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Quaker United Nations Office



SSRC

Toward Coordinated Responses to Conflict: Perspectives on United Nations Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding

Beijing Foreign Studies University
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Summary Note of Proceedings

Introduction

On 13 and 14 May 2013, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in partnership with the Beijing Foreign Studies University held a two-day conference titled *Towards Coordinated Responses to Conflict: Perspectives on United Nations Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding* at the Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU). The conference commenced with a public plenary session which led into a series of closed discussion panels focused on United Nations peacebuilding architecture. Roughly forty individuals from Europe, China, the Global South, South East Asia, and the United States participated in the two-day event.

Plenary Session

The plenary session featured, first, a speech by Ms. Liu Hua, deputy director-general of the United Nations Association of China (UNA-China) and former counselor at the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations in Geneva. Liu Hua emphasized the tremendous shift that has taken place over the past three decades in the nature of conflict around the globe. She recalled that during the Cold War most conflict was international in nature, now it is rarely so, happening instead in places where the state is weak or nonexistent. In response to this change, the UN must adhere to the principles of the Charter by focusing more of its energies on conflict prevention.

In the keynote speech that followed, James Jonah, the former undersecretary of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations, reflected on the history of UN involvement in peace operations. Ambassador Jonah pointed out that while former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld set parameters and established tools for the UN to mediate and resolve conflicts, including the creation of the role of independent observers, the UN today has drifted quite far from this principle. He urged participants to think about how the UN might return to its foundational Charter and stressed the importance of this convening; noting that the UN system needs to embrace the important role that China plays. Ambassador Jonah also made a strong plea for the revitalization of the international civil service, suggesting that China could play a role in this process.

Session I: UN Peacekeeping: An Evolving Doctrine

Following the plenary introduction, the meeting continued under the Chatham House rule and delved deeper into the UN peace architecture, starting with a session on peacekeeping. The founding principles of UN peacekeeping—consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force—were discussed in light of the ever-changing nature of conflict around the world.

Also discussed was the changing nature of peacekeeping missions, specifically the trend toward more multidimensional missions involving a whole spectrum of components—military police, infrastructure expertise, human rights observers, disarmament officers, electoral assistance officials, and so forth—with increasingly complicated mandates. Previous models, in contrast, had straightforward mandates involving long-term observation roles, such as that deployed in the Golan Heights in Syria in 1974. More recently, missions have included support for the protection of civilians as well as the simultaneous involvement of such peacebuilding components as institutional development and economic growth.

Participants also discussed how the multidimensional missions increasingly are partnering with regional actors such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), adding new dynamics to UN peacekeeping. The UN is focusing more on building effective relationships with regional actors, who are generally the first to respond to conflicts in Africa. While regional actors' involvement and increasingly swift responses to conflicts were said to be extremely helpful for the UN, it also potentially emboldens regional actors to dismiss the decision-making process of the UN Security

Council and act independently, often with their own agendas. Some participants were concerned that this further complicates the standardization and multilateralism of international responses to conflict and undermines the primacy of Security Council decisions on international peace and security. Others stressed the importance of strengthening partnerships with regional actors so that such tensions can be avoided.

Participants next reflected on the mixture of successes and failures of peacekeeping missions around the world. UN missions, they agreed, frequently appear to lack exit strategies, which are often tied to the UN's political strategy and thus contingent on an agreed-upon political process. An example given was that of the peacekeeping mission MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in existence for nearly twenty years. Participants discussed how this mission has, over the years, absorbed much of the state's responsibility to protect its people. This has been recently demonstrated by the creation of the more robust military presence in DRC, the UN Intervention Brigade, mandated by the Security Council to target insurgent groups, particularly the M23 rebel movement.

Participants connected the example of the UN Intervention Brigade in DRC to the push from the Security Council for more robust mandates for the protection of civilians and, at the same time, for the increased use of force on the ground—which, in some cases, is argued to be associated with the further escalation of violence. In the same vein, participants discussed how the military component of a peacekeeping mission is not the solution to conflict, but rather one tool of a much larger political engagement that goes beyond the mission itself. Participants agreed that the overall goal of a mission should be to build the capacity of the host state, rather than strengthen its own temporary architecture, highlighting again the importance of an exit strategy for UN missions. A long-term political focus is important for a mission to have from the beginning. It was also noted that until the host government displays the necessary commitment or initiative to engage in some level of structural reform, a peacekeeping mission will have little power to make lasting change.

Last, participants discussed future challenges that UN Peacekeeping operations (PKOs) may eventually begin addressing, particularly with respect to a growing number of disasters resulting from climate change that are expected to present an increasing need for disaster relief, resettlement, and even interventions to prevent natural disaster.

Session 2: UN Peacebuilding and Fragile States

Peacebuilding, another component of UN post-conflict engagement, is founded on the concept that the first ten years after a conflict are essential for building peace and avoiding a relapse of violence. Peacebuilding is typically led by the nation state and includes initiatives aimed at establishing peace and security, expanding economic growth, and strengthening state institutions. Participants noted that guidelines from such international initiatives as the G7+ countries' meetings and the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding—most notably, the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States—could be used as a reference.

The main components of the UN peacebuilding architecture are the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which were all established in 2005 to improve coherence between national governments and international actors on security and development policy in post-conflict states. These three bodies work primarily with nation states, regional systems such as banks, and with civil society actors at the local level to streamline and invigorate efforts to improve economic growth, enhance social cohesion, and make progress toward meeting other requirements for sustainable post-conflict recovery. Currently, six countries are on the PBC agenda,¹ each with a chair of a Country-Specific Configuration who helps set the peacebuilding priorities for the country and reports to the Security Council. The PBF supports twenty additional countries through the funding of UN agencies working with national programs and organizations.² To be on the PBC's agenda, a national government must demonstrate high levels of ownership and commitment to building lasting peace after conflict. Countries themselves can make requests to be on the agenda, while recommendations can also come from the Security Council.

The discussion moved on to whether the UN and the wider international community know what African countries need or want in the areas of peacebuilding, including democracy, good governance, and economic growth. Some participants stressed that peacebuilding should be viewed in terms of the global political landscape, being sure to encompass the perspectives of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), which differ on the role of international engagement in nation-building—the main work of nation states, donors, and the UN in the aftermath of devastating civil conflict. Additionally, it was emphasized that nation-building should be driven by the host state's own idea of governance and not according to the perception of the intervening party. The results of the United States' role in "strengthening democracy" in Iraq and Afghanistan were said to exemplify failures of externally driven nation-building processes. Similarly, some called for more tolerance in assessing how long reforms take in post-conflict states. Participants agreed that balancing a focus on rule of law and institution building with production capability and economic development was a key component of a successful peacebuilding mission.

Participants also cited outcomes from a G7+ group of fragile states conference in February 2013 as evidence that fragile states want progress in the areas prescribed by the Western liberal model for post-conflict recovery, such as political inclusion, good governance, and economic growth, although they may have different views of how best to implement them. One participant noted that, according to the World Development Report of 2011, no low-income fragile state had achieved any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2011, indicating that the existing approach to peacebuilding in these countries is flawed. Another suggested that more South-South cooperation in the area of peacebuilding would allow countries with similar histories to share experiences of reaching development goals. Such collaboration could, it was suggested, help demonstrate from experience how low-income countries in Africa can more

¹ Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and the Central African Republic.

² Chad, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Haiti, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Uganda, and Yemen.

effectively link national-level objectives and agendas to local peacebuilding efforts.

Some participants noted that an example of how different countries approach post-conflict recovery and nation-building in Africa differently was in how some participants believed Western donors no longer focus on agricultural development, to the detriment of many countries with subsistence farming. While China and other BRICs have tended to focus more on agricultural and economic growth, “institutional development” of political and judicial processes is better understood and practiced by Western practitioners. Some suggested this is because the West itself is beyond a phase of agricultural development and into one where institutions and the strengthening of democracy are central. However, it was noted that BRIC countries, including China, have lately concentrated more on institutional development, although, participants pointed out, an alignment of Chinese investments in Africa with UN peacebuilding goals would help advance agricultural, economic and institutional development goals simultaneously.

Session 3: The Peacebuilding–Peacekeeping Nexus

In this session, participants discussed the ways in which peacekeeping and peacebuilding architectures overlap. They emphasized that the two happen simultaneously during peacekeeping missions, and the process is not linear or sequential. Technically, no transition takes place from a phase of peacekeeping to one of peacebuilding, but one does occur in the mission’s focus, as mandated by the UN Security Council and the PBC. A common misconception is that peacekeeping is the work of the military and peacebuilding the work of civilians; in reality, they work together simultaneously.

In terms of financing, UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding resources are also closely connected, and a mission can use the limited peacebuilding resources to fund aspects of UN work that supports a peacekeeping mission. The general pool of PBF resources was said by participants to be about \$100 million and funds in the peacekeeping budget about \$7.33 billion. Some participants believed that, despite the blurred lines, UN missions should be cautious to not overextend their roles or be too flexible with where the lines are drawn as this complicates the purpose of UN operations.

Participants noted that, since peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations can only focus on what is detailed in their mandates, the important groundwork for these operations is laid down when the country or conflict is discussed by the UN Security Council. Many agreed that when the Security Council members are determining how best to respond to such issues as protracted violent conflicts or global warming, they need to transition from making decisions based on national interests to ones based on global responsibility.

In a similar vein, participants suggested that often the concept of sovereignty—a cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy—prevents collective decision-making in the Security Council. Some believed the concept should be viewed more broadly, especially in the context of responsibility to protect citizens of authoritarian and abusive regimes. Participants remarked on the need for UN officials to be candid in this respect during briefings and to make sure the key

messages are communicated to the Security Council. Related to this, participants also pointed out that the UN needs to work more with local communities and traditional and religious leaders in both peacekeeping operations (PKOs) and peacebuilding efforts. As one put it, “Most of our complaints...come from the UN stopping at the national level and forgetting the local voice.”

Session 4: Conflict Mediation and Preventive Diplomacy

Participants recognized that the international system needs to react more promptly to signs of conflict, and stressed that the UN Charter is just as much about the responsibility to prevent as it is about the responsibility to protect. Although mediation efforts are not always successful, those that are well planned and widely supported by the UN system can have durable outcomes.

In a discussion on the role of UN special envoys and the importance of ensuring a legitimate mediation process, participants identified a number of potential pitfalls. Envoys often have difficulty balancing their personalities and approach with behind-the-scenes work. They require, but often lack access to, intelligence and teams of technical experts, and they have difficulty remaining impartial while retaining the support of experts and balancing differences of opinion among them. Participants noted the existence of UN-written reference points for best practices in mediation, although they conceded these points are often best utilized when interpreted through the lens of a particular case. Some cited the UN Mediation and Support Unit within the Department of Political Affairs as a reservoir of region-specific mediation experts.

Some discussion centered on whether mediation successfully targets the root causes of conflict and violence, or if it merely scratches the surface of the issue. Some questioned whether UN mediation efforts to assist the post-conflict recovery of Myanmar, for example, were genuinely inclusive and tackled the underlying ethnic issues of the conflict. An alternative view brought up the difference between aiming to find an agreement to end violence and aiming to find one to address the root causes of a conflict. While participants agreed that, ideally, peace processes must address both the symptoms and root causes of violence, some disagreed on whether a mediator could do more than aim for some level of compromise between warring parties rather than a resolution. The process of addressing root causes, some noted, requires decades of commitment, as the causes are often embedded in many years of grievances having to do with such complex issues as identity, territory, and religion, and one or two years of internationally facilitated dialogue cannot be expected to change them.

Participants noted the acknowledgement by mediation practitioners of the increasing role the private sector has played in conflict through arms trading, extraction of minerals linked to conflict, and so forth. Some suggested that contemporary mediation efforts need to find better ways to address these “silent spoilers.” The tendency of mediators to say too much about their successes to the media was cited as another challenge to successful mediation because, at its core, mediation is about trust and confidentiality among all parties. Discussion also touched on the genuine impartiality of mediators, with some declaring that the concept is a myth. Some offered the Darfur Peace talks in Doha in 2011 as an example, pointing to negative effects on the mediation from strong lobbying efforts.

Participants also cited access to intelligence as vital for successful mediation. Some suggested the best intelligence is often gathered by host governments and/or parties to the conflict who may gain nothing from sharing with mediators or those supporting a peace process. While nation-states must be the ones to frame their own goals, they often are limited by short-term objectives based on personalized interests. This speaks to the importance of trust in preventive diplomacy and mediation, so that governments and parties to the conflict will be willing to share their intelligence with the external actors involved in the process.

Another subject for discussion was alternative models and organizations for mediation and preventive diplomacy outside of the UN, particularly the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE's early warning system, its methods for collecting and disseminating information, the structure and role of its standing committee, and the constant review of its norms and practices were all deemed worthy best practices which could be of use to the UN in the area of mediation. Participants agreed on a general need for more innovation and breakthroughs in the field of preventive diplomacy and mediation and suggested the UN work more closely with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, and independent organizations, such as the Carter Center, that have this thematic expertise.

Finally, participants discussed China's role in preventive diplomacy and mediation. While some expressed a hope for more Chinese mediators in the future and for a shift in China's principles of non-interference to allow the country to play a more proactive role in mediation, others noted difficulties in reconciling China's role in preventive diplomacy with its traditional foreign policy objectives. One participant suggested the answer might be working with regional organizations to develop new models and other innovations in preventive diplomacy.

Session 5: Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

Post-conflict societies are often divided, and participants saw addressing the perceptions and grievances of all social groups as highly important to peacebuilding efforts. They presented healing as the "software" of reconciliation and the different mechanisms for achieving it as the "hardware." Participants emphasized the severe trauma suffered by those affected by violent conflict and agreed that a chief challenge for practitioners in this field is how best to deal with such a painful legacy and the injustices caused without deepening the underlying tensions.

Participants described reconciliation as being at all times political, economic, and sociocultural, and occurring at the national and local levels simultaneously. At the national level, reconciliation efforts typically involve mechanisms such as truth and reconciliation commissions and tribunals. Some engaged in it may be focused on prosecution, punishment, and combating impunity, while others, particularly at a local level, may concentrate more on addressing trauma and rebuilding trust. Similarly, participants made a distinction between those who see the end point as re-creating a past societal dispensation—that is, restoring "the way things used to be," based on local traditional values—and those seeking

to create a new pattern for society built around international norms, including human rights norms. Participants reflected on the difficulty of finding the truth in post-conflict settings, given differing perceptions and accounts of the causes of the violence. To address this dilemma, participants once again stressed how addressing the structural roots of conflict is crucial for lasting peace.

Another subject of discussion was the usefulness of UN resources for reconciliation when a key challenge lies in deconstructing the mindset for violence. Participants believed the UN's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) tools have the potential to disarm and demobilize armed elements, but they lack a useful approach to societal healing—or the “software” of reconciliation. In this respect, participants discussed the merits and shortcomings of traditional mechanisms in bringing perpetrators to justice, using such local traditions such as the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda, and acknowledged the importance of religion and spiritually based approaches for helping societies heal, although religion was also cited as a controversial area for UN engagement. The role of economic incentives and employment programs for youth in maintaining stability and preventing the recurrence of violence was also stressed.

Finally, participants mentioned the alternative approaches for reconciliation available as a resource within the peacebuilding architecture of the UN, particularly the PBSO. Similarly, some put forward the Commission of Inquiry based in the UN Human Rights Council as another resource.

Session 6: The Role of the Private Sector

Participants stressed the point that democracy is not in itself sufficient for post-conflict recovery, and that a parallel track for economic development is needed alongside political dialogue. They reflected on the tendency of foreign investors to view African countries as commodities rather than trading partners. Others observed that over the past year or two, Chinese business has suffered great losses as a result of conflict and is now much more sensitive to anticipating violence and engaging with conflict prevention as a form of risk management.

Participants reflected on how the standards of such international voluntary initiatives as the Ruggie Principles, set by the UN Human Rights Council and the United Nations Global Compact, which were created to serve as platforms for public-private commitments to sustainable and ethical business, can at times operate like “exclusive clubs” for signatories. They noted that, in general, the trend of elite-driven economic growth should be avoided, and increased economic growth should emerge from a confluence of agendas among the state, private sector, UN, and local government for improved livelihoods for all citizens.

Some emphasized the role of the local private sector as “bridge-builders” for political engagement at the national and local levels, with the participation of responsible enterprises key to this process. Some positive examples were from Kenya in the run up to the 2013 presidential elections, when the electoral commission sent messages through large private telecommunication companies encouraging people to vote and emphasizing the importance of a peaceful election for Kenya. Media support for Kenya's national electoral debates also demonstrated how the private sector could be used as a tool for good.

Participants discussed the way in which private companies often look to the UN for security support when the state is weak and disagreed about how much support a peacekeeping mission should give to private enterprise in a country with a UN peacekeeping presence. Some asked about the links between the private sector and peacebuilding. The response was that the UN generally lacks experience in engaging the private sector, and more cross-fertilization is needed between the financial and the international relations/development sectors so that knowledge can be shared. Participants also agreed on the need for greater transparency and increased involvement of local stakeholders in private enterprises although, they emphasized, in predominantly agricultural countries, the focus needs to be on livelihoods, not simply on employment or jobs.

Session 7: China and the UN

Participants saw China's continuing shift from non-intervention to diplomacy and from bilateralism to multilateralism as remarkable in the context of UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding. The twentyfold increase in China's contribution to UN peacekeeping in the last thirteen years has been greatly appreciated by the UN, which regularly encourages China to expand its financial contribution, the types of areas it participates in, and the depth of its political engagement. Beyond peacekeeping, participants also devoted some discussion to how China might be better incorporated into existing peacebuilding frameworks. Some suggested the Chinese could view their peacekeeping contributions as the first step in improving their image within the UN and wider international system. Similarly, the breakthrough in peacekeeping operations could be a gateway for a more active role for China in other areas within UN peacebuilding efforts.

In the areas of mediation and preventive diplomacy, some cited China's more active role in the Israeli–Palestine peace process and talks between parties in Myanmar as an illustration of its growing participation. While acknowledging the Middle Eastern mediation role has much to do with China's energy security, participants believed it also reflects the country's expanding diplomatic ambitions. Participants generally accepted that, in the current global political order, China's involvement in mediation efforts—even if tacit—will only increase. One suggested that China cannot afford to stay silent on such issues, which link to regional security. This is particularly the case with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), to which China's approach has changed recently, as has its stance on regional maritime conflicts.

While all agreed that China is indeed more active in the global arena, some identified limits to its participation, particularly with respect to ideology. Some also suggested that China's limited input into certain areas, such as African politics, might be due in part to having less African expertise than the West and perhaps less about ideological differences. Participants predicted that the eagerness of Chinese youth to work in the nongovernmental humanitarian field would increase China's internationalism and over time expand the role of its humanitarian sector overseas.

However, participants also characterized China's approach to international relations as fundamentally different to the West. They suggested that China's approach is focused on gradualism and incrementalism where entry is gained first economically, then politically. Some argued this approach is more effective

and realizable in fragile states, and that the West often imposes unrealistic expectations and rushed timelines for political progress on these types of states. Others expressed that in many cases, the West is perhaps overly patient with states failing to deliver on agreed-upon benchmarks—the DRC being a chief example.

In touching on aspects of China’s domestic politics, participants devoted some discussion to whether China needs greater coordination among the various bureaucracies involved in different aspects of UN peace operations. One suggestion was that the Chinese government have a dedicated peacekeeping affairs office to manage its UN peacekeeping work more efficiently, and that it put together a standing force of peacekeepers as a contingency for future UN engagement. Participants generally agreed that China’s growing role in the diplomatic community and its crucial place on the Security Council provide it with a unique opportunity to engage earlier and help lead UN efforts toward the maintenance of international peace.

Reflections on the Conference and Conclusions

Participants agreed that the meeting provided them with a unique opportunity for a nuanced discussion of the UN peace architecture with a diverse group of scholars, officials, and practitioners from Africa, China, and Western countries. International participants found it refreshing to hear the perspectives of Chinese academics on topics pertaining to peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy, and mediation, while Chinese participants noted how helpful it was to hear the perspectives of African NGO representatives on peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

The conference, participants said, helped them realize the benefit that could be afforded to many systems and processes within the UN by increased input from Chinese scholars, although they remarked on the risk of getting caught up in an East/West debate about norms and ideology—an example being the issue of state sovereignty. Some believed the meeting highlighted the view often held of the UN as a Western “Trojan horse,” and not the multilateral platform for international peace and development that it is, or should be.

Participants were surprised by the emphasis on the lack of Chinese collaboration in UN decision-making, despite China’s permanent presence on the UN Security Council. In this respect, they broadly agree on a need for other international actors to look at China in a more multidimensional way, beyond seeing it as a troop-contributing country (TCC) in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and a Permanent 5 (P5) member of the Security Council. Others thought the meeting highlighted the insufficiency of the link between Beijing and UN headquarters in New York.

Some participants felt China’s so-called model for peace and development is being framed by outsiders unfamiliar with its domestic situation, much to its detriment, and that this situation is exacerbated by a lack of exposure to the thinking of Chinese scholars and practitioners on these issues and by the fact that the majority of knowledge on China comes from research generated externally.

To offset this trend, participants suggested best practices in the training, reform, and redevelopment of the security sector as an area for future collaborative focus, particularly with respect to the role of and opportunities for the Civilian Capacity Initiative in peacekeeping. Another suggestion was for Chinese and African or Western scholars to develop joint case studies on peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions so they can practice shared analysis and learning. While participants agreed the conference was useful in fleshing out the role of the UN beyond peacekeeping, interest in developing future conversations on the topic of peacebuilding, and especially the nexus between peacekeeping and peacebuilding, was widespread.

New York, Nairobi, and Beijing, 18 October, 2013