Introduction

Martina Fischer and Beatrix Schmelzle

Over the past two decades a great deal has been written and argued about state failure, fragile or weak states. International organisations such as the World Bank and several UN departments have commissioned research and published policy recommendations on the issue.[1] Governments in some countries of the North have also been very busy providing analysis, with the focus mostly on increasing their own citizens' safety. This includes secret service agencies: since the 1990s, for example, the United States' Central Intelligence Agency has funded a Political Instability Task Force, which is composed of researchers from various universities. This group has published reports on state failure[2] and presented a global forecasting model of instability.[3] In addition, several US-based think tanks have published extensively on the subject.[4] European academia has also given considerable attention to the issue, and several

1 See World Bank (ed.), *Fragile States – Good Practice in Country Assistance Strategies,* Operations Policy and Country Services, Washington DC, 19 December 2005; United Nations Development Group/World Bank (eds.), *An Operational Note on Transitional Results Matrices. Using Results-Based Frameworks in Fragile States,* Washington DC, January 2005; World Bank (ed.), *Strengthening the World Bank's Rapid Response and Long-Term Engagement in Fragile States*, Operations Policy and Country Services/Fragile States Group, Washington DC, 30 March 2007.
2 See Jack Goldstone et al., *State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III Findings*, McLean, VA: Science Applications International Corporation, 30 September 2000; Robert Bates et al., *Political Instability Task Force Report: Phase IV Findings*, McLean, VA: Science Applications International Corporation, 2003 (online at http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/).
3 See Jack Goldstone et al., "A Global Forecasting Model of Political Instability", paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington DC, 1-4 September 2005 (online at http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/).
4 Within its project on leadership and building state capacity, for instance, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars has established a publication series entitled: "What Really Works in Preventing and Rebuilding Failed States" (see www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1411&fuseaction=topics.publications&group_id=215038). The Brookings Institution has published an Index of State Weakness, see Susan E. Rice and Stewart Patrick, *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World*, The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 2008; see also The Brookings Institution (ed.), *Weak and Failed States: What they are, why they matter and what to do about them*, Washington DC, 2008.

universities are conducting research on fragile states in order to elaborate policy recommendations for improving governance mechanisms and increasing the effectiveness of peacebuilding missions. In Germany, the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF, Duisburg-Essen), the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA, Hamburg), the Center for Development Research (ZEF, Bonn) and the Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF, Berlin) have devoted special attention to case studies and context analysis. In addition, a number of independent university departments and state-related research institutions have established the joint Research Center (SFB) 700 on Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood, which is hosted by the Freie Universität (FU) Berlin. Its mission is to analyse how effective and legitimate governance can be sustained in areas of limited statehood and to identify the problems that emerge under such conditions.[5] Further public and private donor organisations and foundations have also commissioned studies to increase and disseminate knowledge on these issues.[6]

Most governments and donor organisations tend to focus on a functional analysis of failed states, as illustrated by the UK's development agency DFID, which defines a fragile state as one where the government is not able or willing to deliver core functions to the majority of its population, i.e. controlling the territory and providing security.[7] While some European governments seem to place strong emphasis on development and poverty reduction programmes in order to counteract crises, the US Government and its support agency USAID have mainly acted on the need to contain potential spill-over of insecurity and unstable structures, by means of forceful intervention.

But civil society organisations engaged in peacebuilding, development and human rights, too, have been discussing the problems related to state failure, often with the purpose of improving governance structures, aid or poverty reduction programmes, development, democratisation and peacebuilding strategies. Some of them have taken a distanced or critical view on the discourse launched by those engaging in large scale international state-building and intervention projects.[8]

Amidst all these contributions, it seems that the debate on failed states finds itself at cross-purposes: some point to the threat of state failure in order to foster security mechanisms, military structures and intervention capacities as the defining features of international relations and also to promote the paradigm of liberal peace, including economic liberalisation; others point to the responsibility of the North for state failure and blame the selfsame neoliberal approach for being one particular source of state implosion, conflict and violence. Many therefore advocate a more coherent policy approach – based on development and poverty reduction and on the principle of Human Security (which means security and improvement of living conditions in the South). As Kasturi Sen, research director at the International NGO Research and Training Centre has pointed out, there is much evidence to support the view that the recent "period of global policymaking [has] led to the growing impoverishment of populations and contributed to social collapse through universal policies of privatisation". She also states that such critique was not only raised by policymakers, researchers and practitioners, "but more recently [has come] from the World Bank itself which, for example, admitted that user charges, a main plank of neo-liberalism, had failed to reduce overall demand and improve equity in access to services such as health care".[9]

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5 The Research Center (SFB) 700 is funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft - DFG). It involves scholars from the FU Berlin, University of Potsdam, the Hertie School of Governance, the Social Science Research Center Berlin (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin - WZB), the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik - SWP), and the European University Institute, Florence (see www.sfb-governance.de/en/index.html).
6 See Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Publication Series on Promoting Democracy under Conditions of State Fragility Issue 1: Afghanistan*, Berlin, 2006.
7 See DFID, *Why we need to work more effectively in fragile states*, London, January 2005.
8 See Kasturi Sen, *Fragile States or Failed Policies: Some Donor-Induced Dilemmas*, Policy Briefing Paper 19, International NGO Training and Research Centre, Oxford (UK), 2008.
9 Ibid., 3.

Introduction

This *Berghof Handbook Dialogue* will not present an additional compilation of definitions and/or theoretical approaches concerning failed, fragile or weak states, nor will it offer recipes or policy recommendations in a technical sense. Our intention is instead to present some food for thought on the general premises of these concepts and to point out dilemmas which mark the current discourse (and practice). The lead article asks poignantly whether it is the states (in the South) that are failing, or the analysis of research (undertaken mostly in the North) that is inadequate or incomplete. Given a situation where state-building efforts are more often than not designed by the North and introduced to the South, this question needs to be investigated. This implies critically and honestly identifying the potential, and limits, of external intervention.

Volker Boege, currently research fellow at the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (ACPACS) at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, and his colleagues Anne Brown, Kevin Clements and Anna Nolan present a critical view on the failed states debate and the political practice that is derived from it. The authors examine the rationale and underlying assumptions of the mainstream discourse. They argue that the perception of so-called fragile states as being an obstacle to peace and development can be far too short-sighted. The same applies for its corollary, the promotion of conventional state-building along the lines of the western OECD state model as the best means for sustainable development and peace within all societies. The authors criticise that both the discourse and the policies are orientated towards the western-style Weberian/Westphalian state. Yet this form of statehood hardly exists in reality beyond the OECD world, and many countries do not resemble the model western state. Boege et al. propose that such states should not be considered as being not yet properly built or having already failed again. They argue that rather than thinking in terms of fragile or failed states, it might be theoretically and practically more useful to think in terms of *hybrid political orders*. This re-conceptualisation in their view opens up new options for conflict prevention and development, as well as for a new type of state-building. The case of East Timor is presented as an example for misguided state-building from scratch, whereas Somaliland and Bougainville offer examples of successful hybrid state-building. The article concludes by outlining that researchers as well as practitioners have to face a huge dilemma: state-building as a project of 'social engineering' has proved to be impossible, but it would be fatalistic and irresponsible to leave the further development of instable polities to an 'organic' historical process, likely to provoke or multiply bloodshed, misery and injustice. There is no other solution than staying involved, but external assistance is in need of reorientation – towards an understanding of hybrid institutions and sensitive engagement with them, instead of imposing external actors' own ideas of what a good state should look like.

Our purpose in this Dialogue is to engage both practitioners and researchers in the debate. Therefore we have asked colleagues from academic institutions and experts with field experience to comment on these findings and propositions. We were fortunate to receive contributions from several scholars and scholar-practitioners, some of whom have gained extensive experience in different regions of the world that are affected by crisis and war (such as sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans or Afghanistan), where state structures are either not present or have been introduced by external state-building initiatives and intervention. All contributors would agree that something has to be done about countries and regions affected by state collapse (or absence), poverty and insecurity – in order to reduce violence, suffering and humanitarian disasters. But based on their differing regional experiences they come to different conclusions regarding the impact and outreach of external intervention, the question of how external initiatives can enhance social change and transform political structures, and with regard to what works successfully and what does not.

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Trutz von Trotha, professor of sociology at the University of Siegen (Germany), states that to date the discourse of political science and peace studies concerning international security, development cooperation and globalisation has resolutely relied on the normative claims and jargon of high politics (unlike empirical political sociology and ethnography). This is why, in his opinion, peace research and political science have been unable to admit the obvious: that the failing state does not function like a state, that the failed state does not have state institutions, and that we have to come to terms with the realities of political orders which are not states. Von Trotha agrees with the main thesis presented in the lead article which, in his understanding, contributes to exposing a short-sighted paradigm, just like the child exposing the lie in Andersen's fairy tale of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. But he also believes that Boege et al. do not pursue this principle to its logical conclusion, and that their ambition of changing the discourse on social-engineering blueprints for state formation into a practice of peacebuilding remains half-accomplished. He suggests that a debate is needed on the peace potential of social and cultural institutions and actors of non-state orders.

According to von Trotha, the concept of hybrid political orders responds to the circumstance that fragile, failing and failed states "accommodate political orders of great heterogeneity and non-synchronicity; that they lack a state monopoly on violence and, equally, encounter divergent claims to authority and legitimacy; that 'traditional' and 'modern' institutions co-exist, ensure order and compete for ordering functions" (in this volume, 42). He concedes that the concept serves to highlight the diversity of non-state orders and to point out connections between elements of very different origins and dynamics. Moreover it emphasizes that the various components of a political order do not exist in isolation but have a profound mutual influence on each other. Nevertheless, von Trotha writes, the concept of hybrid political order "is conceived of in too static a way" (ibid.) as it fails to sufficiently highlight the dynamism of hybridity, just as it downplays the dynamics, interests, conflicts and power struggles of those customary non-state institutions and actors which the failed state model regards as being the obstacles to modern statehood and the enemies of successful state-building. While admitting that there have been successful developments in Somaliland, he doubts that these can document an example of successful state-building according to the authors' ideas, as Somaliland represents a segmentary order and etatist facade, "namely to satisfy the strict rulebook of international law and international relations, in which states are the dominant actors" (ibid., 43). He concludes that applying the Andersen Principle will consistently demand "replacing the principle of state-building with the principle of peacebuilding" (ibid., 44).

Susan L. Woodward, professor of political science in the PhD programme of the Graduate Center, City University of New York, reminds us that Boege et al. are by no means the first to have argued that in many places of the world reality differs from the standard by which state fragility and failure are being judged. However, because the authors also propose a substantial and realistic measure for assessing state performance and for better assistance policies, she expresses concern that their contribution, too, "will fall on deaf ears" (in this volume, 47). Woodward shares their critical view and strongly questions the state-builders' argument that the problem of state failure and its global threats are real. She proposes to shift the focus of the debate onto those who are promoting the concept and its application. She argues that we should turn to those actors who are making the judgements and designing state-building models and assistance, in order to realize that there is great variety in the number and type of actors involved, in their goals and in their respective models of good governance and stable statehood. Similarly, she argues, the label of state failure or fragility is applied to a vastly varied number of countries, types of conditions and outcomes of concern. This variety makes it extremely difficult to do the research necessary to accept all-encompassing policy

recommendations. Woodward asks: "is the problem the model? Is hybridity more legitimate and effective in other cases, too? What kind of hybridity are we talking about and what are its causes?" (ibid., 48), using various cases from the Yugoslav region to illustrate the problem.

The difference in foreign approaches to Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia in Woodward's opinion strongly supports the hybridity argument made by the lead authors. She outlines that the wealthiest and most stable of all the new EU member states, Slovenia, never conceded to a complete neoliberal model, quietly retaining significant characteristics and capacities from the socialist period. Among them were aspects of its industrial policy and the financial accounting system that outsiders sought to destroy in Bosnia, where the internationally required privatization and break-up of enterprises has created an economic disaster, accompanied by widespread corruption in the foreign-managed privatization process. Using the Bosnian example, she illustrates that international intervention did not 'ignore' existing local structures but was aware of these and actively aimed at fundamentally transforming them. Local populations were "viewed as being burdened by the legacy of communist policies and centrally planned economies and, thus, had to be forced to become democrats and create market economies. With regard to pre-war institutions and customs, the attitude was one of slash and burn" (ibid., 52). While Yugoslavia's economy was never centrally planned and was fully open to the world economy, and although its property structure was not state-owned but socially owned and worker managed, "the international state-builders treated them as if they had been the Soviet Union and needed fundamental change" (ibid.). With respect to the former Yugoslavia, Woodward therefore concludes that the state-building agenda is more explicitly ideological than in the cases discussed by Boege et al., but the problem is the same: "ignorance of the actual local situation, including its very successful, pre-war governance capability" (ibid.). Woodward further argues that in some countries of former Yugoslavia, internationally supported power-sharing principles have enabled the leaders of the dominant (ethnically defined) political parties to hide and protect their illegal economic activities. The internationally imposed political orders have failed to gain any domestic legitimacy in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, and social and economic outcomes attest to their ineffectiveness as well.

Andreas Mehler, director of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies' Institute of African Affairs, also agrees with the lead article's critical approach towards the mainstream discourse on fragile states. He adds more details on the situation in sub-Saharan Africa, specifically in the security sector, which is often used to assess, and re-build, state performance (after all, security provision is regarded as one core function of any state). Mehler investigates what such security sectors actually look like, and in doing so he emphasizes several problems in the current practice of outside assistance, explaining that whenever states abandon social space, it becomes possible for alternative actors to claim authority by occupying it and performing the core functions that the state is no longer able or willing to perform. As a consequence, oligopolies of violence emerge, as Mehler shows for the case of Liberia. But these processes are usually not taken into account by external policies; instead, "the uniform answer" of international actors "to a detected deficit in core functions of the state is 'state reconstruction'", and in their view, "'deep' intervention seems to be allowed in post-conflict countries […] as they have displayed their 'failure' by falling prey to widespread conflict" (in this volume, 59). External agencies engage in security sector reform "which more often than not follows technocratic blueprints informed by normative assumptions about what the state should be" (ibid.). Based on his observations in Africa, Mehler finds that support for promoting change in the security sector is delivered primarily by officers of the armed forces and police of western countries, who have little knowledge about the dynamics at play in the host country. Related

development-type activities are increasingly left either to NGOs or to donor agencies who may have some capacities for monitoring security policies, "but at the same time have other normative and professional 'distortions', which often get in the way of applying lessons and conclusions from sober analysis" (ibid.). Another problem is that outside experts, in order to come to quick results, often fail to critically assess who their partners are: who they represent, what their interests are, what their record in security provision is and what legitimacy they can claim. External interventions are confronted with the dilemma that only in rare cases is a fresh start with new and fairly elected elites actually possible. Mehler concludes that any outside assistance aimed at increasing security needs to be based on a much better, locally-grounded analysis.

However, despite his shared criticism of mainstream analysis and state-building practice Mehler 'waters down' the wine offered by the lead article in terms of alternative approaches. In his view, the realities of sub-Saharan Africa show that solutions in the form of hybrid orders are in danger of bringing on more of the same – neopatrimonial instability and inefficiency – unless they are carefully monitored. He is concerned that the hybrid regime which Boege et al. advocate "will not be the kind of functional mix of 'modern' and 'customary' institutions of the Somaliland type, but rather [...] a neopatrimonial regime" (ibid., 63), where there is no division between the private and the public sphere and where clientelism dominates vis-à-vis formal procedures, but where there also exist rational-legal facades which function well in selective areas, not least in the repression apparatus. Mehler stresses that in most of Africa the inefficient state cannot justly be described as a provider of security and is instead regularly circumvented and replaced with more viable alternatives by its citizens. But it has nonetheless preserved its appeal and some of its power. According to Mehler, what Boege et al. propose may therefore not exactly (or just partly) be the answer to the problem, and he doubts that ordinary people on the ground would advocate such an approach. If a hybrid solution turns out to be identical with the neopatrimonial system – which historically has been part of the problem rather than part of the solution when it comes to security provision – little will have been won. In his conclusion Mehler urges to constantly analyse the efficiency of individual local security actors (state *and* non-state), and to care more about local perceptions, accessed for example through opinion polls, as their results can suggest the acceptance of a given hybrid order, but also produce additional reasons to alter it.

The comment by Susanne Schmeidl (visiting fellow at the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at the Australian National University and advisor to The Liaison Office in Afghanistan), which includes input from Masood Karokhail (deputy director and one of the founding members of The Liaison Office in Kabul), starts from a different angle, based on experiences in Afghanistan. Both contributors were involved in setting up the Afghan Civil Society Forum, which has been established with support of swisspeace (based in Bern, Switzerland). Schmeidl agrees that shortcomings in the currently practised analysis of failed states have led to very questionable intervention strategies. She claims that a state that provides services to its citizens or controls the means of violence and territorial integrity does not exist in Afghanistan. The average Afghan citizen shows a lack of trust in the current state, and reluctance, or even resentment, to pay taxes to an entity not considered legitimate or able to provide security or other basic needs. However, it has taken international actors several years to realize "that the Afghan state, which is mostly limited to Kabul and a few other major cities anyway, was not doing so well" (in this volume, 68). Today, seven years into the Afghan state-building project, many seem to share the opinion that the project has failed. Yet, "instead of trying to objectively diagnose the causes of the illness and search for a possible cure, the blaming game has started" (ibid.), and there seems to be a trend of blaming the "backwardness of rural

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Afghanistan, which is presumably simply too pre-modern, wild and unruly to come together into an orderly state project" (ibid.). But there is evidence that external approaches have been designed top-down, implemented at high speed and have provided technocratic solutions instead of coherent strategies. Schmeidl criticises that while western states were formed over decades, if not centuries, new states like Afghanistan are expected to shape up overnight. The outcome is a "McDonaldization" of state-building, which does not take into account that building states and security takes *time* and long-term commitment.

As a case in point, Schmeidl sees the constitution-making process in Afghanistan in a very critical light. She deplores that early criticism and recommendations not to excessively speed up the process, expressed for example in a Crisis Group report, were strongly rejected. Later on, some drivers of the process (like UN Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi) conceded, that "it would have been much better to keep that [i.e. the 1964] constitution for a few more years rather than artificially decide [...] that a brand new constitution had to be produced barely two years after the adoption of the Bonn Agreement" (quoted in this volume, 69). Moreover the author deplores that external approaches have focused heavily on urban centres, arguably creating one of the most centralized states in the world. Here she sees a parallel to East Timor, the case that is presented by Boege et al. as misguided state-building from scratch, and confesses to a *déjà vu* experience, in which state-building appears as "an exercise where lessons seem to be neither observed, learned nor transferred" (ibid., 70).

Finally, Schmeidl discusses what contributes to creating successful hybrid regimes. She stresses that in Afghanistan, tribal structures have been damaged through the years of wars. As a consequence, leaders that gained legitimacy based on acceptance by their communities, and were linked to customary institutions, have been replaced by warlords that gained their power from military strength. The current situation is characterized as a combination of strong hybrid political orders and a weak central state that appears to be failing. In her view, the Afghan case illustrates the irony (or tragedy) that even though hybrid state-building was never promoted, *malevolent* hybrid orders have emerged, due to the weakness of the new administration that did not confront the warlords as *de facto* power holders, hence adopting a strategy of accommodation. The latter have managed to capture the Afghan government, creating a situation where those interested in keeping central government institutions weak and ineffective have been placed in positions of authority over the state institutions that needed to be strengthened. At the same time, others (customary institutions) that in the past had worked alongside the state have now been sidelined.

Working out organic and appropriate approaches to hybrid state-building, according to Schmeidl and Karokhail, needs the involvement of civil society, both modern and traditional. Civil society has developed some potential throughout the past years in Afghanistan, but has never been engaged meaningfully in the state-building exercise as both the government and the international representatives consider it a threat to (building) a strong state. This is the experience of The Liaison Office. Schmeidl concludes that a twofold challenge remains: firstly, to sort out how to support hybrid political orders without strengthening the wrong actors and bringing warlords into the driver's seat, and, secondly, to listen more carefully to the citizens' voice.

Bjoern Hofmann, graduate of the University of St. Andrews (UK) and the University of Dresden (Germany) has conducted research on Afghanistan and East Timor. In his opinion, the lead article makes a valuable contribution to the state-building discourse. Some aspects, however, should be elaborated in more detail: in particular, the underlying understanding of 'order', the implications of the argument for peacebuilding and the presentation of East Timor as an example for a misguided

state formation approach. First of all he sees a need for definitions and a clarification of terminology. In his view, the term "hybrid political order" carries the connotation that some kind of order does indeed exist. Hofmann admits that in Afghanistan and East Timor traditional or cultural practices of conflict management, security provision and social cohesion continued to exist during and after war, but he nevertheless suggests that the term "order" should not be applied indiscriminately. In his view, a situation that is marked by violence, suffering and lawlessness needs to be labelled as disorder; calling these situations hybrid political orders would thus be misleading. Furthermore, Hofmann criticises that Boege et al. do not specify whether their concept allows for a categorisation of order, defining whether it refers to a weak or some form of stable order, or whether it refers equally to all fragile, failing or failed states as hybrid orders without any further indication whether they have already collapsed, are weak or comparatively strong.

Hofmann does not see an added value in adopting the terminology of "hybrid political orders" and he doubts that the proposed change in terminology will contribute to more effective peacebuilding. The concept appears to him as merely "reframing the top-down versus bottom-up debate among academics and peacebuilders" (in this volume, 81), and such reframing seems to be outdated as "most scholars, and notably practitioners, agree that one approach cannot do without the other and that any peacebuilding process requires a […] framework […] in which bottom-up initiatives can be supported, flourish and result in a more genuine form of governance" (ibid.). Circumstances on the ground or preferences of donors and peacebuilders might lead to the adoption of policies which lean more towards one side or the other, but most peacebuilders suggest that top-down and bottom-up initiatives have to be balanced. Hofmann makes reference to recent analysis of peace operations to illustrate that in those missions where state-centred approaches have been implemented, they have "shift[ed] towards more bottom-up, emancipatory approaches over the course of time, since a successful implementation of the latter facilitates the gradual disengagement of external actors" (ibid.).

Hofmann's assessment of the developments in East Timor differs substantially from the findings put forth by the lead article. Accordingly, he presents a more optimistic outlook on the future and the country's peacebuilding potential. He concludes that rather than simply replacing the notion of state with the "misleading notion of a hybrid political order", we should refine our own understanding of what constitutes a state and how state formation can be effectively supported. Instead of thinking of a state predominantly in terms of its administrative institutions and its powers, we should adopt a concept that puts the citizens at the centre. Hofmann notes that the state manifests itself in the sum of the people on a given territory, who form this state and delegate responsibilities and powers. Such state formation is based on trust and identity. State-building assistance would then ideally "find the balance between a top-down and bottom-up approach by responding to the demands of the people" (ibid., 84), and it would guarantee an inclusive process, respect cultural traditions and at the same time support political state formation.

In their final reflection, Boege et al. emphasize that they do not neglect the negative dimensions of hybrid political orders but "want to raise awareness of their positive dimensions and potentialities, identify their workable elements" (in this volume, 88). They highlight their understanding of hybrid political orders as an analytical, and not so much as a normative concept (as assumed by Mehler and Hofmann). Their intention is not to present states as 'bad' and hybrid political orders as 'good' (or as an alternative to states), but to draw attention to the institutions and processes of governance on the ground that actually determine the political order. With respect to Susan Woodward's proposal to focus on those doing the judging, labelling and intervening and

to identify their goals and policies, the authors suggest doing both: to provide a more thorough analysis of the political interests behind the fragile states discourse *and* to deliver a detailed and comprehensive analysis of how "the real world operates" in the regions labelled as fragile, in order to demonstrate that alternatives do exist. The authors agree with Trutz von Trotha's proposal to overcome the state-centric view and to shift the focus from state-building to peacebuilding. At the same time they clarify that they do not intend an all-out rejection of the notion of the state. They believe that states will continue to be the foundation of the international system and that in reality there will be cases of "positive mutual accommodation of introduced state and indigenous non-state institutions" (in this volume, 92). But they express their concern that "in this context, areas of non-statehood will be perceived as voids, and these voids will be in danger of being filled by other states – most probably by means of force, intervention and occupation" (ibid.). Thus they see a need to confront the western concept of the state and to create "some deeper awareness of what processes actually deliver peace, order and stability in many regions of the Global South" (ibid.).

In sum, the lead article and the comments presented in this Dialogue demonstrate that there are no simple solutions for the dilemmas, problems and questions raised. Rather than answers, more dilemmas have been outlined and more questions have been added, which was exactly the editors' intention. This Dialogue presents one piece in the puzzle of an ongoing debate relating to the present laboratory of international state-building endeavours. This laboratory covers most distinct parts of the world, including very diverse places such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, East Timor, Somaliland, Liberia, and many regions beyond, and involves a variety of actors, such as international organisations, governments, state institutions and non-state actors. The fundamental question is which lessons can be learned from these cases: which implications do they have for our *theoretical understanding*, and is there *any political will* among those involved to question current approaches and adapt international policy accordingly? With the exception of the contribution by Hofmann, which presents a comparatively positive assessment of international state-building concepts and intervention practice, all contributions underline that to date very little institutional learning has taken place. So the most important challenge remains: how to sensitise representatives of international organisations and governments, decision-makers in parliaments, administrations and also NGOs to the *need to learn from failed state-building projects*, to ensure that more *déjà-vu* experiences can be avoided and failed concepts will be replaced by more modest and incremental approaches.

The contributions to this Dialogue also reveal that there is urgent demand for further in-depth research into peace missions. Yet this must not be the kind of research that just focuses on improving mission effectiveness, but one that puts the issue of effectiveness into a wider context and questions the underlying ideological premises, interests and purposes of those who conduct the interventions. As Roland Paris has repeatedly pointed out, a lot of literature overemphasizes policy and even subscribes to a "cult of policy relevance".[10] Normative and critical research on structures and processes and on the interaction of different actors and methods of conflict transformation needs to replace analysis that aims at making technical improvements and focuses exclusively on the measurable effectiveness of international intervention activities. Normative research in this case is more than simply practice-orientated; it means investigating which processes and institutions actually contribute to *peace*building. Empirical peace research is necessary, and theory-guided studies are also urgently needed. Research on single cases should be accompanied by context studies and comparative research. It is time to critically reflect upon policies that are conducted

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10 See Roland Paris, Broadening the Study of Peace Operations, in: *International Studies Review*, 2 (3), 2001, 27-44.

under labels such as "security sector reform", "rule of law", "transitional justice", "democratisation & liberalisation", "institution building" and "civil society building". There is a need to question these core elements of the repertoire of international state-building and to modify them, grounded in a solid analysis of given realities in war-torn societies and guided by a search for processes and institutions that actually deliver peaceful co-existence and conflict transformation. It seems to the editors that, although some debate on these issue areas has started, we are still at the beginning and both, practitioners as well as scholars, need to make joint progress.

Berlin, March 2009
Martina Fischer & Beatrix Schmelzle

Introduction

About the Editors

Martina Fischer is the deputy director at the Berghof Research Center in Berlin, Germany, and co-editor of the *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation.* She is also vice chair of the board of the German Peace Research Foundation (DSF). She has a PhD in Political Science from the Free University Berlin and has published widely on peacebuilding in South Eastern Europe, European peace and security policy, civil-military relations, the role of civil society in peacebuilding, the potential of youth in conflict transformation and linkages between peacebuilding and development strategies. She frequently advises peace and development agencies – civil society initiatives as well as public sector organisations, such as the German Development Agency GTZ – on conflict issues. She also has worked as an advisor and consultant for members of the German Parliament, the European Parliament, political parties and ministries, i.e. as a member of the Working Group on Peace and Conflict Studies and the Advisory Council on Civil Conflict Prevention established by the German Foreign Ministry. Among her most recent publications are the edited volume *Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ten Years after Dayton* (Lit Verlag, 2nd Edition 2007) and *Strategies for Peace* (co-edited with Volker Rittberger, Barbara Budrich Verlag, 2008).

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See also...

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