



13th Käte Hamburger Dialogue:

Endless Peacebuilding? The Missions in Afghanistan and Mali

Executive Summary

On 29 April 2019, the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/ Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/ GCR21) held its 13th Käte Hamburger Dialogue in Berlin, on 'Endless Peacebuilding: The Missions in Afghanistan and Mali', organized in collaboration with the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).



With the aim of reflecting on ongoing peace operations in Afghanistan and Mali, which are both of high interest for European and German policy, the Dialogue began with the inaugural remarks by Tobias Debiel, Co-Director of the Centre (KHK/ GCR21) and Director of Institute for Development and Peace (INEF). In his introduction, he set the context for the selection of the two conflicts for the evening's Dialogue- Afghanistan and Mali. Both are missions at crossroads, they are of high interest to international peace-builders and policy makers, and at the same time, there is a gap between these international efforts and the needs of the locals. The overarching question of the evening was set: **is this endless peacebuilding also a goalless peacebuilding**, or, if not, what are we working towards?

Clemens Hach, Head of Division for Crisis Prevention, Stability and Peacebuilding at Federal Foreign Office of Germany, delivered the Keynote address, which began with questioning the premise of "peacebuilding" in the title. From the perspective of the state, he suggested, the mandate received in these missions were often limited to peacekeeping, being either **military or political missions**. He reminded the audience of the broadness of the scope of peacebuilding, and the narrower, much more institutionally political process of peacekeeping on the ground. Hach then went on to posit the two possible interpretations of "local realities". While on the one hand it refers to the interactions of multiple local actors, like civilians, civil society organizations and so on, on the other hand, from a state's perspective while planning a peacebuilding or peacekeeping intervention, the "local" is primarily the local government or authorities. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) missions, for example, are products of mandates with local governments. Thus, technically, an international political peacekeeping mission, whether by the United Nations, the NATO states or any other country, works with the consent of the "local" authority, and thus is attuned with "local realities". The obvious limitation, Hach stated, with this approach to the "local" is that it only negotiates with people or groups in power.



However, using the example of the mission in Mali as an example, Hach observed that primary goal of the military mission as an international intervention was not to build peace, but to only **freeze the conflict**, in order for legitimate political processes to take place. In Mali, as in other conflicts, Germany's mission has been military in nature- working with local actors to see how interventions can strengthen the legitimacy of local authorities. These interventions are limited in their own scope, as well as the scope of the "local" they interact with, but they create a space for peace keeping and perhaps a long-term peace building, through civilian interactions.



Federal Office of Germany was the Iraq conflict in 2014-15. The intervention, under UN-lead, helped legitimize the central government in most of the state, small failures notwithstanding. A large part in this success was also played by the authorities in Iraq, who shared the international interventions' interest in peacebuilding, as well as agreed with the international analysis of the conflict itself, and therefore the process required for peace. Using this as an example, Hach suggested that the fundamental limitation to peacebuilding as international actors often lies in the paradox that the international actors sometimes want peace more than local actors do. Local power dynamics in conflicts sometimes benefit certain local actors enough for them to incentivize a slower resolution of the conflict than what is desired internationally. This could have played an important role in international failure to build peace in Afghanistan. A large number of international NGOs and organizations chose to work independently, in turn delegitimizing the local governments. Military interventions in the country were a part of the problem, and not the solution. It produced what is called a **"Dutch Disease" in Afghanistan**- it became an economy that is solely dependent on foreign aid, such that local actors began profiting from the international intervention and didn't want it to stop. With this, Hach ended his keynote, leaving the audience and the panel with the probing questions – when are we part of the solution and when are we part of the problem? And what extent of intervention can a conflict afford?

The panel discussion that followed was moderated by Julia Leininger, Head of Research Programme 'Transformation of political (dis-)order', DIE. Leininger observed at the very outset that there are **many layers of accountability** that a peacebuilding process weaves itself though- it involves the dynamics between international organizations, domestic governments, donors, international governments and civilians and their exchanges at different levels. From each perspective, thus, "local realities" shift, but the ultimate success of a peacebuilding process cannot exclude the local process.



The panel's comments were initiated by Isaline Bergamaschi, Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), who observed the linkages between the endless war on terror, endless intervention and endless peacebuilding. She observed that the current conflict in Mali had to be understood in the context of past conflicts and via the continuum of power relations between Mali and its development aid donors over the decades. Furthermore, both **the rise and fall of Mali from the position of being a "donor darling"** had a post-colonial context, and the role of France in interventions in Mali should be read through that lens. Finally, Bergamaschi raised the point of **"peace brokers"**- locals who work with the peace interventions and international organizations like the United Nations. The brokers are the middle-men and women between the local civilians and the world outside. With a move towards more and more nationalization of peace missions by the UN, the brokers try to maintain a balance between politicization of their work as Malians and neutrality as UN staff, and are often caught in the middle.



Florian Kühn, Visiting Professor at Department of Social Sciences, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, followed Bergamaschi, starting with a question on the methodology- when we compare conflicts, what aspects are we looking at? We compare conflicts instinctively, and upon analysis, we find that our comparisons are always political, he suggested. He observed that conflicts are complicated and multi-layered and as international actors, we know relatively little about how they develop on the ground. When missions talk about freezing the conflict, they really mean the freezing of violence. Depending on the level and mode of intervention, the conflict appears different, but all actors are inevitably enmeshed in the local politics and try to affect it. The case of **Afghanistan as a rentier state** is a particular example. Intervening actors either have to fight the local and existing international structures profiting from this economy, or have to get co-opted into it themselves. Peace interventions thus inevitably head towards being a problem, but to what extent in case of each conflict, we find out only later.

The third panellist, Katja Mielke, Senior Researcher at BICC, also reinforced the need to first, politically and historically contextualize current conflicts, and second, as international actors, pay attention to the research produced by local researchers. **Local researchers** have observed how Afghanistan has been a rentier state long before the current conflict, but the analysis of the conflict by the international actors has mostly ignored this. The "local realities" of a conflict that we choose to focus on are also determined by which actors we choose to partner with. For example, when the Bonn Conference (or the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of



Permanent Government Institutions) was held in 2001, four factions or delegations of Afghan representatives were at the table, but a fifth delegation, with members of the civil society, were not allowed a voice and they had to hold a parallel conference. This was reflected in the kind of intervention the United States of America (USA), United Nations and others planned, Mielke suggested. The compromises that were made along the way could have made peacebuilding in Afghanistan unsustainable and consequently endless.



Tying up the arguments of the panel, Julia Leininger opened the floor to comments and questions by the audience, with an observation on the large amount of **monitoring and evaluation reports** on conflicts, and a need to ponder on the uses we put the evaluations to. Lively audience participation followed. A commentator remarked that peacebuilding often appears like a failure from a top-down view, but if we analyse the post-conflict process through a bottoms-up lens, there are crucial successes, for example, with many women finding voice in local government processes in Afghanistan. An audience member observed the need to look deeper into the **relationship between development and peace**, while another raised questions regarding the need for independent evaluations of conflicts. The vote of thanks was delivered by Conrad Schetter, Director for Research at BICC, who concluded the Dialogue with a call for a re-positioning our focus as peacebuilders- from looking for exit strategies to keeping the country of conflict and its interests at the centre. With that, the 13th Käte Hamburger Dialogue was successfully concluded.

Written by Mouli Banerjee