Peace Processes: A Genealogy and Critique

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Peace processes are amongst the most widespread, most high profile and arguably most important phenomena in contemporary world politics. If we are to believe the BBC or the International Crisis Group, or any of the countless other mainstream media, advocacy and conflict resolution organisations, there are currently ongoing or stalled peace processes in places as disparate as Spain and Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland and Nepal, Columbia, Israel and Sudan – and many other places besides. Every month, some peace process or other is being launched or re-launched, or is collapsing or re-collapsing. Take developments during 2007 alone. In January, a bombing at Madrid airport brought to a halt the nine-month old peace process between the Spanish government and the Basque separatist group Eta. In March, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam mounted an aerial assault on a government military base next to Sri Lanka's main international airport – just part of the violence that has escalated throughout 2007, despite both the government and the LTTE having formally committed themselves to a peace agreement and ceasefire. In May, the resumption of power-sharing in Northern Ireland saw Ian Paisley becoming First Minister of the Stormont assembly, and Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein chief negotiator and a former commander of Derry IRA, becoming – rather incredibly – his deputy. In June, another power-sharing arrangement, this one between Fatah and Hamas, collapsed into violence, with Hamas taking control of the Gaza Strip, and Israel and the US promising renewed support for the Palestinian President and his new emergency government, as well as for the peace process. In August, 500,000 people marched for peace in the Punjab as India and Pakistan celebrated 60 years of independence – but the peace process between the two nuclear powers showed no sign of movement whatsoever. In September, the peace process in Nepal suffered its first major setback as former Maoist rebels withdrew from the interim government established after the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. And in October and November, the US and international 'Quartet' (US, EU, UN and Russia) made yet another attempt to re-launch the long-stalled Arab-Israeli peace process.

If we turn to the discipline of IR, however, what is so striking is how little sustained attention peace processes have received. There are of course lots of empirical studies of individual peace processes, and there does of course exist a large conflict resolution literature which has lots to say on negotiation, third party mediation, reconciliation, and so on. But scour recent literature in international theory – realist, liberal institutionalist, English school, Marxist, post-structuralist, constructivist or whatever – and one finds barely a mention of peace processes. Equally, the overwhelming majority of studies of individual peace processes make no attempt to engage with, let alone contribute to, core IR theoretical debates. The relationship between peace processes and the structure of the international or global system remains largely unexplored.

Even more fundamentally than this, however, few have cared to ask what 'peace processes' in fact are. Within the conflict resolution literature, this question – what are peace processes? – is rarely posed, perhaps because conflict resolution specialists hold such a strongly shared tacit understanding of them that they don't even need to ask. Yet peace processes are a puzzle. What, for instance, is it that 'peace processes' share in common? Where does this concept of 'peace process' come from? Is the phrase 'peace process' just nice-sounding rhetoric, or does it denote something more substantial? If the latter, then are peace processes an age old phenomenon or something quite recent? And, finally, what might such reflection be able to tell us about whether peace processes are – to put it at its simplest – a good or bad thing, and about why they so often fail? These are the questions that this paper seeks to address.

In pursuing these questions, I adopt – for the purposes of this paper – a primarily Foucauldian vocabulary. My theoretical leanings are Marxian above all, and elsewhere I have analysed 'the political economy of peace processes' in these terms, but here Foucault serves me better. From Foucault I take both of the titular terms 'genealogy' and 'critique'. Foucault thought of 'genealogies' as 'histories of the present' – as histories whose purpose is to denaturalise the present; to undercut liberal progressivist narratives which portray the present as the rational culmination of human Enlightenment; and instead to examine contemporary socio-political discourses and practices, especially those associated with liberalism, as technologies or apparatuses of power. As for 'critique', Foucault once defined it as a matter of making 'facile gestures difficult'. It is in these terms that I want to analyse peace processes. Peace processes are, I contend, a 'facile gesture'.

I want to make nine propositions about what peace processes are, where they have come from, and what in my view is wrong with them.

First, peace process discourse is new. The term entered international political and diplomatic discourse only in the mid- to late 1970s, when it was coined by US policymakers as shorthand for US-led attempts to reduce tensions between Israel, Egypt and Syria in the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur war. The widespread use of the term has, however, only really taken off since the end of the Cold War. If we take *The Times*' use of the phrase as an example, it was entirely absent from the paper's journalistic vocabulary until 1974. By 1978, however, the term appeared in 50 articles, and by 1990 562 articles. Since 1990, it has appeared with an average 843 *Times* articles per year. Other mainstream news media paint the same picture. Since the mid-1970s, in sum, the term 'peace process' has emerged out of nowhere to become a commonplace of global political discourse. In Foucauldian terms, we may say that 'peace process' has only recently become a 'discursive object', and has only recently become naturalised as a way – as the way – of doing peace.

Second, the rise of peace process discourse is a product of the fact that peace processes are a novel real-world political phenomenon. Peace processes are a new form of peacemaking, distinct from traditional peacemaking practice in at least two ways. They are, first, a form of peace without victory. Classically, wars ended with decisive military victory on one side and defeat on the other, and the imposition of peace terms by the victorious power(s). In peace processes, by contrast, parties come together on a formally (but not necessarily empirically) equal footing, without any of them having surrendered, and within contexts where violence between the negotiating

parties may well be ongoing. In peace processes, the relationships between victory, defeat, violence and peace is, in sum, confused and contested. That's one defining feature of peace processes. But a second and more important one is that peace processes are 'processes' of peacemaking, in which matters of process, duration, sequencing and timing are viewed as key to the making of peace. Peace processes typically unfold through a series of distinct stages, with a progressive sequence of interim agreements, which are usually substantively de-linked from one another. To give but one example, the Israeli-Palestinian process of the 1990s proceeded through the Madrid multilateral conference (October 1991), the framework Oslo accords (September 1993), the Cairo agreement on Israeli redeployment from Gaza and Jericho (May 1994), the Oslo II agreement redeploying Israeli forces from Palestinian population centres in the West Bank (September 1995), and a series of further agreements in 1997, 1998 and 1999, with each step remaining independent of the next. Classically armistices were followed very shortly afterwards by final peace agreements. Now peace-making takes much longer. Furthermore, classically the core concern of peace-making projects was to ensure the correct distribution or disposition of things – a fair allocation of territories, a sensible balancing of military capabilities, and a reasonable division of spoils. In peace processes, by contrast, this traditional concern with placing has been complemented, perhaps even superseded, by a concern with the timing of moves towards peace. It is no coincidence that the most influential recent theory of peacemaking – William Zartman's 'ripeness' theory – is essentially concerned with whether the time is ripe for peacemaking, that is, with the timing of moves towards peace. To adapt Mary Kaldor's phrase, we may say that for both of these reasons peace processes are a form of 'new peace'.

Third, for proponents of peace processes, a phased process of peace-making is thought to be necessary on the premise that time is the greater healer, in several different regards. Time creates opportunity for internal social and economic reconstruction – what is usually called 'peace-building' – which will, it is hoped, provide a basis for increased economic growth, improved systems of governance, and in turn the consolidation of initially tentative peace-making ventures. Time allows for a liberal functionalist 'spill-over effect' to come into play – the assumption being that inter-state regional cooperation on relatively insignificant functional issues can create webs of mutual interest which might eventually 'spill over' into the 'high political' arena, facilitating the agreement of a final peace settlement. Time is thought to increase the likelihood of political compromise – by minimising the need for immediate concessions and thereby reducing the danger of alienating large sections of parties' support bases, whilst at the same time dragging reluctant leaders and parties into processes to which their futures become bound. And time creates opportunities for dialogue and trust-building between parties to a conflict. It is for these reasons that a step-by-step, processual approach to peace-making is thought to be necessary.

Fourth, and by way of clarification, peace processes share close family resemblances with but are nonetheless distinct from another form of 'new peace' – 'peace-building'. Peace-building, as Kofi Annan defined it, is a project which aims 'to create the conditions necessary for a sustainable peace in war-worn societies', and which involves extensive international intervention in conflict or post-conflict environments with the aim of building a sustainable basis for lasting peace. Now, peace processes share with peace-building the belief that peace has to be actively constructed – and that this requires time and commitment. Both are illustrative of the post-Cold War

'merging of security and development', as Duffield calls it – not just in the narrow sense, as often discussed, whereby poverty and 'under-development' are viewed as security problems, but in the more fundamental sense that peace is now conceived as something that has itself to progressively unfold. There are also, however, a number of differences between peace processes and peace-building. Whereas peace-building is a project led by international organisations and legions of foreign consultants, in peace processes it is local elites who are (or who are presented as being, at least) the primary agents of peace. Whereas the peace-building project is essentially about transplanting generalised templates for social and economic reconstruction, peace processes always attend to local specificities, focus at their core on political questions, and usually involve bewildering and unique transitional arrangements (a Palestinian Authority, for instance, which under the Oslo peace process was responsible for administering over 200 non-contiguous pockets of West Bank territory). Whereas peace-building is an essentially liberal exercise, an attempt to transplant liberal or neo-liberal structures into post-conflict societies, peace processes are typically also informed by a sharply realist power politics (I will clarify the reasons for this shortly). Finally, whereas peace-building is usually thought of as a 'post-conflict' activity, peace processes attempt to span the whole temporal divide between protracted conflict and sustainable peace. Given these differences, I would define peace-building as but one (key) element of that broader phenomenon called a peace process.

We can now move into more explanatory and critical territory. The rise of peace processes is rooted, I think, in three set of issues – in historical sociological transformations (proposition five), in real-politik (proposition six), and in global social contradictions (proposition seven).

So fifth, peace processes are not just a clever invention, borne out of some dawning realisation that peace is best achieved through a process (to think this would be to subscribe to what Foucault called a 'Whig' interpretation of history). To the contrary, the emergence of peace processes should be understood in historical sociological terms, as a product of diverse socio-political transformations within our global liberal capitalist world order. At least five such structural transformations lie behind the rise of peace processes, I believe. As a result of what Foucault called the 'governmentalisation' of politics, peace-making has become about much more than the regulation of political relations; instead peace-makers have had to enter into more and more spheres of social and economic life, complicating the challenge of peace-making immeasurably. As a corollary, the expansion of bureaucratic and legal apparatuses has demanded both that peace-makers produce lengthy paper trails, and that they pursue a more procedural approach to conflict resolution (Castlereagh took just fourteen staff with him to the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15; Lloyd George by contrast took nearly 400 to the Paris negotiations of 1919; and today's peace processes require the mobilisation of entire governmental apparatuses). Third, the consolidation and deepening of liberal capitalist rationality – the intellectual hegemony of social structures and modes of thought which understand even human violence in economic terms – has lent weight to the mostly spurious belief that economic development, slowly nurtured through regional integration and peace-building, is the path to sustainable peace. The rise of a global peace industry – of an ensemble of international institutions, donors, think tanks, NGOs and consultants all committed to the view that peace has to be nurtured slowly – has created a powerful web of interests in support of this very idea (just as it also has in the case of the

development industry). And finally, the growing psychologisation of social relations in the global North – the growth of forms of thought and practice which emphasise the importance of trust, empathy, self-esteem, understanding, etc in inter-personal as well as high political relations – provides a powerful backdrop to the idea that peace-making is about building trust. The novel political institution that is peace processes bears the marks of all of these broad social transformations.

Sixth, the rise of peace processes is not simply a function of structural transformations, but also of the strategies and interests of particular political actors, especially states. A step-by-step approach to peace-making meshes well with some interests and strategies much more than it does with others. For a start, status quo actors tend to favour protracted peace-making processes, whereas revisionist ones generally prefer quick settlements (or else a continuation of violence until they win). In 2006 Indian Prime Minister Monmahon Singh observed, for instance, that 'territorial disputes are never easy to resolve overnight. They take time. But there is a lot we can do together, focusing on the interests of the people … I really believe if this process is allowed to go forward, it will create a climate conducive to a final settlement' – a sentiment with which Pakistan, the revisionist actor on Kashmir, strongly disagrees. Equally, peace processes often gain powerful support from local political elites who have become politically and economically dependent upon the continuation of the process itself. Palestinian President Abu Mazen, for example, is now so dependent upon the structures created by the Oslo peace process that his main political demand is for the re-launching of that process; he appears much more concerned about this than about the ultimate question of what a final peace agreement might look like. If we return to the first peace process, between Israel and Egypt, this was choreographed by the US under Nixon and Kissinger as part of their détente strategy for slowly winning the Cold War battle for influence in the Middle East. Peace processes, then, were not borne from liberal ideals, but rather from a strategy developed by Henry Kissinger, war criminal and doyen of realist diplomacy. Peace processes, if these examples are any indication, are more a stalling mechanism for the powerful than a procedure for building trust. They are for the most part conservative or reformist political institutions whose central purpose is to forestall radical or revolutionary political change. Or to put this another way, peace processes are inter-elite projects for reconsolidating hegemony and/or legitimacy (whether internal or international).

Seventh, and continuing on the theme of political strategy, peace processes are a strategic response to the contradictions of contemporary global order, an unstable political compromise between divergent national and global imperatives. Prior to the emergence of mass national (democratic or authoritarian) politics, the machinations of political leaders and elites were not subject to significant public interrogation or institutional constraint. Today, by contrast, mass politics and deeply-embedded nationalist narratives are such that leaders cannot easily make concessions, except at great political and personal risk to themselves (indicatively, Sadat, participant in the first peace process, was assassinated for his troubles). And yet alongside these entrenched nationalisms, our contemporary global order is marked by high degree of global integration, and by sharp economic and political dependencies upon the liberal and supposedly peace-loving global North. The problem, for political and economic elites in many conflict zones, is how to manage these divergent national and international demands. The answer, for many, is a peace process. Peace processes

allow their participants to speak warm words of peace to the cameras, and to reap great economic and political benefits in return, without necessarily having to make any substantive sacrifices – they present plentiful opportunities for participants to 'have their cake and eat it too'! For instance, by participating in the Oslo peace process during the early 1990s, Israel managed to end its relative economic and political isolation and thereby to transform itself into a dynamic high-tech globalised economy – and to do so without making any significant concessions to the Palestinians. The two Israeli leaders who managed this trick spoke in very different voices, with one of them, Yitzhak Rabin, always speaking of security, and speaking to the deeply ingrained militarism of Israeli political; discourse; and the other, Shimon Peres, speaking in a dovish language of peace and reconciliation, and consequently finding himself distrusted and disliked by the Israeli electorate but loved on the world stage. Peace processes, in sum, are Janus-faced phenomena: they look both inwards at domestic audiences, and simultaneously outwards at a highly integrated and demanding global capitalist order. Peace processes, one might say, are a contemporary political strategy for coping with the twin demands of mass politics and global capital.

Eighth, one upshot of this is that peace processes rest upon and involve a remarkable degree of deception and fabrication. India and Pakistan maintained the pretence of a peace process for several years during the early and mid-2000s, despite achieving little apart from agreement on agendas. In present-day Sri Lanka, both the government and the LTTE maintain their stated commitment to a ceasefire, despite the fact that their peace process has patently collapsed into war. In Angola, after the signing of the 2002 peace accord, violent political clashes were re-classified as criminal actions by an international community unwilling to undermine the peace. Under the Oslo process, slightly differently, Israel made so few concessions to the Palestinian demand for statehood that simulations of statehood had to be created: Israel, for instance, would allow the Palestinian Authority to have its own 'border guards' to check Palestinian passports, despite the fact that these guards had no authority and would merely hand the passports on to Israeli officers who were hidden from view. Peace processes are a complicated strategy for dissimulating peace - they are a form of virtual peace.

Lastly, and in light of the above, we can come to critique. Peace processes do not so much fail because of political weakness and policy mistakes – as is usually assumed by political actors and conflict resolution experts alike – as because failure is built into their very structure. Or to put this another way: if the aim of peace processes is to delay having to make significant compromises, to restructure and reconsolidate domestic hegemony, or to garner international legitimacy – in these terms peace processes usually succeed, at least temporally. The institution of peace processes is informed by dubious economic and psychological models of human nature, of human social relations, and of the reasons for political violence. The idea that peace requires time is undermined by the fact that time is not neutral, and that it serves status quo interests above all – by the fact that peace processes are quite conservative political institutions. And the simulations of peace on which peace processes are usually built do not provide much basis for sustainable, lasting peace. Given all this, is it little wonder that peace processes so often fail?