

Elites vs. Institutions in Peacemaking

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The long-term success of any peace process depends crucially not only on devising an institutional design in which the conflicting interests of all parties can be negotiated and accommodated without recourse to violence but also on local elites and their willingness and ability to mobilise their constituencies in support of these institutions.

Introduction

In the contemporary world, the role of elites is crucially important in every political system and every phase of state development. The aim of this essay is to discuss the statement quoted above, i.e. introduce both inseparable parts of successful peace process. When doing so, it will argue that the approach of the elite is also the deciding factor in settling ethnic conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction. Although the relationship between institutional design and local elites attitude towards reconciliation is rather complex, as the former – if ‘suitable’ – supports the latter, and the latter – if ‘appropriate’ – may facilitate, preserve, and fulfil the ‘spirit’ of every institutional design, it is the ‘appropriate’ long-term elite behaviour which is far less common, (if mutual then only hard to neglect), and, therefore, harder to achieve than ‘suitable’ conflict settlement.

To demonstrate the stance that “key to the long-term stability of peace settlements is the ability of political leaders to change the social organisation and execution of power from force/violence-centred structures to those of consensual politics” (Wolff, 2002b: 87), this paper will be based on two cases of recent ethnic conflicts – peace processes in Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina (culminating in the Good Friday Agreement and Dayton Accords, respectively). As in both of the examples, despite the different role of the particular elite, the dominant theoretical background of conflict resolution is a variation of power sharing approach, we shall limit ourselves to this (rather broad) explanatory field.

To tackle the introduced statement, this paper will begin by examining necessary general qualities of a ‘suitable’ institutional design, its impact on the behaviour of the elite; and then focus on ‘appropriate’ conduct of elite, so-called ‘political skills’ which may be applied when solving ethnic tension and, finally, the role of external actors as on of the essential ‘providers’ of elite motivation to agreement.

‘Suitable’ institutional design

To entitle even a ‘suitable’ peace agreement with the name successful[1], not only has it to create conditions for expression of good will of participating groups and, above all, their elites, but it also needs to satisfy several criteria aiming both at abstract and concrete goals. Without fulfilling these – to use the example of Dayton again – it only creates a “reality gap” between the Western model of what Bosnia ought to be (model characterized by respect for legal norms, tolerance and understanding among different ethnic groups) and what it has become – “land characterized by a struggle for survival rooted in ethnic solidarity, disillusionment with ethnic coexistence, and the predominance of narrow ethnic self-interest over the commonweal” (Burg and Shoup, 1999: 415).

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First of all, any peace treaty including a particular form of institutional design has to end a large-scale inter-communal violence, as it was the case in both examined cases, and create institutions that prevent the same failures that led to the conflict (Wolf, 2006: 155-156). It aims not at putting an end to grievances based on exclusive ethnic identity[2], but at designing an environment enabling stable progress – if its participant attitudes allow. While the practical results of each solution are unique, in general terms each community in every conflict must identify with whatever new political institutions are devised, as the primary goal is to make moderation rewarding. The complementary objective is penalization of extremism – both aiming at establishing citizen organizations and associations that cut across cleavage lines and build social capital essential for cross-cultural and cross-factional links reducing tension (McGarry and O’Leary, 1996: 392; Paris, 1997: 82-83).

Therefore, the treaty should create a delicate balance between not excluding relevant interests from the seats of influence and “critical decision-making processes”, and leaving out extremists – individuals who clearly and repeatedly advocate violent action against other individuals or groups in the society – from participating in active politics (Hartzell et al., 2001: 186). The importance of this balance for the prospect of long-term success of any peace process can be seen at the case of Northern Ireland. Although the Good Friday Agreement did not establish “minimal, but broad consensus among political leaders and the population at large about the desirability of a common future” in the first years, in contrast to failure of Sunningdale Process and only “limited” success of Anglo-Irish Agreement, it did not exclude relevant subjects (the political parties in Northern Ireland) from the formal negotiation (Wolff, 2002a).

Further, the role of elite seems to be strengthened through the suggested condition of delaying elections until passions have cooled and former belligerents have been disarmed. As Wolff and Paris agree, political liberalization and full-scale-democratization may have to take second place behind institution building for some time, as implementation of the proposed solution can be performed only with the support of the society in question and not in an unstable fractional environment threatened by radical demands solely for particular group interests (Wolf, 2006: 173-175; Paris, 1997: 82-83). Similar restriction aiming at suppression of radicals supporting the resumption of the conflict and, thereby, at stability in the initial phase of application of any institutional design, includes installation of mechanisms limiting the promulgation of inflammatory propaganda, including ethnic “hate media” (Paris, 1997: 83)[3].

To sum it up, any peace process depends on groups having learned to transact with one another and perhaps having even developed new rules of conflict management on the basis of their interactions at the political centre (Hartzell and Hoddie, 2003: 320). Furthermore, it relies upon following provisions for each community – security (constitutional, legal, and policing arrangements for protection), recognition (respect for national identity, culture and allegiances), autonomy enabling communities’ self-government and protection in education, civil association and languages, and equality in civil, individual, and collective rights (McGarry and O’Leary, 1996: 392).

The more the agreements come close to these criteria, the better the structure of peace process will function. As Schneckenner argues, the functioning of the institutional design “will surely have an effect on elites’ behaviour and attitudes” (2002: 226) and strengthen the very initial elite’s investment of effort aiming at carrying out the system from theoretical solution into praxis.

However, as Bosnian case suggests the institutionalised arrangements (of power-sharing nature) itself are insufficient to promote cooperation and reconciliation among former enemies. This seems to be especially due to the ‘early’ taking place of elections violating condition stated above and countering, thereby, other circumstances. Although the political liberalisation was intended as “the first step toward knitting back together the physically and ethnically torn nation” (Paris, 1997: 72-73) and meant to settling down to the affairs of state and governing the country, it resulted instead into giving the nationalists a further mandate to continue their policies of ethnic conflict albeit now by political means (Oliver, 2005: 161).

Despite the crucial importance of institutional design, the Bosnian example points to the fact that it is the role of elite and their willingness and ability to mobilize their groups in favour of common system.

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'Appropriate' conduct of the elite

Having outlined the issue of institutional design, which, as written above, also affects the elite's attitude toward peace process, it is essential to say that the role of the conflict group leaders is critical not only in regulating ethnic conflicts, but also in implementing the agreement. The latter role, enabling that the state once again begins to mediate effectively between distrustful ethnic groups, can be more difficult and complex than the negotiations (Lake and Rothchild, 1996: 75). In ideal case, the elite should conform to the 'spirit' of the agreed treaty, demonstrate respect to their counterparts,

convince their followers, contain radical opponents and paramilitary groups, build formal and informal coalitions with moderate forces of the other side, stick to the agreed status quo, assure full participation of all relevant groups and, if possible, revive positive traditions of mutual understanding from the past (Schneckener, 2002: 224).

However, in the reality, even less is a reason for a celebration. E.g. in Bosnia after Dayton Accords, the future of the treaty depended upon the meetings of three-member Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina^[4] in Sarajevo. According to Oliver's statement from the year 2005, "no Bosnian Serb leader had set foot in Sarajevo proper since the start of the war", because (especially in the crucial period after the war) fearing for his life (2005: 161). Nevertheless this rather poetic paraphrase, the actual elite's support of the new institutions is usually manifested through respecting the status quo introduced by the agreement and not aiming at hegemonic position. Such an appreciation of the spirit of the agreement does not exclude "war through negotiations" based on tough bargaining within the system of the basic commitment, though (Dixon, 2002: 731).

Bearing in mind the ideal elite's conduct, Dixon identifies nine "political skills" of rather 'non-ideal' character used by the northern Irish elite to be able to act in accordance with their obligations and, at the same time, not to lose face in front of the hard-liners in party and electorate^[5] (Dixon, 2002: 733). As including a certain level of deception, such an approach to ensuring 'common good' ('dirty hands') provokes threefold criticism. While some argue that lies can be counterproductive (as may cause further lies to be necessary and cynicism, disrespect and distrust of politicians), 'realists' defend the 'political skills' on the grounds that 'the ends justify the means', and, finally, "democratic realists" dispute that the 'credibility' gap between political spin at the front of the political stage and the back stage political 'realities' should and could be reduced and democratic debate and accountability enhanced (Dixon, 2002: 737-740). The most important critique of such a practice of conflict settlement, however, points to the fact that little attempt has been made to persuade rather than manipulate important sections of the population to support the peace process. In other word, the underlying cause of the conflict – mutual animosity – has not been addressed. Further, as Dixon states, the political capital of key pro-Agreement politicians and parties has been eroded as the choreography of the process and the use of political skills have been publicly exposed (2002: 739).

Nonetheless, recent developments in Northern Ireland, although to a lesser extent, point to development from confrontation to cooperation attitude. Firstly, both 'radical' leaders, Paisley and Adams, accepted "non-violent and democratic politics as the only way to achieve their ultimate goal" (Wolf, 2006: 169), and, according to latest news^[6], both publicly declare cooperation. Obviously, the chances in Northern Ireland are a lot better than in Bosnia since each party agrees to the principle of majority consent, i.e. the Northern Irish territorial status quo remains unchanged unless a majority of the population decides differently (Schneckener, 2002: 216). However, even in Bosnia the "political stalemate has become to dissolve gradually and a more pragmatic sense of at least punctual cooperation between the (former) conflict parties has established itself" (Wolf, 2006: 170).

Be that as it may, given the nature of elite conduct in Bosnia shortly after conclusion of the Dayton Accords, it is essential to emphasize that a decisive impact on the motivation of the elite have external actors. As the problems of credible commitment hinder the efforts of groups to resolve their differences peacefully, the primary significance of external intervention is that an external actor can enforce an agreement, thereby providing the necessary credibility that is otherwise lacking (Lake and Rothchild, 1996: 67-68). Nevertheless, this statement has to be qualified. Whereas McGarry and O'Leary observe that "immediate, daily, vigorous, and continuing" British and Irish oversight

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is required to encourage the Agreement's full implementation (2004: 289), Lake and Rothchild "are sceptical" that external appeals, exhortations, and pressures will in and of themselves dissuade determined elites from their abusive courses even if the third party makes the local parties believe that the outside powers are resolved to enforce the ethnic contract in a fair manner into the indefinite future (1996: 66-70). Such a stance can be, therefore, viewed rather as confirmation of the initial thesis emphasizing the importance of the elite' approach towards the peace process.

Conclusion

It is clear that both 'suitable' institutional design and 'appropriate' attitude of the elite underpin long-term success of any peace process. The aim of his paper has been to highlight and outline some of the reasons why is it so by drawing near two particular cases of recent ethnic conflict resolutions – Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Firstly, it has introduced some necessary qualities of every peace agreement as is the ending of violence, inclusion of all relevant interests and reasonable delaying of elections. All of them serving as a 'playing field' for groups learning how to transact with one another. Secondly, some forms of conduct of the elite as well as their willingness and ability were presented with the aim to highlight the importance of the elite approach toward the settlement, or to show that it is upon the 'players' (and not the 'field') how they play. Even though the actual institutional design should not be underestimated, a written law can arguably never prevent human invention to bend it.

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[1] As Crocker and Hampson point out, success is an inherently relative concept, which can be defined as the avoidance of major setbacks or "marginal improvement in stabilizing, containing, and checking the human price and territorial spread of a volatile struggle". Not taking this relativity into account when creating a peace agreement, as it was the case of Dayton, leads only to "formalisation of an elaborate panoply of seemingly worthy goals" (e.g. a reunited, multiconfessional Bosnia; democratic government; reconstruction of the devastated economy; monitored ceasefire and disengagement of forces; peace etc.), which can hardly be implemented in a short term perspective (1996: 62-63).

[2] Defined through believed common descent, common historic memories, shared culture based on language or religion, and attachment to territory – see Kaufman (2001: 16-17).

[3] This demand was not hold especially in Bosnia before the elections in 1996, where the media were under firm control of the nationalist parties. As Oliver states, "political campaigning by opposition parties was almost impossible and where conducted, their rallies and meetings received almost no media coverage whatsoever" (2005: 159).

[4] Each segment of the state having one representative – one Bosniak and one Croat elected from the Federation and one Serb elected from the Republika Srpska.

[5] These include actions with obvious nicknames *Choreography and Play Acting*, *Smoke Screen*, *Salami Slicing*, *Hard Cop/Soft Cop* – for details see – Dixon (2002: 733-737).

[6] Martin McGuinness, a Sinn Féin politician, the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and former IRA leader reflecting on his relationship with the first minister, declared: "Up until the 26 March this year [2007], Ian Paisley and I never had a conversation about anything – not even about the weather – and now we have worked very closely together over the last seven months and there's been no angry words between us.

See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/7134094.stm [Accessed on 17/12/2007]

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