlap frequently occurs in practice. Berdal posits as peacebuilding missions (given the ambitious and wide-ranging nature of their mandate) what others often describe as peacekeeping operations. Indeed, Berdal's second chapter discusses in some depth the use of force in UN operations with peacebuilding objectives such as MONUC in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Haiti.

Peacebuilding is perhaps best rendered in its French translation, *consolidation de la paix*—those activities that promote stability, good governance and economic revival after spasms of serious violence. In his sweeping first chapter, "The Peacebuilding Environment", Berdal makes clear just how much the local circumstances attending these activities vary from country to country, arguing that templates for peacebuilding architecture and operations developed by the United Nations, well-meaning (but sometimes also self-interested) non-governmental organizations, and specialized academics, cannot hope to achieve anything useful without allowing also for a deep understanding of local conditions, society, and politics. Haiti, Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan have little in common beyond their poverty, and the Balkans was not poor by Third World standards. The notion that poverty per se predisposes to conflict is an old myth; a lazy one that does not stand up to analysis. Rather, some poor countries, being badly governed with little attempt at ethnic and other forms of inclusiveness, lend themselves to conflict, sometimes of a secessionist nature, while other poor countries, more equitably managed or more effectively repressed (Myanmar, for example), do not.

Berdal rehearses cogently the dialogue between scholars in the late 1990s and early in the last decade, seeking to establish whether greed (of rebel leaders) or grievance (of rebel communities) better explained the pattern of civil wars in Africa (and beyond), centred largely on the work of economist Paul Collier before, during, and after his tenure as the head of the World Bank's Development Economics Research Group. Berdal participated in these

debates. They proved a tremendous learning experience for all involved, due not least to Collier's ecumenical approach to younger scholars challenging him. One of them, Karen Ballentine, a Canadian scholar associated with Columbia University who formulated several of her key insights at the New York-based International Peace Academy, died in July 2010, greatly before her time, a major loss. The debate over causes of conflict was an important one, as strategies for peacebuilding need to address tensions that up-end societies in the first place. Berdal (93) quotes Susan Woodward as remarking that these strategies also need to appreciate how wars themselves are "transformative", requiring post-conflict strategies that respect the "reality created by … war".

Countries in post-conflict straits are generally very fragile, up to 50 percent of them lapsing back into war within a few years. It is hard to predict prospects for any of them. Who would have expected in January 1970, after Nigeria's particularly bitter and murderous civil war, that national reconciliation would occur smoothly? Who among us anticipated Timor Leste lapsing back into widespread violence in 2006, requiring the launch of a second international intervention force at the invitation of the government, the residual UN peacekeeping mission there not being up to the task of restoring order.

Peacebuilding is not a science, as Berdal makes clear. Alchemy is important, requiring strong leadership by local politicians (as happened in Mozambique, for example, but not in Haiti or Somalia) and also by key international actors on the ground, the selection of whom has too often been vitiated by patronage and "division of the spoils" considerations at the UN and within regional organizations. Internationals responsible for peacebuilding require economic literacy, which is why Carolyn McAskie of Canada and Enrique Ter Horst of Venezuela were able to formulate strategies that worked well in Burundi, and might have in Haiti had they been implemented there. However, peacebuilding as simply promotion of development cannot succeed. Security threats linger menacingly and confidence in public order is fragile.

That security and development are mutually reinforcing is both true in the abstract, and is a high-minded truism when developing operational activities to support peacebuilding strategy. They operate on very separate tracks and time-lines, with economic take-off generally requiring years, rather than months, and security easily disrupted overnight. One under-researched question is the extent to which rapid and sustained economic growth has been central in anchoring peace in Mozambique, and (to a lesser extent) El Salvador following particularly vicious civil wars.

Berdal's third chapter, a melancholy one, examines the new UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and a supporting Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) mandated by the 2005 UN Summit. The influential High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (HLP) in 2004 called for the creation of a powerful decision-making body on these issues along-side the Security Council. What resulted from messy negotiations among UN delegations was a bloated advisory body that has yet to find its footing. The PBSO is an orphan within the UN's bureaucracy that has suffered from excessive staff and leadership turn-over, and a lack of meaningful backing by the current Secretary-General. Perhaps the only encouraging factor associated with this story (161-162) has been a well-financed

Peacebuilding Fund that has been successful in allocating significant resources to Burundi and Sierra Leone.

There are many Canadian connections to these developments. Canada, in 2000, sponsored the impressive International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), which in a cogent, wide-ranging report released in December 2001, formulated the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) concept. On the humanitarian imperative, the HLP picked up where ICISS left off. Canada was instrumental in engineering acceptance of the R2P principle by the UN Summit of 2005 against steep odds and was also active on other UN reform proposals. The last four Canadian ambassadors to the UN, Louise Frechette (later Deputy-Secretary-General of the UN), Robert Fowler, Paul Heinbecker, and Allan Rock, each individually and with their teams, contributed significantly to the UN's intellectual and institutional development, including in this area. Canada currently sits on the PBC, and was doubtless an asset in its campaign for a UNSC seat in 2011-2012. Carolyn McAskie, after her sterling service as the senior UN official in Burundi, was appointed the first leader of the PBSO in 2006.

Throughout Berdal's fascinating, sobering account, the theme of state sovereignty and developing country, including Chinese, concerns over incursions against it, recurs in a variety of forms, including through efforts to retrospectively redefine R2P. The United Nations is not a happy place these days. Neither at the forefront of international relations, with the Obama Administration only fitfully engaged, nor led with any real panache, it seems to be sinking into greater irrelevancy than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Berdal's book, often elliptically, provides many clues as to why this is.

This volume is indispensable to the study of international efforts to tackle contemporary conflict, a subject of keen interest in a growing number of Canadian academic departments and schools.