BOOK REVIEW

Peacebuilding. Preventing Violent Conflict in a Complex World

By Dennis J. D. Sandole[1]

Reviewed by Roberta Holanda Maschietto[2]

    Peacebuilding. Preventing Violent Conflict in the Modern World is part of the book series by Polity, *War and Conflict in the Modern World*, which include other titles such as *Peace Operations* and *Humanitarian Intervention*. The series aims to introduce central topics on war and peace to a broad public, including academics and practitioners. In this book, Dennis Sandole is challenged to summarize, and discuss, what has become a very complex topic in the last 20 years: the peacebuilding agenda.

    Drawing from his ample background in Conflict Resolution, Sandole's starting point is the nature of the current world security context, symbolized by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In his own words, "...the post-modern world is increasingly characterized by complex, interconnected problems that cannot be solved by a single actor. Attempts to deal unilaterally with any one pressing issues at the expense of others with which it is

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[1] Dennis Sandole is a Professor of Conflict Resolution and International Relations at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR), at George Mason University. A founding member of S-CAR, Sandole received his Ph.D. in politics at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. He has been a William C. Foster Fellow as Visiting Scholar with the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), where he worked on the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) negotiations. His publications include, amongst others: "Conflict Management and Problem Solving: Interpersonal to International Applications"; "Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and Application"; and "A Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution."

[2] The reviewer is a doctoral researcher in Peace Studies at the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford. Her research deals with dynamics of empowerment and disempowerment in contemporary Mozambique.

interconnected only reinforces the phenomenon of 'unintended consequences'" (Sandole, 2010: 4).

It is Through responding to this premise, and by criticizing the traditional realist paradigm, Sandole presents an alternative approach to understanding peacebuilding – a complex problem solving approach, around which the five chapters of the book are centred.

Chapter one focuses on the problematique of peacebuilding. As a starting point, Sandole questions the "peace" that is at stake in the discussion on peacebuilding. Rescuing the Galtung's negative/positive peace dichotomy, he describes how "building" peace may have a minimalist or maximalist connotation, and the usual international responses according to either case. While most interventions are *reactive* in nature, he maintains that effective peacebuilding should be *proactive*. "Comprehensive peacebuilding", he argues, "[...] constitutes, 'in theory', the ultimate antidote to the theory-policy deficits in our collective efforts to understand and deal with deep-rooted causes and conditions of global terrorism" (Sandole, 2010: 14). His position resembles the so-called 'cosmopolitan' view of conflict resolution (Ramsbotham et al., 2005), and is based on the assumption that the "'national interest' is global and vice versa" (ibid.).

In order to grasp the complexities that such a perspective entails, Sandole presents the "four worlds' model" of perception and action, which includes two *exosomatic* dimensions – the natural and the human-made –, and two *endosomatic* ones – the mental-psychological and the biological/physiological. The model tries to capture the ontological complexity of global problems and how people react to them.

The four worlds' model is discussed in details in *chapter two*, entitled "Complex Problem Solving in Violent Conflicts". Here, Sandole engages in dialogue with several models of conflict analysis and resolution (including the prisoner's dilemma, Lederach's pyramid, Dugan's nested paradigm, Diamond and MacDonald's multitrack framework, as well as his own three-pillar framework (3PF) of conflict analysis). He then tries to integrate these models into one comprehensive checklist, based on his 3PF, that he calls the "enhanced three-pillar framework", or "enhanced 3PF". The three pillars comprehend (a) the conflict causes and conditions (that includes different dimensions of the "four world's model"), (b) the conflict elements (parties, issues, objectives, means, conflict handling and environment) and (c) the conflict intervention (subdivided in different stages of possible action).

According to Sandole, "...the utility of the comprehensive checklist, the 'enhanced' three-pillar framework (3PF), is that it provides a holistic construct approaching an ideal type for assessing (a) what has been done and (b) what still needs to be done with regard to peacebuilding in the twenty first century" (Sandole, 2010: 76). Following this, in the *third chapter*, he proceeds to the analysis of how to improve the record of peacebuilding.

Discussing the literature, he compares the different assessments of peacebuilding, and observes two main problems. First, and at the bottom of it, are the different understandings of what the objectives of peacebuilding are, and of what "peace" is.

Second, there is an excessive push for a "one size fits all" approach, as well as the absence of the participation of ordinary people in the critical processes of peacebuilding.

In spite of this, and in a optimistic fashion, Sandole presents two examples of some effective cases that should be used as examples for insights in the future, namely, the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP), the first-ever preventive UN mission, which took place in Macedonia; and, more generally, and in spite of some setbacks, the European Union commitment to a Kantian peace, and enlargement through setting democratic pre-conditions for joining.

Chapter four is dedicated to the link between peacebuilding and "the global war on terror". Terrorism is framed as an *epiphenomenon* of deep-rooted conflict. In this regard, conflict analysis, and resolution is perceived as one way to work toward terrorism prevention. Rescuing concepts such as 'cognitive dissonance' and 'structural violence', Sandole argues that situations of deep frustration have the potential to translate grievances into violent action (terrorism being one of such manifestations). This assumption naturally leads to a completely different political agenda that would include a deeper understanding of the generic drivers of violence, as well as a better understanding of the differences between the North and the South (or of the West and Islam). In practical terms, this would entail moving to the opposite direction of the current agenda. Therefore, instead of promoting further polarization, it would imply working towards some kind of 'negotiation' with terrorists; in the sense that it is fundamental to understand them and their language if any concrete solution is to unfold.

From this global agenda, the *final chapter* narrows its focus to the role of the United States in the future of peacebuilding. The point is made that the US is an indispensable nation in order for peacebuilding to become more effective, considering its capacity to reach globally and its resources to promote change. Further developments will depend on the actual leadership. In this regard, Obama's agenda for global change and problem-solving is seen as a potential for improvement, although there Sandole acknowledges the problematic actions of the US in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Still, and in spite of this, the author believes that there is room for improvement if there is the right balance between the "3 Ds" (defence, diplomacy and development). Further, a push in the global agenda towards the strengthening of the Peacebuilding Commission; more emphasis in the responsibility to protect; the identification of the interconnection between complex global problems; and the enhancement of regional and global approaches could all be elements that would make this movement more effective.

Overall, the book is extremely informative and very clear in its double intent of (a) providing the reader with an ample and general knowledge of the peacebuilding debate; and, (b) proposing an alternative model to deal with the peacebuilding agenda. The book also balances a very intense and abstract discussion on conflict resolution and concrete examples of this agenda.

The deep focus on conflict resolution puts Sandole's work in a different strand than most books on peacebuilding. This approach has pros and cons. On the positive side, in a debate very much influenced by political science, where peacebuilding is often presented as state-building and institutionalization (Call, 2008; Paris, 2004), the author reminds us of the complex aspects related to general dynamics of conflict. Instead of reinforcing general templates associated with 'liberal peace', or focusing on a strict understanding of peacebuilding (as only UN missions, for instance, or the immediate period that follows full scale war), he understands conflict as a broader process that has to be dealt with, preferably, in a preventive instead of reactive way.

The book is also innovative in bringing the discussion of terrorism within the peacebuilding agenda.[3] While this is interesting, in that it questions what have been clearly ineffective policies in combating terrorism, the connection between fragile states, grievances, structural violence and terrorism deserves more caution, and is not as straight forward as it might be interpreted by the discussion. Bringing a full chapter of the book to link peacebuilding and the "global war on terror" seems to exacerbate these connections, while minimizing other aspects of the phenomenon of terrorism, and its historical manifestations (see Crenshaw, 2007).

Sandole is also very optimistic about both the current US presidency and global governance as pillars to enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding. As the book was published in 2010, it can be argued that the context for assessment was different than the current, characterised by a deep critique of the Obama administration. Obama's speeches and aspirations suffered severe setbacks that may be associated to the US decision making process. On the other hand, if the US is an indispensable nation, its role in promoting peace is as relevant as its role in promoting conflict, and this balance is what seems to be more critical in the end. In a similar vein, this optimism is also reflected in the mild discussion of more radical critiques on peacebuilding (Richmond, 2005). While acknowledging these critiques, a deep discussion would possibly lead to the questioning of the very premise of the book: the problem-solving approach itself.

In summary, '*Peacebuilding: Preventing Violent Conflict in the Modern World*' brings a relevant contribution to the debate on peacebuilding, especially by framing the topic through the lense of conflict resolution and bridging this to the political agenda. It further fulfils the aim of the Polity collection, as it clearly speaks to academics, practitioners, and the general public.

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[3] Terrorism is discussed in the field of conflict resolution in general (for instance, in Ramsbotham et al., 2007), but not so much within *peacebuilding* per se.

References

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