

# A General Introduction on the Peace Process and Its Components

*Balazs A. Kovacs\**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Good morning. My name is Balazs Kovacs. I am a professor at the Department Peace and Conflict Studies of the University for Peace. I would like to tackle our theme of the fundamental characteristics of peace processes.

First of all, I would like to thank everybody who came to the symposium this morning. I would like to give a general introduction on the peace process, whatever that be, and I will discuss components and some ambiguous ingredients of conflict and peace on the premise of peace process. I will try to gauge the limit of each limitation.

Before we begin, I would like to recognize some authors on whose ideas I have drawn upon extensively in this presentation — Johan Galtung, John Paul Lederach, Hugh Miall, Catherine Barnes, Oliver Ramsbotham, Stathis Kalyvas, I. William Zartman, and others.

## II. DEFINING CONFLICT AND THE PEACE PROCESS

I would like to start by defining what I mean by peace process and conflict. For the purposes of this presentation, peace process will be defined as a series of actions by parties in a conflict, as well as third parties and other stakeholders, to end an ongoing manifest conflict. Therefore, a peace process is an active endeavor in which participants work for a peaceful resolution to their conflict. Conflict is defined as perceived or actual, mutually incompatible interests and/or goals of the parties, on which they act. Conflict can be latent, in which case the parties are not aware of these incompatible goals and interests, or it can be manifest, in which case the parties perceive each other as opponents of the two sides of the controversy, and act to achieve their respective goals. Conflict can be violent or armed

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\* '02 J.D., Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Budapest, Hungary; '05 M.A., United Nations-mandated University for Peace, San Jose, Costa Rica. Balazs Aron Kovacs is an instructor in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, United Nations-mandated University for Peace.

and it can be non-violent or non-armed. I am going to use violent conflict as synonymous with armed conflict; but, it has to be noted that some form of violence is a part of every conflict, even latent ones.

Violence is not limited to hurting the other. It is not only killing the other. It is also imprisoning the other, it is also denying the other's right to express his or her views, to deprive somebody from the means of dignified living.

Conflicts that require efforts such as a peace process are always political in nature. Therefore, the peace process itself is a political act. As such, the peace process is an integral part of the struggle in which the parties to the conflict strive to achieve the goals they set out at the beginning of the conflict. They are seeking to satisfy their needs at the onset of the conflict; but, there are also needs which emerge during the conflict and they try to achieve, at least to an acceptable degree, those goals and those objectives. Paraphrasing the famous early 19th century military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, the peace process is war by other means. The objectives are still the same but they are trying to achieve those goals through peaceful means.

We are now getting to the objective of the peace process. The peace process is a political exercise having to do with conflict between the parties' agendas and trying to help both parties come to a settlement they can lean on for their future relations. It is also a method of creating a new *status quo* in society and a new *modus operandi* for the parties involved in the conflict. At the other end of the conflict, there is another set of goals which they seek to achieve. These goals may change over the course of the conflict and these are necessarily derived from the development of protective conflicts, where sometimes the original goals may even be forgotten, and people will become psychologically used to being a part of the conflict.

At the onset of the conflict, parties have a set of goals, which may change over the course of the conflict. But generally speaking, it can be said that parties set out to win the conflict. Some conflicts do end with one party prevailing over the other; many, however, do not.

To give you some examples, just recently, the Sri Lankan government launched a major offensive against the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam in a bid to close the conflict with military victory. Similarly, the Uribe government in Colombia stepped up its military campaign against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, sometimes leading to major international controversies with neighbouring Ecuador and Venezuela, where rebel elements were holed up. These two cases are ongoing and we will have to see whether these governments' efforts will succeed. Other concrete examples include my home country, Hungary, where the short-lived rebellion against the Soviet-backed Communist government was quickly quelled by the Red Army. In Cuba, just three years after the Hungarian events, the rebel group overthrew Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship

and replaced it with Fidel Castro's. And that regime is still in power today. That has to remind us that it is not always better if the revolutionaries win.

Other conflicts, however, remain inconclusive for extended periods and this is particularly true in cases known as low intensity armed conflicts. Most of the armed conflicts in the world today are such, and these conflicts can be very lengthy. In Northern Ireland, for example, the war between the Irish Republican Army and its splinter groups, and the British government, lasted three decades before the settlement was reached. In the last couple of days, British soldiers and police were killed. So we may say that the Northern Ireland conflict may not be over after all. The conflict between the Basque separatist group *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* and the Spanish government is still ongoing, even though the intensity has decreased in the last couple of years. Decades-long conflicts plague many African countries, some protracted, some recurring. The first-ever head of state in office indicted by the International Criminal Court is from Sudan. Somalia has lost any semblance of statehood, and the list goes on. The Philippines' civil wars have been going on for decades and finding a way out of these conflicts will be the focus of today's symposium, I believe.

### III. VARIOUS LEVELS OF THE PEACE PROCESS

According to the ripeness theory, peace processes usually begin when the parties perceive that the conflict has reached a mutually hurting stalemate. As the conflict escalates, the human, material, psychological, and political losses begin to mount on both sides. Without anyone actually gaining a definitive upper hand, parties are more amenable to negotiated solutions.

The peace process can happen at various levels. The most known and most televised is the elite level in which the leaders — presidents, prime ministers, rebel leaders opposed to each other — meet. Such meetings are sometimes in private and sometimes publicized. Parties may engage in direct negotiations as well mediation, using the services of a neutral, trusted third party. Elite-level negotiations are important because it is impossible to terminate conflicts without the consent of the highest decision makers. It is also the elites who control most of the resources that their societies and constituencies can mobilize.

Very often, this is the only level of analysis at which conflict and peace are examined. While it is true that elites play a central role in beginning, conducting and ending conflicts, and that many conflicts are elite-driven, it is an oversimplification of the problem. Conflicts happen at all levels of society. War, in particular, is a total exercise. They may happen in academia where supporters of different camps undermine each others' reputation. It may happen in the cities and the villages where neighbours denounce each other, often using the armed forces in control to settle personal scores. There is a saying in human rights circles: "If you kill one person, you go to jail; if

you kill 20, you go to an insane asylum; but if you kill 20,000 people, you get invited to a peace conference.” Because not everybody has the chance to kill 20,000 people, and for the reasons mentioned earlier, other strata of society need to be involved in the peace process.

There is the level which I call the mid-level, that of the technocrats and academic intellectuals, who can engage each other and settle certain technical details, as well as build trust.

Also, there is the level of the grass-roots, the community level. This level is particularly important in intrastate conflicts, when shattered communities must live together after the conflict is over. Civil wars, especially, tend to polarize communities and communication often breaks down. This is also the level that tends to suffer most from armed conflicts so that the rehabilitation and the rebuilding of communities here is very important. Community workshops are extremely important tools in bringing communities together to give back the human face of the other. Where the conflict has a religious and/or ethnic colour, inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogues can be of very high importance.

#### IV. FINAL REMARKS

Finally, there are the challenges. Conflicts do not begin without a reason. Intrastate armed conflicts generally begin at the intersection of grievances and opportunities. Both are necessary conditions. Grievances are needed to mobilize populations and without the opportunity to challenge the state, armed conflicts cannot break out. Interests are found at many levels of analysis. Because parties tend to publicly frame their interests as group or collective ones, for many reasons, it is easy to lose sight of the diversity and complexity of interests. Without disentangling and addressing these interests, making peace will be unlikely to succeed.

In ongoing conflict situations, some elements benefit from the *status quo* and are interested in the continuation of the conflict. The benefits can be power, wealth, and access to resources that would otherwise be unavailable. Such elements may become detractors or spoilers in the peace process. Catering to their interests may result in situations where the violence ceases or subsides, but justice is not restored and controversial personalities may hold the state at ransom.

Such detractors and spoilers can be dealt with but sometimes, it is not a very savory thing. Around the end of the Sierra Leone Civil War of the last decade, the leader of the Revolutionary United Front, Foday Sankoh, became known for chopping off hands to prevent people from participating in the elections. He demanded to be the Minister of Mining, effectively controlling the diamond wealth of Sierra Leone. Obviously, in such a case, justice would not have been served.

Identities are dynamic by nature and in extreme situations, such as armed conflict or severe repression, they change even more rapidly and usually become increasingly polarized. Conflict effectively shapes and transforms identities. Identity is what we are. If it is shaped by conflict, the peace process may influence the very thing that we are. This may make parts of the involved populations resistant to peace initiatives.

There are, however, greater opportunities. Peace processes may, as a minimum program, end hostilities or formally end a system of oppression. There is, however, a greater potential there — the possibility of deep social transformation, a fundamental re-weaving of society's fabric. In order to ensure stable and lasting peace, the peace process is perhaps a necessity.

Thank you very much.