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Disentangling aid dynamics in statebuilding and peacebuilding: a causal framework

Naazneen H. Barma, Naomi Levy and Jessica Piombo

ABSTRACT

While scholars and practitioners alike argue that the pursuit of sustainable peace in post-conflict developing countries requires international interventions to build state capacity, many debate the precise effects that external assistance has had on building peace in conflict-affected states. This paper seeks to clear conceptual ground by proposing a research agenda that disentangles statebuilding and peacebuilding from each other. Recent scholarship has made the case that the two endeavours are geared towards distinct sets of goals, yet few have subjected the causal mechanism underlying those processes or the relationship between them to sustained theoretical and empirical inquiry. Additionally, despite decades of mixed results from international interventions, we lack knowledge of the mechanisms by which external engagement leads to specific outcomes. To address these gaps, this paper offers a causal framework for understanding the effects of aid dynamics on state coherence and the depth of peace. It specifies the variables in that framework, with a view to establishing a new research agenda to advance our understanding of statebuilding and peacebuilding. Finally, it proposes that public service delivery in post-conflict countries offers fertile empirical ground to hypothesize about and test the relationship between state coherence and sustainable peace.

International peacebuilding interventions in post-conflict countries are typically designed as statebuilding efforts that channel high levels of assistance towards building state capacity, which is in turn believed to enhance their prospects for sustainable peace. Yet statebuilding and peacebuilding are distinct processes with different logics that may, in reality, both reinforce *and* contradict each other in specific circumstances. Indeed, part of the reason why international interventions in post-conflict countries have yielded disappointing results is that their design is predicated on often untested assumptions about how the foundations for sustainable peace are best achieved – and how the different processes for attempting to do so are truly inter-related. This paper seeks to clear conceptual ground by disentangling statebuilding from peacebuilding through a focus on the impacts of international aid on each of these processes. The goal is to establish a theoretically informed

framework for empirical investigation that has the potential to improve the results of post-conflict interventions.¹

This undertaking charts middle ground through what has become a major intellectual fault line in the contemporary peacebuilding scholarship. Critical theorists have explained the relative failure of the peacebuilding enterprise by reappraising the ‘liberal peacebuilding’ model itself and thereby throwing into question both the international community’s motivation in applying it and the appropriateness of its content (Weberian bureaucracy, liberal democracy, and neo-liberal economics) in the post-conflict countries in which it is attempted.² Positivist scholars have equally recognized the shortcomings of international interventions yet, in their empirical studies, have adopted a problem-solving orientation geared towards improving the design and implementation of peace operations.³ Despite the prolific and valuable work on internationalized statebuilding and peacebuilding, however, there has been surprisingly little research focused on enhancing our understanding of when and where these processes support and run counter to each other.

The conceptual advance in this paper is not in mounting a new critique of international peacebuilding. Rather, we propose a research agenda that addresses the various existing critiques through a new conceptual framework that has the potential to support a range of empirical studies. In particular, this paper interrogates the conventional wisdom that creating peace in post-conflict states must involve building state capacity by asking the following questions: Do international efforts to assist post-conflict recovery actually help to build state capacity?⁴ And does such an approach to statebuilding actually contribute to the prospects for and attainment of sustainable peace?⁵

In the first section of the paper, we argue that although many scholars and practitioners have acknowledged the problematic conflation of peacebuilding and statebuilding, there has been little effort to disentangle them analytically. In the second section, we discuss the benefits of viewing statebuilding and peacebuilding as distinct causal processes that lead to two separate sets of outcomes – *state coherence* and the *depth of peace*, respectively. To explain variation in those outcomes, the third section draws on the aid effectiveness

¹Transformative peacebuilding operations often also incorporate a democratization component, an objective that we do not consider here. The broader pursuit of liberal peacebuilding and the international community’s track record in achieving its goals has been dealt with extensively – see, especially, Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War*; Jarstad and Sisk, *From War to Democracy*; Paris, *At War’s End*; Westendorf, *Negotiating Insecurity*; and Whalan, *Peace Operations*.

²See, especially, Chandler, *Empire in Denial*; Pugh, “Critical Theory”; and Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*.

³Influential examples of this line of work include Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War*; Paris, *At War’s End*; and Paris and Sisk, *Dilemmas of Statebuilding*.

⁴A parallel set of questions regarding the relationship between state capacity and service provision is posed in Krasner and Risse, “External Actors”. See also Lee, Walter-Drop, and Wiesel, “Taking the State (Back) Out”; and Hanson, “Complements or Substitutes”.

⁵Call, “Knowing Peace”; and Paris and Sisk, *Dilemmas of Statebuilding* point to a number of the intellectual and practical problems with conflating statebuilding and peacebuilding.

literature, practitioner insights, and recent work on the political economy of service delivery to suggest that the nature of specific *aid dynamics* is a key independent variable affecting the outcomes of international intervention. The fourth section introduces our conceptual framework, which offers a causal approach to disentangling statebuilding and peacebuilding. We suggest that this framework could help shape broader empirical research on different types of intervention by a wide range of actors seeking various objectives. We thereby hope to facilitate more empirical work on the causal mechanisms by which post-conflict recovery efforts result in their various outcomes.

Internationalized Statebuilding and Peacebuilding: The Logic and Its Contradictions

After the end of the Cold War, statebuilding emerged as one of the primary methods through which peace could be constructed in countries emerging from conflict. As both scholarship and practice increasingly integrated the processes of statebuilding and peacebuilding, top-down, externally driven solutions to end internal violence and build a sustainable peace became the international norm for responding to civil conflicts around the globe.⁶ Two assumptions underpin the optimism animating internationalized statebuilding attempts, evident in the ever-expanding scholarship on these issues. First, there is a widespread belief that statebuilding and peacebuilding are mutually reinforcing, such that ‘in practice peacebuilding has largely been operationalized by donors as statebuilding’.⁷ Second, international interventions are essentially still considered the most effective, even ‘right’, way to pursue post-conflict peace.⁸ This is despite an entire vein of critical studies decrying the structural harm to post-conflict countries that can come as a result of overly internationalized peacebuilding interventions and the harmful exclusion of bottom-up initiatives.⁹ Richmond and Franks have attributed this to the ‘active, muscular and humanitarian liberal internationalism’ of the United States and United Kingdom, exerted through both their bilateral initiatives and their influence on multilateral institutions such as the United Nations.¹⁰

Hence the manner in which peacebuilding is typically pursued in conflict-affected countries is through international interventions that channel a large

⁶Paris, *At War's End*; and Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*.

⁷Denney, Mallett, and Mazurana, “Peacebuilding and Service Delivery”. On the conflation between statebuilding and peacebuilding see, also, Krasner, “Sharing Sovereignty”; Fukuyama, *State-Building*; and Barnett, “Building a Republican Peace”. Some of the problems with this conflation are also pointed to by Call, “Conclusion”; and Paris and Sisk, *Dilemmas of Statebuilding*.

⁸Roland Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding”.

⁹On the problems of liberal peacebuilding, see Chandler, *Empire in Denial*; Cooper, Turner, and Pugh, “Last Peacebuilder”; and Spears, “False Promise”. On the myopia of international interventions regarding the ‘local’, see Autesserre, *Congo*; Mac Ginty, *Hybrid Forms*; and Richmond, *Failed Statebuilding*.

¹⁰Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*, 1.

volume of financial and human resources into governments in order to help them carry out their basic functions and enhance the delivery of public services. Assisting governments in this way, the logic goes, helps to build state capacity, which in turn enhances the prospects for recovery, development, and peace. The provision of public services is seen as a crucial element of both statebuilding and peacebuilding, since one of the most fundamental roles of the state is to deliver the public goods and services expected by society.¹¹ Indeed, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) definition of statebuilding, like that of many other statebuilding practitioner agencies, is focused on generating and delivering upon the social contract.¹² The extent to which public services are delivered is, in turn, a key measure of the quality of post-conflict governance and peaceful stability, capturing both state capacity as well as the measure of legitimacy gained by the state as it performs this crucial expected role.¹³

Yet these relationships among external intervention, state capacity, and lasting peace – as well as the particular role of public service provision in the logic of intervention – have typically been asserted without much examination of the merits of the causal logic. In turn, over the last three decades, these assertions have been acted upon at great expense and most often with disappointing outcomes. In no small part, the persistent appeal of internationalized statebuilding is a result of the fact that the theory and practice of peacebuilding have been so intertwined since the 1990s that a great deal of scholarship has been driven by operational concerns. The benefit of this is apparent: the close dialogue between scholars and practitioners in this field has meant that they have informed each other more so than in other crucial contemporary policy areas. Yet there is also a major drawback, in that our understanding of the causal dynamics of peacebuilding has been compromised and, as a result, both the goals and outcomes of interventions remain vague and difficult to measure. Richmond, a staunch critic of the internationalized peacebuilding via statebuilding approach, has argued that it will remain impossible to fully understand what can successfully contribute to peace when these disparate concepts are not examined independently.¹⁴

While statebuilding and peacebuilding have converged in both practice and scholarship, as objects of study they are separate processes rooted in distinct intellectual lineages. Research on statebuilding originates from much longer standing literatures than that on peacebuilding. The vast literature on state formation includes seminal work on how states generated and grew their administrative structures and also how and why they developed into

¹¹Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States*; Whaites, "States in Development"; and DFID, *Literature Review*.

¹²OECD, *Concepts and Dilemmas*. See also DFID, *Building Peaceful States*.

¹³Denney, Mallett, and Mazurana, "Peacebuilding and Service Delivery"; and OECD, *Service Delivery*.

¹⁴Richmond, *Failed Statebuilding*.

democratic or autocratic states.¹⁵ Much of this longer view of statebuilding emphasizes the inherently violent nature of the process, with states originally forming as ‘protection rackets’ among elites attempting to protect against threats to their property and privilege.¹⁶ Other strands of work take a governance approach that divorces the technical qualities of good or ‘good enough’ governance from the full package of democratic regime attributes.¹⁷ What these different veins of the literature share is a core focus on statebuilding as the attempt to build the elements of a Weberian state: capacity, authority, and legitimacy.¹⁸

Peacebuilding has long been conceived as the process of building a sustainable peace and recovering from conflict, but how it is implemented has evolved considerably. Embedded within the concept is an implicit theory of conflict resolution that is predicated on transforming the sociopolitical roots of conflict.¹⁹ In its early guises, peacebuilding was squarely about the process of building resilience into community structures and patterns of relations.²⁰ Yet the liberal peacebuilding paradigm has in many respects supplanted this earlier conception.²¹ In 1992, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as ‘action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict’.²² In so doing, he redefined peacebuilding as an intervention strategy, with a broad range of political, economic, and social goals. As put into practice, peacebuilding quickly became a formulaic project of the international community, perpetuated by the scripts and operative frames of international agencies and enacted upon nations that could not afford to refuse the assistance and thus had to acquiesce in the way in which it was carried out.²³ In this process, the peacebuilding project came to focus on building state institutions, with its goals centred on transforming and expanding the institutional arena in which a government interacts with its citizens. As a result of this state-oriented conception of how peace is delivered in post-conflict states, institution-building emerged as the key to peacebuilding success, through internationally managed initiatives to build and strengthen formal institutions of governance.²⁴ Mac Ginty even notes that such operations have been described as ‘peace by governance’.²⁵

¹⁵Ayoob, “State Making”; Ertman, *Leviathan*; and Levi, *Rule and Revenue*.

¹⁶Bates, *Prosperity & Violence*; Tilly, “War Making and State Making”.

¹⁷Grindle, “Good Enough Governance”.

¹⁸See Lemay-Hébert, “Weberian Approaches”, for a discussion of different conceptions of statebuilding. In adopting an institutional conception of statebuilding, we explicitly omit nation building activities that are designed to generate socio-political cohesion.

¹⁹Galtung, “Peace Research”.

²⁰This is along the lines of what is labelled peace formation in Richmond, *Post-Liberal Peace*.

²¹Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding”.

²²Boutros-Ghali, *Agenda for Peace*.

²³Autesserre, *Peaceland*.

²⁴Call and Cousens, “Ending Wars”; Menocal, “New Paradigm”; and Paris and Sisk, *Dilemmas of Statebuilding*.

²⁵Mac Ginty, *Hybrid Forms*, 15–6.

The logic connecting statebuilding to peacebuilding seems straightforward: endowing governments with the capacity to perform their basic governance functions, including the unbiased delivery of essential public services and collective public goods, lays a crucial foundation for stable, peaceful societies. Almost all multilateral and bilateral donors view statebuilding as one of the major pillars of their strategies in fragile and post-conflict countries.²⁶ Building state capacity to enable post-conflict countries to better govern themselves has thus become the single most integral element of international peacebuilding interventions. Yet the combination of statebuilding and peacebuilding into one meta-enterprise conflates what are in reality two separate processes: building the structures of the state (statebuilding) and crafting sustainable peace on the ground (peacebuilding).²⁷ Many scholars recognize the problematic nature of the overlap between the two processes and have pointed out serious flaws in this peacebuilding paradigm. Critical theorists have argued that the liberal objectives underpinning the model are an inappropriate imposition of externally generated, especially Western, ideals in post-conflict countries.²⁸ Even scholars adopting a positivist lens have noted that peace operations are, in many instances, extremely messy and prone to relative failure, with most of the challenges relating to contradictions built into the model.²⁹

The internationalized and interventionist nature of peacebuilding generates additional challenges. Paris and Sisk have observed that contradictions are ‘embedded in the very idea of externally assisted state-building’, including, for example, competing imperatives between short-term and long-term goals.³⁰ Practically, too, international interventions all too often fall short of achieving their expressed objectives in terms of state capacity and public service provision, let alone the loftier ideals of democracy.³¹ Moreover, the more the international community involves itself in the process of creating a viable state and building a sustainable peace, the more evident is the lack of the local autonomy necessary to own and operate that state. Challenges to state sovereignty seem to be deeply ingrained in the nature of international peacebuilding, especially in the context of large-scale peacebuilding interventions.³² The inherent contradiction is clear: peacebuilding constitutes an attempt to build domestic sovereignty through an international exercise.³³

²⁶McCandless, “Peace Dividends”; and Menocal, “New Paradigm”.

²⁷Often third and fourth processes of establishing a democratic regime type (democratization) and a market economy (neoliberalism) are also bundled into the enterprise, but these are outside the scope of this paper.

²⁸Chandler, *Empire in Denial*; Cooper, Turner, and Pugh “Last Peacebuilder”; and Pugh, “Critical Theory”.

²⁹Autesserre, *Congo*; Barma, *The Peacebuilding Puzzle*; Paris, *At War’s End*; Pugh, “Critical Theory”; and Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*.

³⁰Paris and Sisk, *Dilemmas of Statebuilding*, 305; Levy, “Lessons from Social Psychology”; and Roeder and Rothchild, *Sustainable Peace*.

³¹Guttieri and Piombo, *Interim Governments*; and Lake and Fariss, “International Trusteeship”.

³²Krasner, “Sharing Sovereignty”; and Fearon and Laitin, “Neo-Trusteeship”.

³³Zaum, *The Sovereignty Paradox*.

Some critics of external statebuilding go so far as to claim that such peacebuilding efforts constitute a new form of imperialism or colonialism.³⁴

Nearly three decades into the modern era of peacebuilding, despite these heated debates over the merits of this internationally led, state- or institution-oriented model, there remains a basic commitment to this form of peacebuilding intervention. Local opposition to internationally imposed formulas has successfully managed to shift the particular details of what transplanted institutions look like and how much attention is given to local and traditional forms of governance and, in many cases, the size and complexity of intervention has been scaled back.³⁵ Yet in key ongoing interventions across the globe – including those in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Burundi, for example – the international community retains its core commitment to statebuilding as the way to build peace. At the same time, despite the prolific amount of work that has discussed the problematic overlap between peacebuilding and statebuilding on the one hand and the challenges associated with the internationalization of peacebuilding on the other, there has been little progress in identifying how statebuilding and peacebuilding interact in practice as an empirical matter.

The remainder of this paper proposes a conceptual framework to resolve some of these intellectual and practical knots. First, we suggest disentangling statebuilding and peacebuilding by viewing them as distinct causal processes related in theory and practice to two different sets of outcomes. We then propose a focus on the myriad ways in which the delivery of aid varies – what we term *aid dynamics* – as a crucial influence on the extent to which the goals of statebuilding and peacebuilding are achieved. Delineating aid dynamics as a key causal variable is not a big leap from the conventional wisdom: the high levels of international involvement in fragile and conflict-affected states simply would not exist if international actors did not expect this engagement to be effective. Yet we argue that scholars should not hold the *ex ante* belief that international assistance produces the intervener's desired outcomes, nor should we begin with the normative conviction that aid necessarily creates perverse outcomes. Instead, in the final section, we propose a research agenda geared towards analysing the causal processes by which the dynamics of aid affect statebuilding and peacebuilding goals, framing this as a fundamentally empirical question.

Disentangling Statebuilding and Peacebuilding: Processes and Outcomes

Statebuilding and peacebuilding are best understood as distinct processes that are oriented towards achieving improvements in two different sets of goals or

³⁴Pugh, "Critical Theory"; and Chandler, "Other Regarding Ethics".

³⁵Autesserre, *Congo*; Richmond, *Post-Liberal Peace*.

outcomes in post-conflict countries. In addition to disentangling statebuilding and peacebuilding from each other, the inputs to these processes must be analytically distinguished from their outcomes if we are to understand the causal processes by which statebuilding and peacebuilding activities might lead to particular results. In this view, the statebuilding process involves actions intended to enhance *state coherence*, whereas the peacebuilding process involves actions intended to improve the *depth of peace*. In order to gauge the effectiveness of statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts, we conceptualize and assess the outcomes of each in terms of these two variables: state coherence measures the functioning of the state apparatus, while the depth of peace measures the degree to which a country has built a comprehensive and sustainable peace. Separating out the two sets of outcomes in this manner enables analytical purchase, in turn, on a deeper theoretical and empirical investigation of the relationship between state coherence and the depth of peace. In other words, this conceptual step affords us a lens on the question of whether attempts to strengthen the state apparatus in post-conflict countries does indeed lead to better outcomes in the realm of sustainable peace.

Each of these outcome variables is non-dichotomous, ranges in value, and can be measured across multiple dimensions and at different levels of analysis, as follows.

State coherence. The ‘state coherence’ variable gauges the strength of the formal, modern state. It aims to capture the variation in how effectively state institutions are able to carry out the tasks of governance and achieve the state’s goals, as well as to capture for whom the state governs in terms of how its authority is achieved and whether it is perceived as legitimate. The ‘state’ refers to the formal, juridical institutions of government: executive and policy-making bodies, bureaucratic and military apparatus, and rule of law institutions and structures.³⁶ State coherence varies along three inter-related dimensions.

- (1) The *authority of the state* captures the degree of control of the state, in terms of its ability to maintain public order through the rule of law or otherwise, secure its borders, collect the revenue it needs to pay for its activities, and maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.
- (2) The *effectiveness* of the state captures its ability to carry out policies, perform governance functions, and achieve desired outcomes.

³⁶While informal systems of power may undergird or compete with these formal structures, the distinction between them remains important – thus the classic distinction between *juridical* and *empirical* statehood presented by Jackson and Rosberg, “Africa’s Weak States”. The state is distinct from the administration or regime that runs it, and is also different from the specific regime type – the form of that administration and the nature of how it comes to and exercises power. A state is recognized by the international community as the sovereign ruler of a given territory.

- (3) The *legitimacy* of the state captures the extent to which society views governance by the state as normatively and empirically legitimate.

These dimensions capture the variation in the degree of control states wield within their societies, in their abilities to articulate and carry out their visions and policies, and in the extent to which they are viewed by society as legitimate.

State coherence varies along a continuum ranging from incoherent to coherent. State incoherence is characterized by a lack of authority, an inability to provide basic public services or set coherent policies, and widespread questioning of state legitimacy. Coherent states, by contrast, broadcast their authority, satisfy the social contract, and are widely viewed as legitimate. The variation in state coherence can manifest differently across these dimensions – states are neither wholly coherent nor incoherent. Like Krasner and Risse and Hanson, we separate out the questions of the state’s authority or infra-structural power from its capacity to deliver services.³⁷ State coherence can also vary across the different sectors of a state’s activity. Often, states are selective about the sectors in which they build strength and capacity – choosing, for example, to privilege the security or extractive sectors over the social services, thus being able to maintain order and broadcast authority effectively even while being ineffective in providing basic public services. Finally, there may be important sub-national variation in this variable, across geographic or demographic units within a country.

This conceptualization views state coherence akin to what many label ‘governance’, absent the emphasis on participation or democratic regime type. Engleburt, too, defines good governance as a state with accountable and efficient institutions, and also explicitly does not tie this to democracy.³⁸ Similar to Fukuyama’s recent work on governance – in contrast to his earlier work on statebuilding – we focus on state coherence as the authority of a state to set and implement policy goals and to do so with a degree of effectiveness and legitimacy.³⁹ In other words, we focus less on scope, or the range of activities in which the state engages, as a measure of state coherence and instead emphasize the authority of the state, its effectiveness in carrying out the duties it has chosen to execute and the services it provides, and its perceived legitimacy in the eyes of those whom it purports to serve.

Depth of peace. The ‘depth of peace’ variable measures the extent to which a society has developed a degree of resilience to channel conflict and prevent large-scale violence. It captures the ‘peacefulness’ of a society, including the extent to which a society can channel and resolve tensions and conflicts without resorting to violence. The depth of peace has three core dimensions.

³⁷Krasner and Risse, “External Actors”; Hanson, “Complements or Substitutes”; and Mann, *Sources of Social Power*.

³⁸Engleburt, *State Legitimacy*.

³⁹Fukuyama, “What is Governance”; and Fukuyama, *State-Building*.

- (1) The *absence of violence* captures the ‘negative peace’ by measuring the extent of violence in society at multiple levels, from organized to routine violence.
- (2) *Post-conflict recovery* captures how well a post-conflict society has managed to normalize, including societal healing and the restoration of peaceful relations.
- (3) *Conflict resilience* captures how a society manages conflict through mechanisms that prevent tensions from erupting into violence, or that help to contain violence once it breaks out.

These three dimensions together form a continuous variable that ranges from a lack of peace characterized by high degrees of violent conflict, to a broad and sustainable peace where multiple mechanisms work to channel tensions and reduce the likelihood that violent conflict will erupt.

Our conception of ‘depth of peace’ thus captures the peacefulness of a society in a manner that builds on the distinction between the ‘negative peace’ and the ‘positive peace’ most closely associated with Johan Galtung.⁴⁰ The deepest peace will not only reflect a minimal degree of both organized and casual violence, it will also foster conditions that promote human security. In a post-conflict situation, this type of peace represents ‘conflict transformation’, in which the relationships between the parties in conflict have normalized, fundamentally changing from one of conflict and violence to one of arbitration, management, and even resolution. As with state coherence, the depth of peace can vary sub-nationally, temporally, and across public service delivery sectors. Moreover, the three dimensions may not necessarily co-vary across these levels of analysis.

A deep peace is not one where no conflict exists, but where conflict does not lead to violence in most instances. Instead, political, economic, and social tensions and competition are processed through various institutions within society. The concept thus captures ‘the capacity of social systems to absorb stress, adapt and repair’.⁴¹ This conception of peace does not rely on formal state institutions, nor is it keyed to a particular regime type. Political tensions will be processed and managed by institutions of governance, whether formal or informal; economic tensions may be handled either by the market or state-mediated mechanisms (or some combination); and societal tensions by civil society, state institutions, or traditional and other informal mechanisms, as appropriate. When such mechanisms break down society is less resilient and the normal tensions and conflicts within society are more likely to escalate into violence. The overall resilience represented

⁴⁰Galtung, “Peace Research”.

⁴¹Resilience is viewed as a *consequence* of peace by IEP, *Pillars of Peace*, 2. By contrast, we conceptualize societal resilience and the ability to process conflict as part of what *creates* a durable, positive peace at all levels of a society.

by the depth of peace concept is especially important in a country that has emerged from war and large-scale violence, since the mechanisms to manage tension may have been eroded during the violence and their repair, in turn, constitutes a key element of post-conflict peacebuilding.

Disentangling statebuilding and peacebuilding from each other and taking a causal approach to how these two distinct processes result in the outcomes of state coherence and the depth of peace enables us to unpack international interventions into their analytically distinct components or activities. While statebuilding and peacebuilding may intimately affect one another, they follow separate pathways and contribute to different outcomes. It may indeed be the case, per the conventional wisdom, that some elements of statebuilding and peacebuilding reinforce enhancements in both state coherence and depth of peace. Sometimes, however, the mechanisms to achieve one of these sets of goals are counterproductive for attaining the other. Menocal offers a balanced analysis of the complementarities and tensions between the two processes.⁴² In terms of complementarities, statebuilding can help to build more inclusive societies and legitimate political settlements centred around the state apparatus and the state–society interface. In terms of tensions, achieving greater state coherence may require a different form of political settlement from deepening the peace, especially when elites face competing imperatives. Moreover, as both Menocal and Mcloughlin note, statebuilding with the express purpose of enhancing service delivery is not related linearly to the pursuit of political legitimacy.⁴³ Our approach enables conceptual and empirical investigations of the relationship between statebuilding and peacebuilding.

The Effects of Aid Dynamics

The peacebuilding scholarship has wrestled with the question of how international interventions actually assist societies in achieving improvements in state capacity and sustainable peace. The focus in this literature has been on comprehensive international interventions that, in addition to providing peacekeeping functions, deliver significant financial aid, policy advice, and technical assistance to post-conflict countries, such as the peacebuilding efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, East Timor, and Kosovo. In examining the ways in which such international interventions succeed or fail in achieving their mandates, a great deal has been written about the effect of different *types* of peacebuilding operation.⁴⁴

Much less has been said about the consequences of the *degree* of intervention. The reality of how the international community pursues statebuilding

⁴²Menocal, “New Paradigm”. See, also, Haider, “Conflict and Fragility”.

⁴³Menocal, “New Paradigm”; and Mcloughlin, “Service Delivery”.

⁴⁴Chesterman, *You, The People*; and Caplan, *International Governance*.

and peacebuilding is that large multi-dimensional interventions geared towards post-conflict recovery represent a small and specific subset of the broad range of post-conflict activities. Focusing solely on the big, recognizable peace operations, as has much of the peacebuilding scholarship, restricts our understanding of the broad range of engagement strategies. Even countries that do not have large-scale international interventions receive varying degrees and forms of multilateral, regional, and bilateral assistance – and this can and does vary over time.

Uganda, for example, experienced recovery without significant international assistance after its civil war ended in 1986; but by the early 2000s it had become a highly aided and aid-dependent country. There are also examples where governments receive significant external assistance but are very controlled and deliberate in how they direct and use that assistance, representing a form of autonomy even in a highly aided context. Laos and Rwanda are good examples of a high degree of local control and decision-making autonomy, even when significantly aided.⁴⁵ In reality, too, there are instances of more fully autonomous or indigenous post-conflict recovery, in which internal decision-makers and actors pursue reforms to achieve sustainable peace and improvements in state capacity in the relative absence of coordinated international intervention. Yet, as Weinstein observed, surprisingly little research has been undertaken on the similarities and differences between international peace operations and autonomous processes of statebuilding and peacebuilding.⁴⁶

We propose that *aid dynamics* should be viewed as a major explanatory variable in the quest to understand the outcomes associated with statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts. It is certainly not the only causal variable worth examining; other crucial dimensions of context, including the nature of the preceding conflict, the particular configuration of elites, and latent social and economic cleavages matter a great deal, of course. Nevertheless, recent work on statebuilding and peacebuilding in the practitioner community has similarly highlighted the importance of distinguishing among the myriad ways in which development partners engage to improve service delivery as the means towards building state capacity and helping societies recover from conflict. In particular, the specific modalities through which development partners aim to support public service delivery influences both the effectiveness with which those services are delivered and the extent to which the domestic government gains legitimacy for that function being performed. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) thus states, '... service delivery, depending on *how* it is undertaken

⁴⁵A state's capacity determines, to some extent, the possibility for it to assert these higher levels of local autonomy – yet it appears that even states with relatively low levels of capacity, such as Laos, can yet exert a higher degree of independence.

⁴⁶Weinstein, "Autonomous Recovery".

(exclusively versus inclusively, by which type of provider, and to which groups of people) can contribute either positively, negatively or neutrally to wider state-building and peace-building processes', while at the same time noting the lack of clarity about causal mechanisms and a dearth of evidence.⁴⁷ The OECD similarly notes that engaging with recipient post-conflict governments on statebuilding initiatives is a question of degree rather than a dichotomous choice and that careful strategic programming is required to mitigate the dilemmas often associated with externally driven service provision.⁴⁸

To better conceptualize the role of aid dynamics in statebuilding and peacebuilding, we turn to the rich scholarship that seeks to understand the effectiveness of international aid on economic growth and development. One vein of this literature evaluates whether international aid contributes to the strength of developing countries' economies. Whether economic growth, levels of investment, or savings rates are evaluated as the primary outcome, aid seems to have little positive effect on economic success, if any. Summing this up, one meta-analysis of the literature characterizes the results of 40 years of research as 'sad'.⁴⁹ A second strand of the aid effectiveness literature is closer to our own interest in statebuilding in that it asks whether improvements in governance accompany development assistance. Some scholars have found that international aid can have positive effects on governance. Aid can, for example, be crucial in filling immediate gaps in public service provision and, in the longer run, can help to relieve a binding constraint on the better functioning of bureaucracy and the rule of law through such mechanisms as improving civil service salaries, or facilitate the survival of reform-minded governments.⁵⁰ Carefully designed approaches to building human resource skills through technical assistance can indeed cumulate to enhancements in overall government capacity.⁵¹ When aid for institutional reform is tailored to local context and specific governance challenges it can help to build the sustainable problem-solving capacity that is essential to sound governance.⁵²

Most scholars accept, nonetheless, that even if aid has some positive effects on governance, it certainly also operates in negative ways – and that the ultimate direction of causality is an empirical question about the relative weighting of causal effects.⁵³ The vast majority of work that investigates the effects of aid on governance paints a grim picture. Knack, for example, found 'evidence that aid levels erode the quality of governance, as measured by indices of

⁴⁷DFID, *Literature Review*, 44.

⁴⁸OECD, *Concepts and Dilemmas*. See, also, OECD, *Do No Harm*.

⁴⁹Doucouliaagos and Paldam, "Sad Results".

⁵⁰Barma, Huybens, and Viñuela, *Institutions Taking Root*; and Gisselquist, "Comparative Analysis".

⁵¹Teskey, "Capacity Development".

⁵²Levy, *Working with the Grain*; and Pritchett, Woolcock, and Andrews, "Looking Like a State".

⁵³Brazys, "Negative Returns", suggests the existence of a non-linear 'aid dependence Laffer curve', whereby aid has positive effects on governance to start with but too much aid leads to negative returns.

bureaucratic quality, corruption, and the rule of law'.⁵⁴ There are a number of mechanisms by which development aid can all too often undermine the very goals it is attempting to achieve in a syndrome known as aid dependence. One significant theme in the aid effectiveness literature concerns the wastage of aid monies, through simple mismanagement as well as embezzlement and fraud.⁵⁵ This problem is especially intractable because aid is fungible: it is virtually impossible to earmark aid for particular purposes.⁵⁶ In turn, this enables a higher degree of rent seeking and rent distribution than would otherwise have been possible.⁵⁷ Consequently, aid can increase corruption or generate outright conflict over the control of aid, thus increasing political instability and predation by increasing the incentives to gain and retain control of the government.⁵⁸ A second significant theme is what has come to be dubbed the 'aid curse'.⁵⁹ In a logic similar to that of the resource curse, government accountability is diminished when externally provided resources reduce its need to raise tax revenue. When aid substitutes for taxation, it weakens the state–society contract which is essential for building state legitimacy.⁶⁰ Ultimately, external assistance can reduce the costs of doing nothing and help bad governments survive by giving them the resources to do so.⁶¹ Moreover, aid can crowd out other productive economic sectors and diligent public sector effort in the business of government; and aid can weaken bureaucracy by siphoning off talented, high-capacity actors.⁶²

In sum, the aid effectiveness literature points to the high likelihood that international interventions have the propensity to weaken state capacity instead of building it. Fukuyama observes that a big influx of aid is very likely to undermine state capacity 'unless donors make a clear choice that capacity-building is their *primary* objective rather than the services that the capacity is meant to provide'.⁶³ Similarly, Brautigam states, 'Large amounts of aid, delivered to countries with weak institutions *create* some of the institutional problems that lead to ineffectiveness'.⁶⁴ Practitioners have attempted to use conditionality as a way to improve governance but analysts have largely concluded that this simply does not lead to better outcomes.⁶⁵ Consequently, the literature points to an aid–institutions paradox: aid tends to be more

⁵⁴Knack, "Aid Dependence".

⁵⁵See, for example, Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States*.

⁵⁶Dollar and Pritchett, *Assessing Aid*.

⁵⁷Tornell and Lane, "Voracity Effect".

⁵⁸Barma, *The Peacebuilding Puzzle*.

⁵⁹See, for example, Ear, "Political Economy"; and Moyo, *Dead Aid*.

⁶⁰Bates, *Prosperity & Violence*; and Moore, "Revenues".

⁶¹Easterly, *White Man's Burden*; Rodrik, "Understanding"; and Van de Walle, *African Economies*.

⁶²Ear, "Political Economy"; Brautigam, *Aid Dependence*; and Dollar and Pritchett, *Assessing Aid*.

⁶³Fukuyama, *State-Building*, 41–2.

⁶⁴Brautigam, *Aid Dependence*, 1.

⁶⁵Collier, "Failure of Conditionality"; Dollar and Pritchett, *Assessing Aid*; and Kapur and Webb, "Governance-related Conditionalities".

effective when institutional quality is better but whether aid improves institutional quality is highly dependent on the manner in which it is deployed.

Drawing on these insights from the aid effectiveness literature, we suggest that *aid dynamics* play a key role in producing the outcomes associated with statebuilding and peacebuilding. Resting on the insights that statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts are typically intertwined and almost invariably focused on enhancing public service delivery as a central objective, it is crucial to understand the wide variation in how much recovery efforts are, in fact, driven by external actors and the effects of that internationalization. In a sense, this approach attempts to incorporate the thinking of hybrid peace scholarship, which posits that the most effective peacebuilding interventions will comprise both top-down and bottom-up processes in ways that complement each other.⁶⁶ Conceptualizing aid dynamics in the manner we propose here enables systematic investigation into *how* different mixes of externally driven and indigenous approaches to statebuilding and peacebuilding influence desired outcomes. It thus offers one way of considering how much processes from below, at least those mediated through recipient country governments and non-governmental agencies, are incorporated into top-down peacebuilding, along with the effects of that balance, concepts that Donais notes are often ambiguous.⁶⁷ Like the two variables described above, the aid dynamics variable is non-dichotomous, ranges in value, and can be measured across multiple dimensions and at different levels of analysis, as follows.

Aid dynamics. The ‘aid dynamics’ variable gauges the extent to which and the manner in which – or how much and in what ways – the international community provides assistance and direction in the provision of public services as part of statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts. Aid dynamics can vary on three core dimensions, colloquially, how much assistance there is, what it is intended for, and how it is implemented.

- (1) The *level* of aid captures the volume of financial assistance, the share of overall assistance targeted to public service delivery, and the predictability and continuity of assistance over time.
- (2) The *purpose* of aid captures the degree to which assistance is intended to shape government policy and priorities in terms of service delivery, the source of assistance, and the sequencing of assistance.
- (3) The *administration* of aid captures the recipient government’s overall systems for aid management, and the manner and extent of direct external involvement in the day-to-day functioning of governance organizations and in actual service provision.

⁶⁶Boege, et al., “Hybrid Political Orders”; and Richmond and Franks, *Liberal Peace Transitions*.

⁶⁷Donais, *Peacebuilding and Local Ownership*.

These three dimensions capture different aspects of how international interventions influence local contexts: they can vary in terms of volume of aid; they can be more or less dominant in setting the substance of policy; and they can complement (and therefore support) or substitute for (and therefore compete with or supplant) the business of the state and service provision in different ways.

Aid dynamics vary along a continuum ranging from no international presence or full internal autonomy to wholesale and direct external involvement and even dominance, indicating full dependence on the part of the recipient government. There are instances of indigenous post-conflict statebuilding and peacebuilding, in which local decision-makers and actors pursue reforms to achieve sustainable peace and improvements in state capacity in the relative absence of international assistance. In other cases, even when highly dependent on aid revenues, some governments exert purposeful control over that aid through policies and implementation processes and thereby retain a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis international actors. By contrast, interventions with a high degree of aid attempt to implement statebuilding and peacebuilding programmes through the direct and coordinated involvement of international actors and significant international resources – financial, policy, and technical – in these processes. The dynamics of aid in statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts represent a continuous variable capturing the mix of domestic and international agency that fluctuates not just at the country level, but also over time, across sub-national localities, and across public service delivery sectors. Like the relationship between aid and governance, different amounts and forms of international assistance are likely to have both positive and negative impacts on state coherence and the depth of peace.

A New Conceptual Framework and a Research Agenda

The preceding sections have cleared conceptual ground in the contemporary scholarly approach to statebuilding and peacebuilding and specified three sets of variables to better guide research. We turn now to the conceptual framework that links these variables and that we believe could be fruitfully used in empirical investigations of statebuilding and peacebuilding. As noted above, the extant literature focuses on external efforts to foster sustainable peace through the building or strengthening of state institutions. This elides theoretical and empirical analysis of how the particular balance between internal and external agency drives recovery efforts – or the ways in which top-down and bottom-up processes of recovery complement or contradict each other – and conflates the processes of statebuilding and peacebuilding with the outcomes of those efforts. We posit that the dynamics of aid itself exerts a series of causal effects on the outcomes of state capacity and sustainable peace. As represented in the schematic in [Figure 1](#), we examine

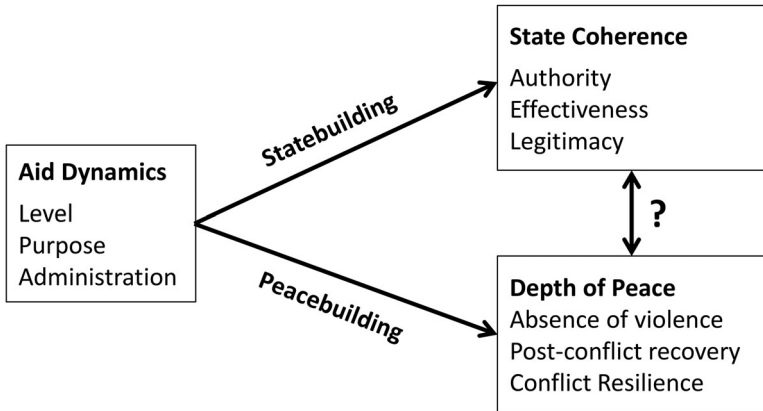


Figure 1. A causal approach to understanding statebuilding and peacebuilding.

statebuilding and peacebuilding as two distinct post-conflict recovery processes. We aim to understand how statebuilding and peacebuilding actually operate by viewing these processes through the lens of a causal approach, with aid dynamics as a primary independent variable driving a range of outcomes on two dependent variables: state coherence and depth of peace. In turn, we can examine the nature of the empirical relationship that links these two sets of outcomes. Each of these empirical relationships can and should be analysed as to whether they are negative, neutral, or positive and to gain a better apprehension of the conditions under which those outcomes occur.

A Broader Research Agenda

The conceptual framework we propose here enables an examination of the systematic causal mechanisms and outcomes generated when the statebuilding and peacebuilding enterprises are internationalized to different degrees. It can inform a wide range of empirical research with the potential to uncover important causal dynamics in the statebuilding and peacebuilding processes. The causal approach we propose is built on two conceptual innovations. First, it allows us to treat the dynamics of external actors' statebuilding and peacebuilding activities as independent, causal variables, instead of conflating international assistance with these processes by assuming that they are internationalized. Second, by distinguishing statebuilding from peacebuilding our framework helps focus analysis on the separate outcomes to which these two distinct processes are geared: the strength of the state and of the peace. These are discrete concepts and should be treated as such. They might tend to co-vary, with similar actions strengthening both, as is the conventional wisdom. But, crucially, we also might find that actions that tend to strengthen one weaken the other.

Empirically, too, our approach advances the study of statebuilding and peacebuilding in that it enables multi-dimensional conceptual definitions of each of the variables – *aid dynamics*, *state coherence*, and *depth of peace* – in a manner that responds to Diehl’s call for more finely grained measures developed specifically for the study of peacebuilding.⁶⁸ Such definitions permit an analysis of the relationships between each of the different dimensions of each variable. In addition, since our conception of *aid dynamics* captures the concept of a mix between internal and external agency, the framework could even be adapted to study a two-way interaction whereby local actors are shaping the relationship as much as external interveners in what Donais terms a process of ‘negotiated hybridity’.⁶⁹ It is therefore amenable to a more discursive and inter-subjective analysis of the multiple relationships among these variables and their different dimensions.

The framework can also be applied at multiple levels of analysis to identify patterns in the relationships between the various dimensions of the three key variables. A cross-national macro-level dataset could, for example, include measures of each dimension of the variables described above. Qualitative field-based research could apply the framework at the meso-level, investigating state coherence and depth of peace as separate outcomes of sector-specific efforts or sub-national units in post-conflict reconstruction.⁷⁰ Sectoral level measures could examine statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts as enacted with respect to specific sectors of government activity: education, healthcare, and public works provision, to name a few. The degree and type of reconstruction of these sectors is likely to vary across them, among various localities within a country, and to ebb and flow over time – and this variation in outcomes affords crucial analytical leverage as to the effects of aid dynamics.⁷¹ International aid also varies demonstrably by sector, geography, and time. Disaggregating the sites at which the outcomes of state coherence and depth of peace are measured would allow more nuanced analysis and thereby a more finely grained comparison of causal processes. Finally, while international aid does not manifest at the individual level, our outcome variables could be conceptualized and measured at the individual level. A rich avenue for future empirical work could leverage higher level variation in aid dynamics to ascertain its effects on individual citizens’ perceptions of societal trust, personal security, and state legitimacy.

While the framework can be applied at multiple levels of analysis, we posit that public service provision in post-conflict countries offers particularly

⁶⁸Diehl, “Behavioral Studies”.

⁶⁹Donais, *Peacebuilding and Local Ownership*, 3.

⁷⁰Autesserre similarly notes the value in undertaking micro- and local-level analyses aimed at understanding the ways in which international interventions unfold on the ground in “Going Micro”.

⁷¹Cutting edge research in the politics of public service delivery rests on the insight that the political dynamics of service provision differ in important ways across sectors. See, for example, Batley and McLoughlin, “Service Characteristics”; and Lieberman, “Comparative Politics”.

fertile empirical ground for several reasons in line with emerging work in the fields of statebuilding and peacebuilding. First, the provision of services is one of the most direct ways in which states interact with their citizens – hence, examining the empirical relationships between aid dynamics, state coherence, and depth of peace in the arena of public service delivery enables a better understanding of the relationship between the state and society at their point of closest contact. In the post-conflict context, this can take on a particular salience as some states use public services as a peacebuilding tool – providing services as a way to help quell discontent, reduce grievances, and build loyalty.⁷² Second, as much as the provision of public services can serve as a method to build state coherence and deepen peace, it can also create tensions over symbolic issues such as identity and material issues such as service distribution, access, and quality – challenging both state legitimacy and conflict resilience.⁷³

Third, international assistance efforts often focus on helping states to provide services or they directly provide those services on behalf of states. This aid strategy has emerged as a result of the notion that external interventions should help post-conflict states to deliver upon their compacts with society as a means to enhance the prospect of sustainable peace – and that achieving this goal is something that international development partners are well-placed to do, by focusing on state capacity-building. Yet, as Krasner and Risse observe, ‘we know surprisingly little about the effectiveness of external efforts at state-building, or public service provision in areas of limited statehood’.⁷⁴ They similarly problematize the question of whether state capacity and service provision are empirically related in areas of limited statehood. Lee, Walter-Drop, and Wiesel demonstrate, counter to conventional wisdom, that the relationship between degrees of state capacity and the provision of public services in the developing world is relatively weak.⁷⁵ Conceptually, in short, public service delivery offers an arena for examining both how states interact with their citizens and how international agencies interact with states. Empirically, moreover, service provision serves as a site at which our three core variables – aid dynamics, state coherence, and depth of peace – can be examined together.

Conclusion and Implications

Like many scholars of international liberal peacebuilding, we are sceptical of the effectiveness of the enterprise. We recognize that the sovereignty contradictions inherent in external statebuilding and liberal peacebuilding are easy

⁷²Barma, Huybens, and Viñuela, *Institutions Taking Root*; and Gisselquist, “Hard Places”.

⁷³Brinkerhoff, Wetterberg, and Dunn, “Water Services”; and Mcloughlin, “Service Delivery”.

⁷⁴Krasner and Risse, “External Actors”, 546.

⁷⁵Lee, Walter-Drop, and Wiesel, “Taking the State (Back) Out”.

fodder for normative critique. Rather than rejecting the enterprise wholesale, however, we seek to understand how variation in aid dynamics affects the outcomes of state coherence and depth of peace. Our work thus fits into the broad range of scholarship that views peacebuilding as ‘too important to lose or abandon’ and focuses on how peacebuilding and statebuilding might be pursued more effectively.⁷⁶

Our treatment of statebuilding and peacebuilding as separate causal processes with a nuanced understanding of aid dynamics as a crucial independent variable allows us to examine critiques of external statebuilding and peacebuilding as an empirical question instead of a normative one. When and how are these sorts of efforts successful? When do the processes by which these objectives are sought achieve their goals and when do they act at cross-purposes to each other? Ultimately, we believe that the conceptual framework that informs our research has the potential to disentangle the causal mechanisms by which peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts result in their various outcomes. Empirical research based on our conceptual framework could (and should) illuminate precisely the many complexities the rich and varied peacebuilding literature emphasizes – over time, across countries, across different issue spaces – with different theoretical emphases. We present it now in the hope that others will also use it to develop a broad empirical research agenda focused on identifying how different types of interventions by a wide range of actors affect the various sets of objectives they seek.

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⁷⁶Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding”, 41.

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