Lessons from peace processes in five flashpoints captured during two-year study

Jobs, training for ex-police, paramilitary forces one key to lasting peace

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Study authors John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty will present their research findings at a seminar Tues. 13 Feb., 9.30 a.m. to 1 p.m., UN Secretariat Conference Room E.

New York — Providing work for ex-security force and paramilitary group members and easing their integration into society is one of several essential elements of long-term success in a peace process, according to a major two-year study by the Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity (INCORE), a joint initiative of UN University and the University of Ulster.

Based on interviews with senior politicians and policy-makers involved in five recent peace processes, the study, entitled Coming out of Violence, identifies several factors that facilitate or block political movement. The case studies were Israel/Palestine, South Africa, Basque Country, Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland.

When violence ends, the study says, the shrinkage of the security industry – army, police, prison officers, private security guards – brings on to the unemployment register many people skilled in the use of arms. Similarly redundant are paramilitaries whose lives have been devoted to armed resistance. Their speedy return to civil society is essential, less because they deserve compensation than because they have the means to destabilize the peace process.

According to the study, the subject of a presentation to representatives of international missions to the UN Feb. 13, “prudence demands that those who were engaged in the war must be provided with jobs and training.”

Other conclusions include:
A lasting agreement is impossible unless it actively involves those with the power to bring it down by violence.

According to the research, most recent successful peace processes have included those in a position to prevent settlement – “the veto holders” – typically involved via secret negotiations through mediators or with political parties representing the gunmen.

The settlement in South Africa started with the release of Nelson Mandela and the ANC prisoners from 1990. In Northern Ireland there were seven unsuccessful attempts to reach agreement through negotiation between constitutional politicians, until the inclusion of Sinn Féin and the loyalist parties led to the Good Friday Agreement. The unwillingness of the Spanish government to treat directly with Basque separatists was a serious obstacle to negotiations during most of the 1990s. The absence of a political front for the Kosovo paramilitaries in early 1998 was a serious obstacle to initiating peace talks with the Serbians, the study notes.

**Spoiler groups**

Spoiler groups can only be neutralised with the active involvement of ex-militants.

Agreement to negotiate often leads to splinter groups determined to continue the armed struggle, the study says. If they in turn enter the process, further breakaway spoilers emerge. At some point, when all splinter groups likely to join the process have done so, two rumps may remain – militants engaged in crime for personal advantage, and ideological spoilers.

“It is relatively straightforward to criminalize the former and to confront them through a police force and justice system acceptable across the community,” said study co-author John Darby, Senior Fellow at INCORE and a Visiting Professor at Notre Dame University.

“It is much more difficult for ex-militants to turn against groups who share their general orientation but have refused to buy the peace process. It would not be easy for Sinn Féin, for example, to support strong military or policing measures against other republican organizations, even those that had been their rivals. The idea of participating in an ‘anti-terrorist’ government would sail uncomfortably close to old revolutionary taboos.”

Peace accords need to address the concerns of victims.

Moves to reintegrate militants into society must be balanced by recognition of the needs of their victims, the study says. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was appropriate to the needs of South Africa, but each society must find a form appropriate to its traditions and circumstances.

Study co-ordinator Roger MacGinty, a lecturer at York University in the UK, noted that the creation of war memorials needs to be treated with particular care in divided
Most cease-fires collapse in the first few months. Survivors are likely to deliver some level of success.

The further the process develops the stronger its shock-absorbent facility and the more capable its ability to withstand the inevitable atrocities designed to undermine it, the study says. This resilience in turn weakens the spoilers – militants opposed to making peace. “The policy implication is to focus economic and political support on the initial stages of the process,” the study says.

During peace negotiations the primary function of leaders is to deliver their own people.

According to the research, power holders – usually the state – enter negotiation because they recognize the inevitability of change before their followers do; their main difficulty is to convince their supporters that the resulting changes are minimal. The power seekers – usually paramilitary leaders – get into negotiation because they recognize the advantages of negotiation before their followers do; their main difficulty is to convince their supporters that the negotiations are achieving major concessions. If the process moves too slowly, it hurts the power seekers. If it moves too speedily, it hurts the power holders.

The following common key issues were identified by the research experts:

- The importance of the sequencing of initiative, statements and concessions;
- The need for political leaders to prepare their own constituencies for political change;
- The changing nature of political violence during political processes;
- The growth of the lending and borrowing of key ideas and initiatives between peace processes and transitions;
- The ability of symbols and symbolism to assume a real political value and play a key role in peace processes;

The power of symbols

The study says the power of symbols is underestimated. In May 1994, as Nelson Mandela was sworn in as president of South Africa, part of the ceremony was a ritual flyover by the South African air force. Their exhausts released the red, green and black of the new South African flag. For some ANC supporters the planes had previously been associated with bombing their bases in the border states. ‘It was the moment when I felt South African’, said one of them.

Mandela “clearly manipulated symbols to encourage reconciliation,” the study says. “He had an unerring eye for the unifying gesture which would heal the wounds of conflict. His attendance at the final of the Rugby World Cup final, the sport of white South Africa, and donning a Springbok shirt, showed a generosity of spirit that set an example in the uneasy new state.”
The study includes a lengthy examination of the various types of violence that occur in the course of securing peace, noting for example that years of violence leaves a vast stockpile of arms that often leads to a surge of ordinary crime. In 1996 there was at least one firearm in 20 per cent of South African households; in Namibia an AK-47 could be bought "for the price of a chicken."

The process of making peace was transformed during the 1990s, according to the study. Between 1988 and 1998 at least 38 formal peace accords were signed. The UN, a major actor in peace negotiations during the 1980s, was directly involved in 16 of them. Of the 15 agreements reached since the start of 1996, all but two were agreed without UN assistance. The others were primarily negotiated by the parties engaged in the conflict itself, sometimes with external mediation.

**Background**

_Come Out of Violence_ monitored six features of five peace processes – violence, progress towards a political settlement, the economy, external actors, public opinion and symbols. The list is not exhaustive; disputes about territory, for example, are central to the conflicts in Israel-Palestine and Sri Lanka, and have less influence in Ireland, South Africa and the Basque Country. Nor do the factors carry equal weight. The balance varies within each setting and depending on the stage through which it is progressing. Nevertheless some general observations and some tentative suggestions may be made:

- Of the six variables, economic factors appear to have the lowest influence on the success or failure of a peace process. The correlation between background economic conditions and political progress is weak, although economic grievances can fuel opposition to compromise, as it did in Israel-Palestine. The promise of economic regeneration after an accord is often disappointed; even in Northern Ireland, where there was a significant peace dividend, its beneficial effect on the process was marginal.

- The influence of external powers is often inconsistent. Diaspora support for ethnic intransigence, notably in Sri Lanka, Israel and Northern Ireland, can be swung round to support peace initiatives, as in the last two cases. The beneficial mediation of external powers was also a strong factor in both places, especially in the early stages, and its absence in Sri Lanka is a barrier to progress.

- The importance of symbols and rituals, for good or bad, is often underrated. The key positive variable is the ability of a post-settlement regime to create unifying symbols, as South Africa has done with its flag, anthem and through sport. The alternative is that rituals will become the property of one or other faction, as happened when marches and other rituals undermined the negotiations in Northern Ireland.

- The most disputed factor is the influence of developments on the ground in initiating and advancing peace processes. All five cases in the _Come Out of Violence_ study resulted from elite accommodations between political leaders rather than from popular
pressure, although the Basque peace movements were an important influence in
mobilising public opinion there.

- Violence and progression towards a political settlement are the main determinants of
success or failure, and they are inextricably linked. Violence was usually the lever which
moved governments to talks. It is more easily turned on than switched off. The demand
from one side that violence should end, and from the other that prisoners should be
released and security policies changed, dominated the early stages of negotiations and
frustrated progress in Sri Lanka, Israel-Palestine and Northern Ireland. It is impossible
to separate the negotiations strand from the violence strand.

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