INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Forging Resilient National Social Contracts:

Preventing Violent Conflict and Sustaining Peace

A Research and Scholar-Policy Dialogue Project

Project Synopsis

In many countries, the social contract between state and society is in crisis. Destructive politics characterized by elite competition, virulent ethnic or sectarian mobilization, economic predation, and deep societal distrust of leadership rooted in decades of warfare or neglect overwhelm efforts to build viable states and a shared sense of shared citizenship. Extractive corporate agreements, interventionist neighboring agendas, crisis-driven migration and refugee flows, and transnational groups willing to utilize violence and extremist ideologies to achieve goals also present profound challenges for states and their societies endeavoring to forge a common vision for peace. International peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts to date have not succeeded in establishing effective responses to these challenges. As such they have faced a host of growing scholarly and policy critiques.[1] A rising consensus in scholarship and policy discussions suggests that i) sustainability requires more than 'negative' peace,[2] ii) elite driven political settlements, while important in establishing the foundations of peaceful political orders, do not guarantee a path to nationally owned, lasting peace,[3] and iii) externally driven, 'templated' approaches to peacebuilding and statebuilding do not lay a secure path for sustainable peace.[4]

Within this context, the social contract notion is rising as a priority policy area[5] to revitalize thinking and practice around how to transform and prevent violent conflict and forge lasting peace in countries affected by conflict and fragility. Grounded comparative research is, however, needed to deepen global awareness and understanding about what the social means to people in different contexts, and specifically, about what underpins and drives its development in constructive ways. While the concept has deep roots across civilizations and is well established in political philosophy, its contemporary application to countries affected by conflict and fragility is not well understood.[6] Over the last decade the scholarship and policy research on statebuilding has investigated the role of elite-based political settlements in achieving stability, providing a critical foundation for this investigation.[7] The notion of the social contract, however, requires transcending the often unsustainable and ephemeral elite bargains, and forging and linking more inclusive ones to durable arrangements for peace.

Case studies
Afghanistan
Bosnia-Herzegovina
Colombia
Cyprus
Nepal
Sierra Leone
Somalia
South Sudan
South Africa
Tunisia
Yemen
Zimbabwe

Project Objectives and Methodology

This research and scholar-policy dialogue project aims to revitalize the social contract concept in the context of contemporary challenges of countries affected by conflict and fragility, producing findings to advance policy and practice pathways for achieving and sustaining peace. The research is inspired by the question: *what drives a resilient national social contract in countries affected by conflict and fragility – a dynamic agreement between state and society, and different groups in society, on how*

to live together. Such a contract allows for the mediation of different demands and conflicting interests over time (including sub-national, international and transnational, and/or nested social contracts) and in response to contextual factors (including shocks and stressors), through varied mechanisms, institutions and processes. Comparative findings aim to elucidate how the social contract manifests, adapts to, and is understood in different contexts. The research investigates three postulated "drivers" of a resilient social contract, developed through a deep examination of the relevant literature and subjected to extensive discussion with the project team of advisers:

1. ***Core conflict and fragility issues are being progressively addressed through an evolving, inclusive, political settlement and requisite spheres of "social-contract making;"*** [8]

2. ***Increasingly effective, fair, and inclusive institutions*** (state, customary, other non-state and international) ***are performing key functions with increasingly broadly shared results;*** [9]

3. ***There is broadening and deepening social cohesion*** – understood as the formal and informal ties that hold society together both horizontally (across citizens, between groups) and vertically (in the relations between citizens/groups and the state) ***– drawing on clear mechanisms and related commitments that value and build inclusivity.*** [10]

These questions and propositions are being examined through both exploratory and explanatory research methods, through interviews, focus groups, and other ethnographic methods, led by national authors. Differential concerns and interests of social groups, notably women and youth, and ethnic and religious groups are in focus, and cross-cutting thematic streams on inclusion/ exclusion, the roles of international actors, and "resilience for peace" capacities are being investigated. While the emphasis of case study research is qualitative and context-rich, survey data will be used to buttress research findings throughout. Findings will be validated in numerous ways – notably, through a series of scholar-policy "dialogues" and through the development of an "expert-based" scoring scheme around the three "drivers." The quantitative scoring dimension of the analysis will draw upon the qualitative research done by authors as well as currently available quantitative data.[11] This will enrich the potential for comparative policy findings, serving as a pilot for development of a possible social contract index.

The project activities are underway in 2016-2018, and will culminate in a series of policy papers on cross-cutting critical themes emerging from the research, a scholarly book focused on the cases, and potentially a policy oriented book on assessing and cultivating resilient national social contracts - launched in several settings internationally.

Project Status, Support and Partnership

We are currently seeking additional partnership and support to enrich our processes and maximize the results and policy impacts of this important research. To date, investments and achievements include:

- Pulling together an outstanding Working Group of authors/advisers (see below) who are committed to, and deeply engaged in, the project;
- Through deeply consultative processes with this group of experts and beyond, developing a concept note and methodology, as well as a guidance note for authors, and draft set of indicators to support critical case reflection around assessing progress in achieving a resilient national social contract;

- With a Rockefeller Foundation award, the holding of our second Working Group meeting at the Bellagio Center in Italy, February 28-March 3, 2017, where authors and advisers reflected upon project their research strategies, progress to date, and collectively strategized next steps with an eye towards maximizing the policy impacts of this work;[12]
- Social media development – *follow us on twitter* @SC4Peace; website, available by mid-April: https://socialcontractsforpeace.org/

Important aspects of the work are still to come, including:
- Specialist and policy analysis and dialogue on findings, country, comparative, thematic, as well as policy implications;
- Country validation processes (where feasible), and global / regional dialogues on findings;
- Comparative and complimentary analysis, including thematic reports on a range of policy relevant issues, i.e. *the social contract and:* inclusive governance; gender; Islam; social cohesion; *Nested social contracts; Assessing resilient social contracts and sustaining peace;*
- Publication editing and production, and launching and dissemination of findings.

The project gratefully receives support from *UNDP's Oslo Governance Center, the Julian J. Studley Fund of the Graduate Program of International Affairs at The New School,* and *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung,* in Berlin and New York*.* Further financial and in-kind support and partnership is being sought towards ensuring the project's success and policy impact.

---

[1] The first major critique: Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
[2] See recent twin Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282) on sustainable peace as a primary UN goal underscore the need to address root causes of conflict and point to inclusive national ownership as criteria for its achievement. Academic literature, i.e. Call, "Knowing Peace When You See It: Setting Standards for Peacebuilding Success," *Civil Wars,* V10N2, 2008.
[3] See, i.e. Menocal, Alina Rocha. *Inclusive Political Settlements*. University of Birmingham, June 2015.
[4] See f.n. 1.
[5] Policy actors engaging the concept include: United States Institute of Peace (USIP), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank - i.e. 2011 speech "A New Social Contract for Development" by President Robert Zoellick. Recent UN resolutions (f.n. 2) describe 'sustaining peace,' as "a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society […]."
[6] Themes concern: i) its nature and purpose; ii) participants; iii) the mechanisms through which it is forged and fostered, iv) moral obligations and conflicting interests, and v) wealth distribution.
[7] See f.n. 3.
[8] These are conceptualized as: peace agreement, governance ('transitional,' 'official,' 'hybrid') and 'everyday' spheres. The 'everyday' acts as a litmus test to ascertain if higher level, formalized agreements or processes effectively represent 'everyday' views. Evidence suggests peace agreement failure, and war reversion, are often due to poor settlement design and implementation. See, i.e. Mack. "Global Political Violence." *Explaining the Post Cold War Decline*. Coping With Crisis Working Paper Series (New York: International Peace Academy. March 3, 2007.
[9] Research points to the need for evidence and to better understand the relationships between access to services and perceptions of the legitimacy and performance of government. See i.e. Mallett, Richard et al. "Surveying livelihoods, Service Delivery and Governance, "Working Paper 31," Overseas Development Institute, 2015.
[10] Lack of social cohesion is linked to conflict (See i.e. UNICEF/Harvard Humanitarian Initiative studies), yet we need to understand more about horizontal and vertical relationships (i.e. as core conflict issues are addressed in the peace process in increasingly inclusive ways, and core functions and services are delivered and realized).
[11] Cross-cutting themes and scoring guidelines will be extracted based on content analysis of the country cases. Each theme will constitute a scoring dimension, while the actual scores for each dimension will range from 0 to 10, with a detailed narrative description of each to ensure objectivity and inter-rater reliability.
[12] The first Working Group meeting took place in Colorado in 11/2015 and had additional support from the Joseph Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver.

Working Group of Case Study Authors and Advisers

Case Study Authors

- **Afghanistan:** Afghanistan: Dr. Orzala Ashraf Nemat, School of Oriental and African Studies
- **Bosnia-Herzegovina:** Jasmin Ramovic, University of Manchester and Roberto Belloni, University of Trento
- **Colombia:** Angelika Rettberg, Universidad de los Andes
- **Cyprus:** Alexandros Lordos, Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SEED)*
- **Nepal:** Subindra Bogati, Nepali Peacebuilding Initiative and Timothy D. Sisk
- **Sierra Leone:** David Francis, University of Bradford
- **Somalia:** Deqa Hagi Yusuf, IIDA Women's Development Organization
- **South Sudan:** Luka Biong Deng, University of Juba
- **South Africa:** Hugo van der Merwe and Masana Ndinga, Centre for Study of Violence and Reconciliation
- **Tunisia:** Youssef Mahmoud and Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, International Peace Institute
- **Yemen:** Fatima Abo Al Asrar, Basement Foundation
- **Zimbabwe:** Showers Mawowa, Southern African Liaison Office; Erin McCandless

Scholar and Policy Advisers

- Marie-Joelle Zahar, University of Montreal, Canada *
- Alina Rocha Menocal, Overseas Development Institute, UK *
- Seth Kaplan, Johns Hopkins SAIS, U.S.
- Neven Knezevik, UNICEF, Kenya
- Sarah Lister, Oslo Governance Centre, UNDP, Norway
- Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, The Graduate Institute Geneva, Switzerland
- Mary Hope Schwoebel, Nova Southeastern University
- Habib Ur Rehman Mayar, g7+ Group of Countries Secretariat, Timor Leste
- Timothy D. Sisk, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, U.S.

* Methods team

**Research and Project Director: *Dr. Erin McCandless* ** is a widely published scholar and practitioner with over two decades of experience working on and in conflict affected settings, broadly on issues of peacebuilding, statebuilding, governance, development and resilience – and their intersections. Dr. McCandless teaches at The New School in New York, is Honorary Senior Lecturer at the University of Kwazulu Natal in South Africa, and founder and Co-Executive Editor of the international, refereed *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development.* She consults widely across the United Nations system and with other international organizations, and serves as a civil society Co-Chair of the New Deal Implementation Working Group of International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding. More information (including on project) can be found on her website: www.erinmccandless.net

Researcher: Rose Worden, The New School / Social Media specialist: Gabrielle Belli, The New School