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Publisher: Routledge

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Conflict, Security & Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccsd20>

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Version of record first published: 13 Mar 2013.

To cite this article: Jan Selby (2013): The myth of liberal peace-building, Conflict, Security & Development, 13:1, 57-86

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2013.770259>

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Analysis

The myth of liberal peace-building

Jan Selby

'Liberal peace-building' is a subject of intense debate within contemporary IR. This article contends, however, that for all the merits of much of the work on the subject, the overall terms of the debate are rooted in a series of questionable assumptions. Proponents and critics alike hold that peace-building is an essentially liberal project, over which there is a global (or Western) consensus, and which is pursued by a decentralised plurality of institutions irrespective of the particularity of war-endings. This article shows that this is misleading. Focusing on the relations between peace agreements and peace-building, it shows that peace agreements are contextually specific political arrangements, driven above all by

strategic considerations of power and legitimacy, in relation to which liberal peace-building doctrines and practices are unevenly applied, instrumentalised or plain ignored—including by international actors. It argues in turn that liberal peace-building discourse overstates both the liberalism of contemporary peace interventions, and the degree of global consensus thereover, and fails to capture the enduring centrality of states, strategy and geopolitics in the making of peace. These arguments are developed with reference to a wide range of cases of post-Cold War peace interventions, though with especial focus on UN peace-building in Cambodia in the early 1990s.

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Introduction

'Liberal peace-building' is a subject of intense debate within contemporary International Relations, especially in the UK where it provides the dominant framing for the analysis of post-Cold War peacemaking. Proponents, most (in)famously Roland Paris, argue that peace-building has a moderately successful record in ending violence; that liberal democratic forms of governance are, whatever their limitations, still the best-suited to managing and mitigating political conflict; that in the absence of any 'viable alternative', liberal peace-building's demise 'would be tantamount to abandoning tens of millions of people to lawlessness, predation, disease and fear'; and that liberal peace-building thus needs 'saving' from its 'irrationally exuberant' 'hyper-critics'.¹ Conversely, critics such as Oliver Richmond, Mark Duffield and Michael Pugh have argued, from a variety of theoretical perspectives, that liberal peace-building applies a standardised liberal social model that is insensitive to local contexts, disempowers local communities and in practice has delivered poor-quality outcomes characterised by superficial democratisation, entrenched corruption and worsening socio-economic inequalities.²

Paris develops his case for saving liberal peace-building by analogy with a 1993 article by Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner, 'Saving Failed States'.³ Yet the idea of 'failed states' is, if anything, even more contested than liberal peace-building. A broad sweep of post-colonial, post-structuralist, Marxian and other critical writers have argued that the notion of 'state failure' is a descriptively shallow substitute for analysis that directs attention away from the historical and global causes of 'weak statehood' in the global South, and that has been selectively applied in the service of post-Cold War interventionism: 'failed state' is thus less a coherent analytical category, than an exercise in ideology, myth or rhetoric.⁴ As such, Paris' analogy between failed states and liberal peace-building hardly seems to strengthen the case for the latter. To the contrary, it suggests the need for further reflection on, and interrogation of, the concept of 'liberal peace-building'. Perhaps, I wonder—and this is the question which animates this paper—if 'state failure' is a fallacy and myth, then maybe something similar applies to the concept of 'liberal peace-building'?

In what follows, I argue just this: that notwithstanding the many important insights generated by critics in particular, the idea of 'liberal peace-building' is essentialist and misleading; and that 'liberal peace-building' thus constitutes a problematic and limiting starting point for the analysis of contemporary peacemaking practices. More specifically, I argue that liberal peace-building discourse overstates the liberalism of contemporary

peace interventions, and understates the enduring importance of strategy, states and geopolitics in the making of peace. This criticism applies not just to proponents of liberal peace-building but also to its critics—who for all their theoretical and political heterodoxy typically reproduce many key elements of the pro-liberal peace-building literature. This is not at all to suggest that the liberal peace-building literature is thereby redundant or irrelevant: I consider much of the critical literature, in particular, to be extremely powerful and important. It is to suggest, however, that the myth of peace-building's inherent liberalism obscures key features of contemporary peacemaking and international peace interventions, and as such is an impediment to their analysis.

In developing these arguments, my emphasis is intentionally more empirical than theoretical—on the grounds that contextualised analysis of concrete peacemaking practices provides the best way of identifying the limits of liberal peace-building discourse. Nonetheless, behind all the empirics my approach is theoretically informed, specifically by historical materialist International Relations scholarship and especially those variants of it that insist that geopolitical contestation and 'the international' have not been displaced by predominantly 'transnational' or 'global' forms of politics.⁵ In common with parts of this literature, the argument herein has a quasi-realist flavour, emphasising the abiding centrality of states, power and strategy within world politics. However, my approach is indebted to Marxism in at least three regards. First, by analogy with the oft-made Marxist argument that classical liberal categories obscure much about the actual mechanisms of capitalist societies, it is argued here that liberal peace-building discourse mistakenly treats 'peace-building' as a discrete sphere of activity and object of analysis—with important implications, as shown below. Second, whereas realists typically conceive state strategies in the international arena as autonomous of domestic socio-economic structures and struggles, and thus invoke notions of the 'national interest' and 'national security' to explain state policies, I do neither: for all my emphasis on geopolitics herein, I consider it but one (crucial) element of contemporary peacemaking, and do not consider peacemaking to be reducible to it.⁶ And third, in typical Marxian fashion the aim of the paper is analytically-informed critique—both of existing structures and relations, and of the 'critical critics' who idealise them.⁷

The argument unfolds as follows. The first main section of the article outlines the basic parameters of liberal peace-building discourse, and observes that in the liberal peace-building literature, peace-building is analytically abstracted from and privileged over other elements of war-ending and peacemaking. This sets the stage for a two-step critical

interrogation centring on the relationship between peace-building and peace agreements. First through a detailed analysis of United Nations peace-building in Cambodia in the early 1990s, and the peace agreement underlying it, I argue that the liberal peace-building literature misrepresents the content and causes of Cambodia's war-to-peace transition, mistakenly viewing it as an inherently liberalisation-oriented process. Second, drawing upon evidence from a wider range of cases I contend that in these cases too peace agreements and peace-building do not fully conform to the liberal peace-building model. Armed with this empirical evidence, I return in conclusion to the shared premises outlined in the first section of the paper, to argue that these to a large degree misrepresent the nature and contexts of contemporary peace-building; and that critics of contemporary peace-building should pay far more attention to states, strategy, geopolitics and not least peace agreements than at present.

One final introductory note is in order. The central target of my critique is discourse, or the debate, on liberal peace-building. By this, I mean those authors and texts which treat peace-building as essentially and definitively liberal—as indicated either by the repeated collocation of 'liberal' and 'peace-building', or else by the largely unspoken assumption of peace-building's inherent liberalism.⁸ The paper takes as its point of departure the work of Paris and Richmond, as the leading figures in this debate, but it also seeks to show just how widely their common premises are shared (plus also to note where they are not). It does not offer a sustained or rounded assessment of peace-building-as-practice (though does have some clear critical implications for practice). If this seems an overly restrictive target, the reason for this focus is that the notion of 'liberal peace-building' currently provides one of the leading frameworks for the analysis of peacemaking worldwide and the dominant framing for discussions of peacemaking in contemporary British IR.

Shared premises

Liberal peace-building discourse has at least seven common features, most of them shared by proponents and critics alike. A first, foundational assumption is that there currently exists a broadly accepted global 'paradigm',⁹ 'framework'¹⁰ or 'project'¹¹ in favour of liberal peace. This 'paradigm', it is claimed, posits that liberal economic and political structures, and processes of economic and political liberalisation, are the best way of building sustainable peace in societies emerging from war. The core components of this 'framework'

or ‘project’ are liberal democratic political structures and processes (multi-party elections, good governance, human rights provisions, the development of a limited but functional state and the empowerment of civil society) and liberal or neo-liberal economic practices (the privatisation of public enterprises, reduced state subsidies, the deregulation of capital markets and the lowering of barriers to international trade). Now, some commentators subscribe to this ‘paradigm’ and ‘project’, seeing it as the ultimate key to post-conflict reconstruction and recovery; whilst others radically disagree with it. But, crucially, both sides think it exists.

A second shared premise of the liberal peace-building debate is that contemporary peace-building is ideationally rooted in liberal theories, principles, norms or discourses. Thus for Paris, liberal peace-building is founded on the ‘liberal peace thesis’ as articulated by a range of classical liberal thinkers (Locke, Smith, Kant, Mill), and given its pre-eminent late twentieth century reading in the work of Michael Doyle; liberal peace-building is rooted in ‘principles of liberal democracy’.¹² For Richmond, even more clearly, the ‘liberal peace-building framework rests upon conceptions of liberal-internationalist thought’.¹³ The point here does not need belabouring, since it is unquestioned right across the debate. Liberal peace-building is assumed to embody ‘the moral-political outlook of liberal internationalism’ and ‘the principles of liberal peace’.¹⁴ The practices of liberal peace-building are assumed to be grounded in liberal discourse, or discourses.¹⁵

A third common assumption is that this liberal project is globally hegemonic. Paris, for example, contends that a ‘single paradigm—liberal internationalism—appears to guide the work of most international agencies engaged in peace-building’, and that ‘the most remarkable feature of the peace-building operations in the 1990s was that they all pursued the same general strategy for promoting stable and lasting peace in war-shattered states: democratization and marketization’.¹⁶ Richmond, with Mac Ginty, claims that the liberal peace is ‘the central organising framework for peace interventions and reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of contemporary civil wars’.¹⁷ This framework has no direct competitors: no rival peacemaking ‘projects’ are identified within the liberal peace-building literature. To the contrary, amongst critics in particular, this project is seen as near-universalist in two senses—as almost universally adhered to, and as attempting to universalise a single liberal social model. As Richmond puts it, there exists a global “‘peace-building consensus” on the nature of the peace to be created—liberal peace’; or as Mac Ginty asserts, liberal peace-building exercises a ‘near monopoly’ within contemporary peace operations, such that it applies worldwide a ‘highly standardized’ model of how to

create sustainable peace—‘a peace from IKEA: a flat-pack peace made from standardized components’.¹⁸ Some recent work emphasises that neo-liberalism is now facing significant challenges, arising especially from the economic crisis gripping the US and Europe, plus the rise of China—but these themes have not yet filtered widely into the liberal peace-building literature.¹⁹

Across the debate, fourthly, the agents of this theoretically-infused global project are thought to be a decentralised plurality of actors and institutions. Thus in Paris’ view, ‘peace-building operations are conducted by a diverse assortment of NGOs and intergovernmental organizations’; while for Richmond, the peace-building consensus rests upon ‘implicit agreement between [...] the UN, IFIs and NGOs’, and is promoted by what is effectively a ‘transnational peace-building class’.²⁰ In Duffield’s formulation—which for all its Foucauldian inflection places a substantively similar emphasis on the polyarchical and diffuse character of liberal peace-building—‘liberal peace is not manifest within a single institution of global government [...] It is part of the complex, mutating and stratified networks that make up global liberal governance’; and likewise for Roberts, peace-building is inextricably associated with, and indeed at the ‘vanguard’ of, biopolitical global governance.²¹ Amongst this plurality of actors and institutions, if one is thought to stand above the rest it is the United Nations. The UN is credited, by Paris and many others besides, for having articulated the key principles of the liberal peace-building project, as outlined most importantly in Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s ‘Agenda for Peace’.²² The UN is also home, of course, to a Peace-building Commission. And UN missions are commonly portrayed, especially by advocates, as the primary vehicles of the liberal peace-building project. Paris, for instance, restricts his analysis of liberal peace-building to multilateral operations where the deployment of military personnel has been approved by the UN Security Council, as also do Doyle and Sambanis.²³ The depiction of liberal peace-building as a pluralistic and multilateral, if UN-led, project is shared by advocates and critics alike.

In liberal peace-building discourse, fifthly, the counterpart to this focus on global liberal hegemony is a strong concern with the local, in two regards. On the one hand, whereas the global is seen as a site of elite consensus, as shown above, the local—the level of implementation—is viewed as a terrain of conflict, resistance, messy compromises and regular non-implementation of, or ‘backsliding’ from, the liberal peace agenda.²⁴ There is, of course, a wide spectrum of positions on the implementation record of liberal peace-building, and on the reasons why this project has faced such local

difficulties. Thus for Paris, the problems encountered during peace-building operations in large measure stem from rapid and ill-managed liberalisation—a finding which, in Paris' view, suggests that the international community should place more emphasis on supporting the growth of strong liberal state institutions, and extend the typical duration of peace-building interventions.²⁵ For Richmond, by contrast, the crisis of liberal peace is rooted in its standardising, universalist pretensions, its focus on institutions of governance—and its concomitant failure to engage either with local cultural practices of peacemaking or with the manifold insecurities of everyday life in societies emerging from conflict.²⁶ And in Pugh's reading, neo-liberal Washington Consensus doctrines promoted under the banner of peace-building have had the predictable effects of aggravating poverty and inequality, whilst facilitating criminalisation.²⁷ Such important differences of interpretation aside, there is wide recognition right across the debate that the local implementation record of peace-building has often not (or, in more critical analyses, rarely) conformed to liberal ideals. In addition to this, much recent critical scholarship identifies local peacemaking practices and traditions, and the minutiae of everyday life, as the key normative sources for countering, softening or hybridising the liberal peace.²⁸ Within this scholarship, and indeed right across the liberal peace-building debate, the fundamental ontology at work is provided by a distinction between the global-liberal and the local.

Sixth, within the critical literature at least, it is often observed that this global liberal project often resorts to illiberal means—both because of liberalism's internal contradictions, and because of the complexities of engaging with illiberal actors and societies. Thus Richmond identifies different 'graduations' of liberal peace-building, including militarised and hyper-conservative models (for instance in Somalia, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq), where coercive means have been extensively utilised in support of liberal ambitions.²⁹ Chandler has shown, in relation to Bosnia, in particular, how the liberal peace project has been pursued by transferring unprecedented powers to the UN and more recently European Union on a semi-permanent basis, undermining internal democratic processes.³⁰ Cooper et al submit that even 'peace-building by consent [...] often rests upon various degrees of coercion'.³¹ And Jahn observes that not only post-Cold War peace-building, but 'liberal diplomacy' in general, deploys a panoply of means to spread liberalism—from 'trade, cultural and political exchange', through to 'the withdrawal of these privileges', right up to 'coercive intervention'.³² In the view of these and other critics, there thus often exist significant immanent tensions between liberal

peace-building's ultimate aim—the creation of liberal market democracies—and the specific tactics and strategies used to disseminate them.

Finally, and underpinning the above, liberal peace-building discourse portrays peace-building as a discrete, identifiable sphere of activity and, simultaneously, as the dominant element of contemporary war-ending practices. In keeping with Boutros Boutros-Ghali's (and before him, Johan Galtung's) definition of 'peace-building' as a 'post-conflict' activity 'to prevent the recurrence of violence', liberal peace-building discourse treats peace-building as functionally (and usually also temporally) distinct from processes of war-ending, whether these involve negotiation or military victory.³³ Admittedly, this is not always explicitly articulated within liberal peace-building discourse. Nonetheless it is the discourse's founding premise, since the identification of peace-building as having distinct properties—as being essentially rooted in liberalism, as being promoted by a dispersed plurality of international actors and as being the subject of a global consensus—necessarily rests upon assumptions about peace-building's existence as a discrete sphere of activity. In addition to this, peace-building is also understood within liberal peace-building literature as the dominant element of contemporary war-ending processes. In depth discussion of peace agreements and their negotiation, most importantly, is largely bypassed within this literature. Individual peace negotiations and settlements are often mentioned and summarised in discussion of specific peace-building missions—but rarely as more than contextual or permissive conditions for liberalising post-conflict activity. Moreover, thematic consideration of peace negotiations and agreements is almost entirely absent. Paris limits his general discussion of peace agreements to the contention that they function as important 'transmission mechanisms' for liberal norms.³⁴ Richmond, equally, holds that contemporary peace accords 'tend to incorporate what are now familiar features' of the liberal peace; and he also implies that the crucial importance of peace settlements in earlier historical eras (post-1918, for example) has given way to an era where peacemaking centres instead on the promotion of liberal democratic governance.³⁵ In liberal peace-building discourse, contemporary peace agreements are viewed either as merely contextual for, or as essentially subordinate to, the logic of the liberal peace-building project.

Most of the above features are shared right across the liberal peace-building debate and have been advanced from any number of theoretical perspectives. Thus it has been claimed from a constructivist perspective that contemporary peace-building is rooted in liberal 'international norms'.³⁶ Invoking Foucault, it has been argued that the liberal peace-

building project is an exercise in global bio-politics or governmentality, which aims to govern and construct liberal populations and subjectivities.³⁷ From a post-colonial perspective, liberal peace-building has been described as a colonial project, 'cast in the mould of colonialism', and aiming to restructure Southern societies in accordance with Northern metropolitan ideology.³⁸ And in neo-Gramscian terms, peace-building has been critiqued as part of a transnational neo-liberal project, 'reflecting the hegemony of liberal values that reigns in global politics'.³⁹ Right across this variegated theoretical terrain, peace-building is represented as a liberal project, founded on liberal ideas, pushed forward by a decentralised plurality of institutions irrespective of the particularity of war-endings and peace agreements, in which global consensus is counterposed by local dissensus or disorder.

Yet for all this trans-theoretical consensus, these shared emphases within liberal peace-building discourse constitute a questionable foundation for the analysis of contemporary peacemaking. Again, this is not to suggest that the liberal peace-building literature is without merit: the critical literature, in particular, provides much compelling evidence of the hubris of liberal internationalism, of the destruction wrought by World Bank-IMF policies and of the frequent complicity of peace-building projects in coercive processes of state-building, dispossession and subjugation. My contention is not that liberal peace-building research is without value, but that the above parameters are unnecessarily limiting, and can generate significant interpretive errors. To advance this case, my focus in the remainder of this paper is on the relations between post-conflict peace-building on the one hand, and peace agreements and their negotiation on the other. What this will reveal is that peace-building is neither a discrete sphere of action, nor the dominant element within contemporary peace processes; that states, strategy and geopolitics continue, as ever, to be crucial determinants of these processes; and that the influence of liberalism, and the degree of global consensus over the liberal peace, are significantly overstated within liberal peace-building discourse. We start by considering one case in some depth, before generalising from this case with the aid of insights from a broader range of examples.

Cambodia

The UN's intervention in Cambodia is the perfect test case for evaluating the liberal peace-building debate. For not only has it been widely discussed within its literature, in addition, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which lasted from

1992 to 1993, was and remains the largest and most comprehensive Chapter VI peace operation in the UN's history. For the first time, the UN was entrusted with overseeing the administration of a member state; for the first time, the UN was responsible for conducting, rather than merely observing or supervising, multi-party elections.⁴⁰ Here we surely have liberal peace-building par excellence.

In liberal peace-building discourse, both UNTAC and the October 1991 Paris peace agreement which provided its mandate are consistently portrayed as essentially liberal in content, causes and aims, if not in their consequences. Thus Paris observes—in keeping with his characterisation of peace agreements as subordinate to the logic of liberal peace-building, noted above—that the ‘agreement set out a detailed plan for transforming Cambodia into a peaceful liberal democracy’, and reflected ‘the Wilsonian assumption that transforming the Cambodian state into a liberal democracy would facilitate the transition from civil war to lasting peace’.⁴¹ Richmond, with Franks, claims similarly that UNTAC had ‘a liberal lineage derived from the development of Western states and the belief that peace follows the development of democracy’.⁴² Neither, it should be noted, provide any analysis of the political interests or strategies that informed the Paris negotiations and agreement, instead placing the UN and liberal internationalism at the centre of their analyses. Others do likewise. Springer claims, from a neo-Gramscian perspective, that both Paris and UNTAC aimed at ‘neo-liberalising’ Cambodia.⁴³ And Peou contends, from an institutionalist perspective, that the ‘Paris Peace Agreements [...] laid the ideational foundation of liberal democracy in the country’.⁴⁴ All assume that this particular peace intervention was rooted in liberal philosophy, and that the primary agent of peace was the UN. All either quickly pass over the Paris negotiations and agreements, or else treat them as important but nonetheless merely contextual of liberal peace-building.⁴⁵ And all note that within five years of UNTAC's departure, Cambodia had consolidated into an illiberal autocracy. Some deem this the inevitable result of local patrimonial traditions, whilst others see it as a function of the shortcomings and brevity of the UNTAC mission—but all are agreed that the medium-term consequences of peace-building in Cambodia were far from liberal.⁴⁶ Liberal peace-building discourse on Cambodia thus mirrors exactly the shared premises summarised above.

The fundamental problem with this narrative is that the 1991 Paris settlement was rooted primarily in geopolitics, and only secondarily in Wilsonian principles. Just as the war in Cambodia was rooted in geopolitics, so was this also true of the peace. From 1979 to 1989, Cambodia was occupied by Vietnam and administered by a Vietnamese-installed

regime, with Vietnam in turn receiving military and financial support from the Soviet Union. The anti-Vietnamese opposition, led by the ousted Khmer Rouge, were located in camps just across the border with Thailand, supported primarily by Thailand, China, the US—and the UK. The conflict in Cambodia, far from being a ‘civil war’ as it is so often now represented, was essentially a two-level proxy war—fought globally between the US and the Soviet Union, and regionally between China and Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge’s politics were about as far from Wilsonian ideals as one could imagine: during their 1975–79 reign of terror, at least 1.5 million Cambodians had died; forced ruralisation had reduced Phnom Penh to a population of near zero; and private property had been abolished, as also had money, an act symbolically represented in the blowing-up of the country’s Central Bank.⁴⁷ But this did not stand in the way of American (or Chinese, or indeed UK) policy. Throughout the 1980s, at China and the US’s behest, the Khmer Rouge continued to hold Cambodia’s seat at the UN, and refugee camps controlled by the Khmer Rouge and its allies continued to receive generous UN aid, whilst the Vietnamese-installed Cambodian regime was subjected to the US sanctions and a complete UN development aid embargo—the only developing country in the world that was prevented from receiving UN development assistance, and one moreover that was just recovering from the worst humanitarian tragedy of the late twentieth century.⁴⁸ Carter National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s candid (but still incomplete) admission summed up the dynamics well: ‘I encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot [...] Pol Pot was an abomination. We could never support him but China could’.⁴⁹

Such late Cold War geopolitical thinking did not simply evaporate with the start of peace moves in the late 1980s, but to the contrary provides the crucial context for understanding both the Paris agreement and in turn UNTAC. The driving forces behind Paris were essentially twofold: on the one hand the tentative improvements in Soviet-American, Sino-Soviet and Sino-Vietnamese relations which characterised the late 1980s, and which provided the global and regional conditions of possibility for an internationally-sanctioned peace deal; and on the other, the changing balance of forces within south-east Asia, with Soviet and Vietnamese influence waning, and Chinese influence on the rise—it being these developments which dictated the peace agreement’s terms. Together, these twin factors paved the way for an internationally-led peace settlement reflecting Sino-American power and interests.

The central problem in constructing such a peace arose from the fact that the local balance of forces in and around Cambodia was sharply at odds with these global and

regional geopolitical developments. For not only was there no sign of local rapprochement between the Vietnamese-installed regime and the Khmer Rouge opposition. Just as importantly, government forces were very much in the ascendancy within Cambodia—a state of affairs that remained unchanged even after Vietnam’s 1989 military withdrawal from the country. Two years on from this withdrawal, all 20 provincial capitals, all but two of 172 district towns and over 90 per cent of the territory and population of Cambodia remained in Phnom Penh’s hands.⁵⁰ For good measure, Cambodia had also witnessed an ‘impressive’ and ‘remarkable’ socio-economic recovery since the ouster of the Khmer Rouge in 1979.⁵¹ Cambodia was not a ‘failed state’, ‘incapable of governing itself’, and in need of ‘saving’ by a disinterested, UN-led international community.⁵² To the contrary, the crux of the peacemaking dilemma was that the government had extensive internal military and political control but only limited international recognition, whilst the Khmer Rouge and allies had exactly the reverse. In Jackson’s terms, one side possessed most of the ‘empirical’ statehood, the other most of the ‘juridical’ sovereignty.⁵³

The terms of the Paris agreement, and UNTAC’s mandate, are readily explicable in light of these contradictory local and international power relations. The key features of the agreement were threefold. Firstly, at China and the US’s insistence, the Paris agreement accorded a legitimate place in post-settlement Cambodian politics to the Khmer Rouge. Various attempts to negotiate peace terms excluding the Khmer Rouge had all been obstructed by Beijing and Washington.⁵⁴ The agreement made no mention of Khmer Rouge atrocities, or genocide, the three years preceding the agreement having seen ‘the progressive elimination of diplomatic criticism’ of the 1975–79 Khmer Rouge regime.⁵⁵ Instead the agreement referred merely to ‘policies and practices of the past’.⁵⁶

Second, the Paris agreement laid out a political framework for a transitional period during which the UN would exercise ‘direct supervision or control’ over ‘existing administrative structures’—which in practice, given realities on the ground, meant supervision or control of the Phnom Penh regime.⁵⁷ This intrusive UN role was essentially arrived at for two reasons. On the one hand, it was a response to the extent of the political deadlock between the parties and their international backers over how to distribute power within post-settlement Cambodia: introducing the UN into the equation was a way of circumventing, or appearing to circumvent, this deadlock over power-sharing.⁵⁸ Yet on the other hand, the prominent place accorded the UN in the Paris agreement was a function of Chinese and American strategies, and their dominant influence upon the terms of the Paris agreement. For China and the US wanted ‘a strong United Nations role’ in order ‘to

diminish the influence' of the Cambodian regime.⁵⁹ It is this which explains why the idea of an interim UN administration was so actively promoted by New York Congressman Stephen Solarz—who, as Chairman of the House of Representatives Asia and Pacific Affairs Committee, had also been the driving force behind the Bush Administration's provision of 'covert lethal aid' to Khmer Rouge allies; and which explains why the Phnom Penh government wanted to limit UN involvement, while the Khmer Rouge wished it to be as extensive as possible.⁶⁰

The third main feature of the Paris agreement was the importance it attached to elections. These were scheduled to take place at the end of the aforementioned transitional period, after which UNTAC would be wound up, with the new democratically-elected Cambodian government assuming the sovereign powers that had temporarily been 'delegated' to the UN.⁶¹ In liberal peace-building accounts, these elections are assumed to provide evidence of the Wilsonian lineage of the UN intervention. However, in view of the context of the elections' inclusion in the Paris agreement, this assumption is just not credible. From the start of the first Paris conference on Cambodia in 1989, all parties had agreed that internationally supervised elections would play a central part in any peace settlement: elections were 'a *sine qua non* of the resolution of the Cambodian conflict throughout the peace process and one on which the parties readily concurred'.⁶² They were not a subject of significant discord or even negotiation. And yet, few of the major players in the peace process were committed to liberal democratic principles. Of the four Cambodian parties and their leaders, all had 'deeply illiberal, antidemocratic and antipluralist tendencies'.⁶³ Moreover, of the key international actors, China had, just a month before the first Paris conference, crushed the country's own reform movement at Tiananmen Square, and Vietnam likewise remained a one-party state. Amongst the major local and international parties to the negotiations, therefore, only the US was firmly committed to liberal democracy (and even in this case, the US' foreign policy commitment to democratisation was, even at the highpoint of its democracy promotion activities, strikingly inconsistent in practice). How then are we to explain the prominent role accorded to elections in the Paris agreement?

Three reasons suggest themselves. To start with, for both local and international parties the elections functioned as a delay mechanism, enabling peace terms to be agreed but postponing until the end of the transitional period resolution of the core political incompatibility of who should exercise legitimate control of the Cambodian state. Deferred elections would no doubt threaten parties' political interests before long, but

power-sharing and the assumption of powers by the UN during the transitional period were the more immediate challenges—and it was partly for this reason that negotiations centred on the latter, and hardly at all on the former. Second, for the local parties, elections could function as ‘war by other means’, holding open ‘to each of the factions the possibility of achieving final victory in their long struggle for power’.⁶⁴ Thus the Khmer Rouge was willing to take part in the peace process, including elections, on the premise that UNTAC would limit the authority of the Cambodian regime, furnishing it with the opportunity to expand its territory and in turn achieve manipulated electoral gains; while for its part, the Cambodian regime likely calculated that, notwithstanding UNTAC, it would be able to exploit the benefits of incumbency and its powerful network of party cadres to secure electoral victory.⁶⁵ Last and most importantly, for the international parties, elections served as a means of conferring international legitimacy upon the post-election government, which would provide an alibi for them to switch sides, overcome their Cold War differences regarding the rightful possessor of Cambodia’s juridical sovereignty, and disengage from the conflict. Elections were accorded such a prominent role in the Paris agreement, in sum, not because they were an instrument of democratisation—something for which most of the major parties to the negotiations cared little—but because they served as mechanisms of delay, ongoing war and above all international legitimation and exit. As Gottesman observes, ‘UNTAC came to Cambodia because multiparty elections were the only way for Vietnam, China, the Soviet Union, and the West to end a draining *international conflict*’.⁶⁶ Roberts puts it more bluntly still: the Paris Agreement was nothing ‘other than a tool for superpower disengagement’.⁶⁷

That the Paris agreement and UNTAC failed to transform Cambodia into a liberal democracy is entirely understandable, given this. Elections were held, in May 1993, and in the narrowest of senses were successful. But not a single one of the key preconditions for elections as laid out in the Paris accord—ceasefire; cantonment, disarmament and demobilisation of military forces; and the creation of a ‘neutral political environment’ for the elections—had been met, rendering them extremely questionable as an exercise in democracy.⁶⁸ The war between the Khmer Rouge and Cambodian regime continued, with daily ceasefire violations throughout the UNTAC period, and with military clashes increasing in the run-up to the elections—by which time the Khmer Rouge had quadrupled the territory under its control.⁶⁹ The Cambodian regime, eager to enhance its international legitimacy, did cooperate with UNTAC—but the latter largely failed to penetrate the former’s party-state apparatus, leaving it free to use its employees and

resources for electioneering purposes. The Khmer Rouge, meanwhile, refused the UN access to areas under its control, refused to disarm or demobilise, and eventually—recognising that UNTAC was unable or unwilling to limit the political reach of the Cambodian regime—withdrew from the peace process and elections altogether.⁷⁰ But this was not to stand in the way of elections which, regardless of circumstances on the ground, constituted the key to international disengagement from the Cambodia conflict. So when the required military and political conditions for a fair vote failed to materialise, the ‘UN deftly redefined its mandate [. . .] from peacekeeping—since there was no peace to keep—to election holding’.⁷¹ A single event, the elections, became UNTAC’s ‘holy grail’.⁷²

From this event, the Royalist party of King Sihanouk, erstwhile ally of the Khmer Rouge, emerged victorious, with the governing Communists achieving the second highest number of seats. Negotiations subsequent to the elections, however, led to the formation of a power-sharing government between the two parties which anomalously featured a ‘first’ and a ‘second’ Prime Minister, with Hun Sen’s Communists, the junior party in terms of the election results, exercising continued control of the state apparatus. Despite some international unease about this ‘constitutional coup’, the international community quickly coalesced around it. As Stedman acutely observes, ‘UNTAC did not insist that the political outcome of the election accurately reflect the electoral outcome, for fear that it would undermine the triumph of holding the election’.⁷³ China ended its military support for the Khmer Rouge and, along with the US, now recognised and cultivated close relations with the Phnom Penh regime. The problem of Cambodia’s contested juridical sovereignty had been resolved.

UNTAC departed in late 1993, its mission declared a ‘success’ by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and a ‘triumph of democracy’ by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher.⁷⁴ But the war continued: UNTAC doubtless facilitated the unification of Cambodia’s juridical sovereignty, but in terms of the amount of territory actually under government control, Cambodia was more a ‘failed state’ immediately post-UNTAC than it had been beforehand. Nonetheless, UNTAC did have one crucial indirect impact in facilitating the eventual demise of the Khmer Rouge and an end to the war. For, as a result of UNTAC and its elections, the Phnom Penh government—effectively led, as previously, by Hun Sen’s Communists—now not only benefited from undisputed international recognition but also, as a corollary, from international and especially Chinese sponsorship. With new financial resources at its disposal, the Cambodian government was now able to co-opt Khmer Rouge commanders into its ranks.⁷⁵ It was this process which eventually led, in

1999, to the disintegration of the Khmer Rouge and the full consolidation of the Hun Sen regime. What made this happen was not (even a geopolitically-mediated) ‘liberal peace’, but rather local co-option in tandem with Chinese regional hegemony, aided by a useful veneer of UN-sanctioned legitimacy.

Peace agreements and peace-building

The Cambodian case suggests four general theses about peace agreements, peace-building and their relations, each of which are confirmed by other cases: first, that contemporary peace agreements and negotiations typically involve extensive international input, and thus need to be included in any rounded assessment of international peace interventions; second and third, that neither the content nor the aims or causes of peace agreements can be essentially characterised in terms of liberalisation; and fourth, that peace-building is neither a discrete sphere of action, nor usually the dominant and determining element of contemporary war-ending processes.

Firstly, then, analysis of peace agreements and their negotiation cannot be sensibly excluded from discussions of international peace interventions—since most peace negotiations today are not merely ‘local’, but receive extensive international input.⁷⁶ Contemporary peace agreements are typically named or known after the foreign locations where they were signed or mediated, ranging from former imperial metropolises (as in the 1991 Paris accord on Cambodia), to US military bases (the 1995 Dayton agreement on Bosnia), to the capitals of small powers with claims to neutrality (the Israeli-Palestinian ‘Oslo’ accords of 1993), to regional capitals (the 1999 Lomé Agreement on Sierra Leone, the 2006 Abuja accord on Darfur) and provincial hideaways (the 2005 Naivasha agreement on Sudan). Such agreements are often signed and guaranteed by a host of international actors (for instance, the Paris agreement was guaranteed by 17 states plus the Non-Aligned Movement and the UN, while the Naivasha agreement was witnessed by eight states plus four regional organisations and the UN). International actors commonly provide technical and financial resources for negotiations, and more importantly help endow them, and the resulting agreements, with legitimacy—which is a crucial precondition for internationally-financed post-conflict peace-building.

Besides this procedural input, international ‘third parties’ usually have significant impacts upon the overall framing and even detailed content of ‘local’ peace agreements.

In the Cambodian case, as we have seen, the framework for peace was developed principally by the US and China, to the extent that Cambodia was ‘as much a “side-show” to the peace process as it had been to the war in Vietnam.’⁷⁷ At Dayton, peace terms were forcibly negotiated by US special envoy Richard Holbrooke whilst he was simultaneously advocating a ‘bombs for peace’ strategy against the Bosnian Serbs, and privately urging the Croats to accelerate a counter-offensive which had already produced at least one hundred thousand new refugees.⁷⁸ The Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), although negotiated bilaterally and on predominantly Israeli terms, was formulated within a framework developed as much by the US administration as by Jerusalem.⁷⁹ Entire sections of the Lomé Agreement were drafted by US officials.⁸⁰ In the case of the Naivasha agreement on Sudan, the broad contours of negotiations were established by George W. Bush’s peace envoy, the former Senator and Episcopal minister John Danforth, who accepted the Islamist military regime of Omar Bashir as legitimate representative of the North, and promoted a negotiation framework which empowered Bashir and his similarly undemocratic Southern opponents, whilst excluding all other actors.⁸¹ And by way of a final example, in the case of the Abuja agreement on Darfur, a take-it-or-leave-it text was simply presented by African Union (AU) mediators, with the Sudanese parties being required to agree to its terms without further negotiation, or face the consequences.⁸² Across this wide spectrum of cases, international actors have, in one way or another, exercised decisive influence over the substance of peace agreements. This is not to suggest that international actors are the sole determinants of peace negotiations and agreements, or that every negotiation process is equally affected by international factors—neither is the case. It is to suggest, however, that if there is indeed a global liberal peace project, then this project must presumably guide not only post-conflict peace-building, but also international input into peace negotiations and agreements.

This would be of no great import if peace agreements were essentially or primarily ‘transmission mechanisms’ for liberal norms—but this is also not so. Thus, secondly, the content of peace agreements is not limited to ‘familiar features’ of the liberal peace. Of course, most contemporary peace agreements do include provisions pertaining to elections, human rights, the rule of law, development and other practices typically associated with liberalism. Both the Dayton and Paris agreements laid out detailed frameworks for elections, human rights and constitutional democracy, the latter stipulating ‘a system of liberal democracy’ as the basis of Cambodia’s future post-war constitution.⁸³ The Oslo agreement placed such heavy emphasis on regional development

co-operation that it was described by one knowledgeable commentator as ‘primarily an economic document.’⁸⁴ And even the Naivasha agreement committed the parties to establishing a ‘democratic system of governance’ in Sudan, to complying with international human rights law, and to holding elections within three years.⁸⁵ Alongside such liberalisation-oriented commitments, however, the detailed content of peace agreements is often distinctly illiberal and non-democratic.

The Lomé, Naivasha and Oslo agreements provide three different examples of this. Lomé, though overseen by the US and specifically its Special Envoy for the Promotion of Democracy in Africa, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, stipulated that the democratically elected President Kabbah would henceforth enter into a non-democratic power-sharing arrangement with the notorious Revolutionary United Front (RUF). It provided the RUF with four ministerial and a further four deputy ministerial positions; granted the RUF and its hitherto imprisoned leader Foday Sankoh complete amnesty, despite UN objections; and named Sankoh as Vice-President and chairman of a new commission with ‘full control over the exploitation of gold, diamonds and other resources.’⁸⁶ Effectively, the agreement legitimised the RUF’s control of diamond production and the RUF-dominated territorial status quo—reflecting the international pressure that had been exerted primarily against the Kabbah government in Freetown, rather than the RUF (by one account, international mediators ‘kidnapped Kabbah’ and ‘made him sign’).⁸⁷ That Lomé subsequently collapsed should not obscure the fact that its terms were not premised on principles of ‘liberal peace.’⁸⁸

Even less identifiably liberal, the Naivasha Agreement provided for the Sudanese military regime and the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M)—neither of which had attained their positions through elections—to become non-democratic partners in ruling Sudan for a transitional six-year period. It dictated that they would together collaborate to hold 80 per cent of the seats in the executives and legislatures of every level of government across the country; and that they would together monopolise oil revenues, granting a meagre two per cent of earnings to oil-producer regions.⁸⁹ The agreement included no actual mechanisms for protecting human rights, or for truth and reconciliation; it confirmed the continued imposition of (the Khartoum regime’s highly conservative interpretation of) Shari’a law within northern Sudan; and while it did provide for elections mid-way through the peace process, these were never central to it and, in the event, ended up consolidating the internal positions of the Bashir regime and SPLA/M. The content of Naivasha, in sum,

was deeply illiberal—which didn't, however, prevent the US, Britain or Norway from becoming its guarantors. The recent partition of Sudan into two illiberal and violence-racked states—this itself a direct consequence of Naivasha—has likewise been internationally lauded and supported.

By way of a final example, the 1993 Oslo agreement provided for the establishment of an authoritarian client regime in Ramallah to control the Palestinian people on Israeli terms, whilst simultaneously permitting the restructuring of overall Israeli control across the West Bank and Gaza (WBG) and continued settlement-building in defiance of international law. Israeli leaders were candid about this logic, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin commending the agreement on the grounds that the 'Palestinians will be better' at repressing human rights 'than we were because they will allow no appeals to the Supreme Court and will prevent the Israeli Association of Civil Rights from criticising the conditions there.'⁹⁰ In keeping with this, Oslo and its implementation accords placed tight restrictions upon the powers of the Palestinian Authority (PA) except in one area—internal repression. Thus territorially, the PA in the West Bank came to comprise 200-plus fragments of territory, which looks more like an outbreak of chickenpox than a typical liberal or Westphalian state.⁹¹ But the PA was granted a 'strong police force', and—with Israeli and international support—quickly developed an extremely poor human rights record, became home to as many as 14 police and security forces, and turned Gaza into the most heavily policed society in the world.⁹² At the heart of this arrangement, Israel routinely deposited tax revenues into PA President Yasser Arafat's personal bank accounts instead of official Palestinian government depositories, with the objective of buttressing his internal powers of patronage and control.⁹³ Oslo, in short, effected an 'outsourcing of occupation'—not the 'introduction' of 'the liberal peace framework' into the Middle East.⁹⁴

Now, some critical liberal peace-building scholars would no doubt respond to such evidence by accepting it—but insisting that it is no great surprise, since the liberal peace project often uses illiberal means in support of liberal ends, as discussed above. True enough, much of the illiberal content of peace agreements is indeed included at the insistence of local actors, and as a result of tactical accommodations and compromises by internationals who nonetheless remain committed to the universalisation of liberal ideals. However, not all of the illiberal content of peace agreements can be so explained—since, as a third main point, the aims, intentions and causes behind peace agreements do not solely revolve around liberalisation.

Put briefly, peace agreements are essentially mechanisms for the restructuring of power relations, and the attainment of attribution of political legitimacy—not liberalisation. They are most obviously mechanisms for the reallocation of power amongst local signatories, using power-sharing (or ‘power-dividing’) formulas which are sometimes semi-democratic but often not so, as in the Lomé, Naivasha and Oslo agreements discussed above.⁹⁵ They are also often significantly structured by and designed to reconfigure intra-group power relations: thus Lomé enabled Sankoh to resume full leadership of the RUF; Naivasha was designed to support both Khartoum and the SPLA/M in consolidating their internal hegemonic positions within north and south Sudan respectively; and Oslo provided a means for the diaspora-based PLO to reassert its leadership of the Palestinian national movement in the face of internal nationalist and Islamist challenges.⁹⁶ And finally, many agreements are significantly structured by geopolitical factors—which are not reducible to, or explicable in terms of, liberalisation. Thus the Paris agreement was primarily determined, as we have seen, by Sino-American power and strategy, it being this that explains the central role accorded to UNTAC within Cambodia’s peace process. Oslo was determined by the long-established military-political embrace between the US and Israel, it being this which explains why the agreement replicated so much of the 1978 Camp David Accords. The Naivasha agreement was a product both of envoy Danforth’s religious and Orientalist reading of the Sudanese civil war—as essentially a conflict between southern Christians and northern Muslims—and of the US’s strategy of accommodating and co-opting Sudan into its War on Terror.⁹⁷ The Dayton agreement was born out of US geo-strategic rivalry with Russia, as well as European concerns about the proximity of the Bosnian crisis, it being this which explains why Dayton maintained Bosnia as a ‘phantom’ sovereign state which was in practice partitioned under international trusteeship.⁹⁸ And by way of a final, telling example, the Abuja agreement on Darfur was imposed on the Sudanese parties by the AU and Western mediators essentially because other strategies for tackling the Darfur crisis—strong sanctions against the Sudanese regime, or the deployment of a UN force with a robust mandate—were opposed by China and Russia at the UN Security Council.⁹⁹ The aims, purpose and causes of these agreements lay principally in geopolitical circumstance, not projects of liberalisation.

In addition to restructuring power, contemporary peace agreements also function as mechanisms for conferring or securing international legitimacy, and thereby attracting political and financial sponsorship. The simple act of agreeing to internationally-approved peace terms confers a degree of legitimacy upon signatories, irrespective of these terms’

actual content; in turn international legitimacy considerations often provide motivation for parties to agree peace. Thus the Oslo agreement was driven in part by Israeli business elites' desire for some sort of agreement—its terms were largely irrelevant—that would end the Arab boycott, ease Israel's international legitimacy crisis, and thereby facilitate access to New York financial markets and east Asian investment opportunities.¹⁰⁰ On the Palestinian side, PLO policy was strongly influenced by its loss of Gulf sponsorship following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (which the PLO had unwisely supported), Oslo providing the PLO with full worldwide recognition, and in turn access to international development funding. The Naivasha agreement arose in part out of Khartoum's need for increased international legitimacy and protection, especially in the context of the US's post-9/11 policies of regime change, and given the atrocities it was concurrently committing in Darfur. The one Darfuri faction which signed the Abuja agreement did so following threats that it would face international sanctions if it did not comply, the leader of the AU mediation team having previously informed the parties that 'the only page [of the agreement] that matters is the last page, which has the space for the signatures'.¹⁰¹ And in the case of Cambodia, as we have seen, the entire peace process was structured by the Sino-American refusal to recognise the Vietnamese-installed regime as the legitimate Phnom Penh government. Across all of these cases, securing international legitimacy was a key aim of parties to peace agreements. In each of these cases, moreover, legitimacy was not secured through assent to any specific liberal principles or practices, but rather through the a-principled act of signing an internationally-recognised text.

There is, however, one particular practice which is key to the legitimacy of contemporary peace accords: elections. In liberal peace-building discourse, these are assumed to provide evidence of the liberalising objectives of contemporary peace-building. If the agreements considered here are any guide, however, the primary reason why elections are so often included in peace agreements is not to advance political liberalisation, but to confer legitimacy upon new dispensations. Thus the Paris agreements, as Heder and Ledgerwood (both former UNTAC officials) confirm, 'did not have as a major goal the transformation of Cambodia into a consolidated political democracy', but instead functioned to legitimate whatever new government and provide an alibi for international actors to extricate themselves from the country.¹⁰² Elections were included in the Naivasha agreement not in order to democratise Sudan, but because donors argued that they were necessary for the agreement to be deemed legitimate.¹⁰³ And elections were provided for under the Oslo accords not in order to bring the Palestinians

democracy, but to legitimise the peace process and Israel's client administration—it being this that explains why, when this administration was defeated in the follow-up 2006 Palestinian elections, the US opted not to celebrate this as a milestone in modern Middle Eastern history (the first time in an Arab polity that power had passed to an opposition through a democratic election), but instead to pursue an active strategy of regime change against the new government.¹⁰⁴ Clearly, the central place accorded to elections within contemporary peace-building testifies to the hegemony of liberal democratic ideas of legitimacy within contemporary 'international society'.¹⁰⁵ But as the evidence reviewed here suggests, elections may, whilst drawing upon this reservoir of liberal legitimacy, nonetheless have functions and objectives which are entirely contrary to those of liberalisation.

This in turn suggests a fourth general thesis: that peace-building is neither a discrete sphere of activity, nor even the dominant and determining element of contemporary war-ending practices. Within liberal peace-building discourse, 'peace-building' is abstracted from broader war-ending processes, and treated as a discrete sphere of action with identifiable properties. A discursive object rooted in UN-speak is mistaken for a really-existing domain, and endowed with an autonomy and attributes ('liberalism') that it does not have the distinctness to possess. The mistake at work here can be identified by analogy. As Marxian thinkers have long argued, many classical liberal antitheses—especially between 'politics' and 'economics', and between 'the state' and 'civil society'—misrepresent and obscure the actual workings of capitalist societies.¹⁰⁶ On the strength of such distinctions, 'the economy' (or 'market') is treated within neo-classical theory as a discrete sphere of exchange and opportunity, with its own universal properties and laws of motion—instead of, as it really is, a formal category and institutional form which is historically and socially variable, which is always infused with and structured by power relations, and which cannot be analysed in abstraction from other 'non-economic' spheres of social and political life. For 'the economy' read 'peace-building': neither have the autonomy or universal characteristics that are often supposed.

Neither discrete nor dominant, post-conflict peace-building is, to the contrary, always subordinate to and structured by the specificities of war-ending processes and the strategies and power dynamics that accompany them. 'Liberal peace-building' doctrines and practices are as a result everywhere unevenly applied, and are often instrumentalised, subverted or plain ignored—including by international actors. This unevenness is not simply a product of tactical accommodations within the liberal peace project; its causes are

also geopolitical. In some post-conflict contexts, international peace-builders have been absent altogether. Civil conflicts in Chechnya (1994–96) and Kashmir (from 1989), for instance, were not succeeded by international peace-building missions, as a result of Russian and Indian vetoes respectively. Equally, the 1990–91 Gulf War was followed not by UN- or World Bank-led post-conflict reconstruction (except in Kurdish areas in northern Iraq), but instead by a decade of international sanctions, which caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and destroyed the entire fabric of Iraqi society.¹⁰⁷ At the other extreme, in areas where the US and allies exercise hegemony, peace-builders have become a semi-permanent presence, supporting essentially status quo strategies. Thus Bosnia and Kosovo have been turned into Western protectorates, under the neo-colonial trusteeship of the UN and EU. In the WBG, meanwhile, Israeli-American status quo interests exist alongside an illegal occupation (and longstanding Israeli suspicion of the UN), the result of which has been semi-permanent peace-building without UN administration or blue helmets, in which international assistance was and remains devoted to propping up the PA, even in the absence of an ongoing peace process. By contrast again, in other contexts, most notably Cambodia, the pre-eminent international interest has neither been status quo control, nor liberalisation, nor even peace, but disengagement—the central concern with legitimising international exit from Cambodia being what explains why UNTAC lasted for only 18 months; was almost entirely focused on organising the apparatus for exit, elections; had very limited enforcement powers; was wound up despite the ongoing war; and did not even include an economic development component.¹⁰⁸ In addition to this wide variability in form and function, peace-building initiatives are also extremely variable in size and levels of international support. As illustration, in 2008 the WBG received Overseas Development Assistance of US\$352 per capita, while the equivalent figure for the Democratic Republic of Congo was a mere US\$15. This international geography of peace-building is much more uneven than recognised within liberal peace-building discourse.

Given its secondary and subordinate role, peace-building is also typically not the crucial factor in determining the relative success or failure of war-endings and peace processes. The relatively successful cases of 1990s peace-building identified by Paris—in Croatia, Namibia and Mozambique—were not so because of any particular features of the peace-building missions in these cases, but because of the withdrawal of neighbouring external powers—Serbia in the case of Croatia, South Africa in the other two cases—from their conflicts.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, the return to war in contexts like Israel-WBG, Sudan or Sri Lanka, let alone Iraq or Afghanistan, have not primarily been functions of specific features of

peace-building in these cases.¹¹⁰ For example, while international peace-building support was undoubtedly a crucial element of the Oslo process, providing resources for the PA and effectively subsidising Israel's ongoing occupation, the return to violence in 2000 was a product of failed negotiations and an Israeli military-dominated political process—not deficiencies in the liberal peace-building project. This is not to deny that pressures for economic and political liberalisation have in many contexts been destabilising and counterproductive, and can be important factors in the failure of war-to-peace transitions. It is to insist, however, that to explain failed war-to-peace transitions solely in terms of shortcomings in post-conflict peace-building, or the liberal peace paradigm, would be reductionist in the extreme.

Conclusions

Within liberal peace-building discourse, peace-building is characterised as an essentially liberal project founded on liberal philosophical principles, which is globally hegemonic and disseminated worldwide by a dispersed multiplicity of governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental actors. Peace-building is thought to offer a fairly consistent, or standardised, model of how to forge sustainable peace (though many critics also note that internal contradictions within liberalism, or local compromises, can lead to deviation from this model). And peace-building is treated both as a discrete sphere of activity, and the dominant element of contemporary war-ending processes. On most of this, critics and advocates of liberal peace-building have, for all the other differences between them, mostly been at one.

If the arguments developed here have any validity, however, then these assumptions are at best only part true. Of course, peace-building texts like 'Agenda for Peace', and practices such as multi-party elections or private sector development, do undeniably have liberal philosophical lineages. Of course, most contemporary 'post-conflict' environments are home to a diverse host of NGOs and IGOs. And there are indeed standardised formulas for post-conflict intervention, conveyed from one crisis zone to the next by a transnational cadre of donors and their consultants. However, as this article has shown, the liberal peace-building narrative is only sustained by the abstraction of peace-building from its broader war-ending contexts, which are not explicable solely in terms of liberalism. Contemporary peace agreements are often deeply illiberal in content, as well as in their aims, objectives and causes—despite often being decisively shaped by international actors. Moreover, once

peace-building interventions are analysed contextually, in relation to the peace negotiations and agreements (or the military victories) that frame them, it becomes apparent that peace-building practices, institutions and formulas are very often deployed for reasons, and in ways, that owe little to liberal reasoning—including on the part of international actors. No single normative paradigm can explain, for instance, why in the very same year that the Khmer Rouge was invited to partake in UN peace-building, some very different geopolitical circumstances dictated that Iraq should be subjected to post-war sanctions and be required to pay reparations, without rehabilitation. Contemporary international peace interventions are not normatively consistent, and are not essentially liberal. The myth of liberal peace-building discourse—that contemporary international peace interventions are inherently liberal—is just that: a myth.

So, if 'liberal peace-building' is a myth, furnishing a partial and misleading framework for the analysis of contemporary peacemaking, what should come in its stead? This is not the place for mapping out a new research agenda, but the above does suggest at least three directions for future work. It suggests first that, just as Marxists insist on 'political economy' rather than 'the market' as the proper object of analysis, so peace research would do well to focus not on some discrete realm of 'peace-building', but instead on war-ending processes in the round—including the negotiation, agreement and implementation of peace settlements, and projects of reconstruction; including cases where these are internationalised, and others where they are not pursued at all; and with an eye to the influence of non-liberal political strategies and ideologies. It suggests also the need for a methodological shift—away from reiterations of the same broad peace-building narrative, to contextualised and comparative studies that attend more fully to the heterogeneity and inconsistency of contemporary war-endings and peace processes. And thirdly, it suggests a need for research on the geopolitics of these war-ending processes—on which very little has been written. Framed around a global-local dualism, liberal peace-building discourse completely overlooks the continued significance of geopolitical, inter-state dynamics in structuring war-endings and peace processes.¹¹¹ Yet geopolitical relations have not disappeared—however much they have been transformed by processes of globalisation. Indeed, within the context of economic crisis in the US and Europe, and the rise of various new regional powers, geopolitical forces and logics are clearly rising in significance. In the view of this author, at least, analysts of contemporary peacemaking would do well to devote much fuller attention to them than they have done hitherto.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Ken Booth, Jonathan Goodhand, David Chandler, Beate Jahn, Kamran Matin, Justin Rosenberg, Anna Stavrianakis, Benno Teschke and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on this article. Suffice to say, remaining errors are entirely my own.

Endnotes

1. Paris, 'Saving Liberal Peace-building', 357, 338–39. See also e.g. Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War*; Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work?*; Paris, *At War's End*.
2. See e.g. the following recent collections: Newman et al., *New Perspectives*; Pugh et al., *Whose Peace?*; Richmond, *Palgrave Advances in Peace-building*.
3. Helman and Ratner, 'Saving Failed States'.
4. See e.g. Boas and Jennings, 'Failed States'; Call, 'The Fallacy'; Hill, 'Beyond the Other?'.
5. E.g. Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations*; Rosenberg, 'Globalization Theory'; Teschke, *Myth of 1648*.
6. See e.g. Selby, 'Political Economy of Peace Processes'.
7. Marx and Engels, *Holy Family*.
8. Thus I include for instance Michael Doyle within this debate: Doyle generally writes of 'multidimensional' rather than 'liberal peace-building' (see esp. Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War*), but nonetheless approaches peace-building through the lens of liberal peace theory (see esp. Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies'), and his arguments are entirely in keeping with the parameters of the liberal peace-building debate identified in the subsequent section.
9. E.g. Paris, 'Peace-building and the Limits', 56.
10. E.g. Richmond, 'Post-Liberal Peace'.
11. E.g. Jabri, 'War, Government, Politics', 41.
12. Paris, *At War's End*, ch. 2; Paris, 'International Peace-building'.
13. Richmond, 'Post-Liberal Peace', 559.
14. Begby and Burgess, 'Human Security', 92, 93.
15. Heathershaw, 'Unpacking the Liberal Peace'.
16. Paris, 'Peace-building and the Limits', 56; Paris, *At War's End*, 19.
17. Mac Ginty and Richmond, 'Myth or Reality?', 492.
18. Richmond, *Transformation of Peace*, 110; Mac Ginty, *No War, No Peace*, 32; Mac Ginty, 'Indigenous Peace-Making', 144–45.
19. Cooper et al., 'End of History', 1997–98.
20. Paris, 'Broadening the Study', 42; Richmond, 'Genealogy of Peace', 22; Richmond, 'Post-Liberal Peace', 567.
21. Duffield, *Global Governance*, 12; Roberts, *Liberal Peace-building*, 3.
22. Boutros-Ghali, 'Agenda for Peace'.
23. Paris, *At War's End*, 60–62; Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War*.
24. Richmond, 'Beyond Liberal Peace?'.
25. Paris, 'Peace-building and the Limits', 81–88; Paris, *At War's End*, ch. 10.
26. Richmond, 'Post-Liberal Peace'.
27. Pugh, 'Political Economy of Peace-building'.
28. E.g. Mac Ginty, 'Indigenous Peace-Making'; Richmond, 'Post-Liberal Peace'; Richmond and Mitchell, *Hybrid Forms of Peace*.
29. Richmond, *Transformation of Peace*, 214.
30. Chandler, *Bosnia*.
31. Cooper et al., 'End of History', 1999.
32. Jahn, 'Tragedy, Part 1', 92.
33. Boutros-Ghali, 'Agenda for Peace', paras. 21, 20; Galtung, 'Three Approaches to Peace'.
34. Paris, 'International Peace-building', 642.
35. Richmond, *Transformation of Peace*, 113, 35–42.
36. Paris, 'Broadening the Study', 35–38.
37. Duffield, *Development, Security*, 4; Jabri, 'War, Government, Politics'; Roberts, *Liberal Peace-building*.
38. Darby, 'Rolling Back', 701.
39. Taylor, 'Liberal Peace, Liberal Imperialism', 156.
40. Ratner, 'Cambodia Settlement', 12–13, 21–22.
41. Paris, *At War's End*, 81.
42. Richmond and Franks, 'Liberal Hubris?', 32.
43. Springer, 'Neoliberalisation of Security'; Springer, *Cambodia's Neoliberal Order*.
44. Peou, 'Re-Examining Liberal Peace-building', 322.
45. A prime example of the latter being Peou, *Conflict Neutralization*, which discusses UNTAC's geopolitical contexts at length, but without this inspiring any reflection on whether UNTAC's central purpose was democratisation—or perhaps something else. One notable exception to the above is Roberts, *Political Transition*, which—however contradictorily—interprets UNTAC as simultaneously reflecting the 'Liberal Project' (p. xiii) and as being a tool of superpower politics (p. 37).

46. Roberts, *Political Transition* espouses the former view; Paris, *At War's End* tends towards the latter.
47. Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, 460.
48. Mysliwicz, *Punishing the Poor*, 73.
49. Becker, *When the War Was Over*, 440. In fact, Washington did support Pol Pot: see Kiernan, 'Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge', 200–01.
50. Kiernan, 'Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge', 209.
51. World Bank, *Cambodia*, quoted in Kiernan, 'Introduction', 18; Mysliwicz, *Punishing the Poor*, 22.
52. Helman and Ratner, 'Saving Failed States', 14. See Kiernan, 'Introduction', 18.
53. Jackson, *Quasi-States*.
54. Hampson, *Nurturing Peace*, 177; Leifer, 'Power-Sharing', 150; Roberts, *Political Transition*, 15–22.
55. Kiernan, 'Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge', 230.
56. *Paris Agreement*, preamble; Kiernan, 'Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge', 230–31.
57. *Paris Agreement*, article 6; annex 1, articles 1–6.
58. Leifer, 'Power-Sharing', 144–45.
59. Steven Erlanger, 'Cambodian Says He Fears Risk of a Greater War'. *New York Times*, 22 July 1990.
60. Solarz, 'Cambodia'; Pilger, *Heroes*, 450; Hampson, *Nurturing Peace*, 184; Leifer, 'Power-Sharing', 148–49.
61. *Paris Agreement*, article 6.
62. Ratner, 'Cambodia Settlement', 5, 19.
63. Heder, 'Cambodia's Democratic Transition', 429.
64. Ashley, 'Undoing of UNTAC's Elections', 61.
65. Heder, 'Resumption of Armed Struggle'; Kiernan, 'Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge', 228–29; Heder, 'Cambodia's Democratic Transition', 427.
66. Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*, 350 (my italics).
67. Roberts, *Political Transition*, 37.
68. Etcheson, Craig, 2005. *After the Killing Fields*, 41.
69. Curtis, *Transition to What?*, 17; Kiernan, 'Introduction', 21.
70. Kiernan, 'Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge', 237; Roberts, *Political Transition*, 88–103.
71. Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields*, 41.
72. Stedman, 'Spoiler Problems', 35.
73. *Ibid.*, 35.
74. Roberts, *Political Transition*, 212; Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields*, 39.
75. Hughes, *Dependent Communities*, 158.
76. Paris maintains just such a distinction, observing in his recent article that peace-building missions founded on negotiated settlements face few legitimacy problems because they are 'deployed at the request of local parties' ('Saving Liberal Peace-building', 348).
77. Roberts, *Political Transition*, 25; Shawcross, *Sideshow*.
78. Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 132, 160–62, 166, 154.
79. Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*.
80. Ryan Lizza, 'Where Angels Fear to Tread'. *The New Republic*, 24 July 2000.
81. Danforth, *Report to the President*.
82. Nathan, *No Ownership*.
83. *Dayton Agreement*, annex 5, article 4.
84. Usher, 'Palestine', 74.
85. *Naivasha Agreement*, chapter 1, article 1.5.1; chapter 2, articles 1.6.1, 1.8.3.
86. *Lomé Agreement*, articles 5, 9, 7.
87. Quoted in Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*, 251.
88. For 'liberal peace-building' accounts of international involvement in Sierra Leone, see e.g. Paris, *At War's End*, 222–25; Taylor, 'Earth Calling Liberals'.
89. *Naivasha Agreement*, chapters 2 and 3.
90. Usher, 'Politics of Internal Security', 28.
91. Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 11–12.
92. *Oslo Agreement*, article 8; Usher, 'Politics of Internal Security', 34; Danny Rubinstein, 'Protection Racket, PA-Style'. *Ha'aretz*, 3 November 1999.
93. Ron Bergman, 'Israel Deposited NIS1.5b in Arafat's Personal Account'. *Ha'aretz*, 8 October 1999.
94. Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*, ch. 7; Franks, 'Beware of Liberal Peacebuilders', 271.
95. This is widely recognised in the large US literature on power-sharing: see e.g. Hartzell and Hoddie, *Crafting Peace*.
96. Young, 'Sudan IGAD Peace Process', 111.
97. Johnson, *Root Causes*, 177–78.
98. Chandler, *Bosnia*.
99. Nathan, *No Ownership*, 15.
100. Shafir and Peled, *New Israel*.
101. Nathan, *No Ownership*, 6.
102. Heder and Ledgerwood, 'Politics of Violence', 14.
103. Young, 'Sudan IGAD Peace Process', 31.
104. Sayigh, 'Inducing a Failed State', 13–15.
105. Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society*.
106. E.g. Wood, 'Separation'; Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*.
107. Arnoev, *Iraq Under Siege*.
108. On the latter point see Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War*, 220.
109. Paris, *At War's End*; Jahn, 'Tragedy, Part 2', 217–18.
110. On Sri Lanka see e.g. Lewis, 'Failure of a Liberal Peace'.
111. For further discussion of the elision of inter-state dynamics (and overstatement of the evenness of 'the global') within contemporary critical IR theory, see Selby, 'Engaging Foucault'.

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