

Sustaining Peace: What Does It Mean in Practice?

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We are beginning to understand what peace is—the structures, attitudes, and institutions that underpin it, and the motives that drive people to work for it. Still, peace remains largely an elusive goal, often negatively portrayed as the absence of violence.

It has been assumed that if we can understand the complexity of war and violence, we will be able to foster and sustain peace. We do not study peace, and therefore we tend to focus on the problems of conflict and aggression rather than the solutions associated with peace.¹ With this approach, prevention is viewed as a crisis management tool to address the destructive dynamics of conflict after they have occurred, typically through short-term and externally driven responses.

To address this peace deficit, IPI is seeking to reframe prevention for the purpose of sustaining peace rather than averting conflict, through a series of conversations from October 2016 to May 2017. The overarching aim will be to build a shared understanding of what sustaining peace and prevention look like in practice at the national and international levels.

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Introduction

In its review of the peacebuilding architecture, the Advisory Group of Experts introduced the language of “sustaining peace” as a counterpoint to the term “peacebuilding.” Although conceived as a comprehensive process, peacebuilding has come to be narrowly interpreted as time-bound, exogenous interventions that take place “after the guns fall silent” in fragile or conflict-affected states.² Sustaining peace seeks to reclaim peace in its own right and detach it from the subservient affiliation with conflict that has defined it over the past four decades.³

Since the UN Security Council and General Assembly adopted landmark identical resolutions on sustaining peace in April 2016, UN member states and practitioners have started to reflect on what this concept means.⁴ This paper seeks to contribute to these discussions by unpacking the definition of sustaining peace and providing examples of what it looks like in practice at the national and international levels. It also aims to clear up the political cobwebs in the minds of some suspicious stakeholders fearful that the concept is another Trojan horse for outside intervention.

First, we describe sustaining peace as an explicit and deliberate policy objective for all states, regardless of whether they are beset by violent conflict. Second, sustaining peace is underpinned by an infrastructure composed of institutions, norms, attitudes, and capacities spanning different sectors and levels of social organization. This infrastructure needs to be constantly nurtured and updated to adapt to changing contexts and circumstances. Third, sustaining peace is conceived as a necessarily endogenous process that requires strong and inclusive national ownership and leadership. Finally, sustaining peace is multi-sectoral and all-encompassing, amounting to a meta-policy deserving of attention at the highest levels of national government.

Committing to sustaining peace entails revisiting the starting point of the process of building peace; as such, it ushers in a paradigm shift in our

1 Peter Coleman, “The Missing Piece in Sustainable Peace,” Earth Institute, November 6, 2012, available at <http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2012/11/06/the-missing-piece-in-sustainable-peace/>.

2 United Nations, *The Challenge of Sustaining Peace: Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture*, UN Doc. A/69/968-S/2015/490, June 30, 2015.

3 Youssef Mahmoud, “Freeing Prevention from Conflict: Investing in Sustaining Peace,” IPI Global Observatory, April 21, 2016, available at <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/04/prevention-sustaining-peace-hippo-ban-ki-moon/>.

4 Security Council Resolution 2282 (April 27, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2282; General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (April 27, 2016), UN Doc. A/RES/70/262; Youssef Mahmoud and Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, “With New Resolutions, Sustaining Peace Sits at Heart of UN Architecture,” IPI Global Observatory, April 29, 2016, available at <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/04/sustaining-peace-peacebuilding-united-nations-sdg/> ..

understanding of peace. Sustaining peace attempts to broaden the peace agenda to include proactive measures aimed at building on peace where it already exists by reinforcing the structures, attitudes, and institutions that underpin it. This new paradigm has the potential to strengthen the prevention agenda as well as to render ongoing peacekeeping interventions more effective. It is not a radical call to substitute existing interventions with new processes, but it is intended as a complete overhaul to how we approach peace and peace-related interventions.

Conflict Is Not the Starting Point

The peace agenda has its roots in the scholarship of peace and conflict studies and is supported by a rhetoric that ranges from the narrower discourse of post-conflict reconstruction to broader debates on peaceful coexistence. In practice, however, peacebuilding has up to now been confined to the narrower end of the spectrum; it tends to be perceived as relevant solely to contexts where conflict is manifest or proximate. As a result, peacebuilding is seen as an extension of conflict resolution or conflict transformation.

The binary relationship ascribed to conflict and peace means that stable states where there is no violent conflict are excluded from the study of peace, when in fact these are the case studies most likely to unveil the factors associated with peace. All societies possess attributes that contribute to sustaining peace, whether their institutions, their culture, their policies, or the less tangible, quotidian, and tacit norms of interaction between individuals and groups. However, where manifest conflict is absent, these attributes remain undocumented and are rarely nurtured. Existing capacities for peace risk falling into oblivion, which could expose even the most peaceful societies to future conflict. Thus, the sustaining peace agenda should be applied to and adopted by all states.

Whereas the starting point of peacebuilding is

conflict and the process is one of transitioning from war to peace, sustaining peace begins with identifying those attributes and assets that have sustained social cohesion, inclusive development, the rule of law, and human security—the factors that together contribute to a peaceful society. As many scholars have argued, conflict is a natural phenomenon arising from social interactions, and even a desirable one, in so far as it often leads to innovation and progress.⁵ In this regard, peace is not so much the absence of conflict as it is the ability to manage and transform conflict in a peaceful and constructive manner. Assuming, therefore, that all societies experience conflict, those that do not descend into violence must possess the structures and capacities for sustaining peace, even if these are not made explicit.

Defining the Infrastructure That Sustains Peace

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing those seeking to understand sustaining peace is to define the concrete actions that will contribute to its effective implementation. The conceptual basis for sustaining peace can be traced back to Johan Galtung's seminal work on "positive peace."⁶ Positive peace requires building and strengthening the factors that foster peace.⁷ Among these factors are those that enable "everyday peace," such as solidarity and compassion between different ethnic groups, and systemic factors, such as equitable distribution of resources, well-functioning institutions, tolerance for diversity, respect for the rights of others, security from physical harm, and access to food and clean drinking water.⁸

Sustaining peace seeks to place greater emphasis on detecting and strengthening what is already working, not only what is in disrepair and needs fixing. Even societies under stress have capacities that need to be nurtured. Moreover, sustaining peace is an ongoing exercise, not a one-time intervention. Contexts change, because of both internal fluctuations and external shocks, requiring

⁵ See, for example, John Paul Lederach, "Conflict Transformation," *Beyond Intractability*, October 2003, available at www.beyondintractability.org/essay/transformation.

⁶ See Baljit Singh Grewal, "Johan Galtung: Positive and Negative Peace," August 30, 2003, available at www.activeforpeace.org/no/fred/Positive_Negative_Peace.pdf.

⁷ Mahmoud, "Freeing Prevention from Conflict."

⁸ Institute for Economics and Peace, "Positive Peace Report 2016," available at <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Positive-Peace-Report-2016.pdf>; Roger Mac Ginty, "Everyday Peace: Bottom-Up and Local Agency in Conflict-Affected Societies," *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 6 (2014).

a concomitant adjustment in the norms and institutions governing society. For example, migration patterns alter the social balance of a society, and maintaining social cohesion in the face of such changes demands that citizens be willing and able to adopt new norms of social interaction and extend their threshold of tolerance. The inability to respond to changes, both internal and external, is an indicator of the weakness of a society's infrastructure for peace.

An Endogenous Process

The emphasis on identifying context-specific capacities as a starting point for sustaining peace makes it primarily an endogenous process. Seen through this lens, sustaining peace is not a time-bound intervention defined by the funding cycles of donors or mandates of peace operations; rather, it is an ongoing effort best undertaken through national policies. Peace can be most effectively sustained when it is conceived as a public good for which the state is responsible. However, as with other public goods, it is the shared responsibility of all stakeholders, and indeed all citizens, to contribute to it.

Peace is multidimensional and multi-sectoral. It cuts across different levels of human organization, from the interpersonal to the societal, rendering sustaining peace a highly collaborative task that requires strong leadership. National ownership of a process that is inclusive of all key stakeholders, including the private sector, women, and youth, is thus a cornerstone of successful efforts to build sustainable peace. Inclusivity is key to ensuring that peace is maintained over time.

Peace, unlike law and security, cannot be enforced from the top, but must be woven into society from within and from below by fostering partnerships and incentives to maintain it. Dialogue among individuals, groups, and social sectors, as well as between the government and its citizens, is key to the success of the sustaining peace enterprise; so is enlightened, inclusive leadership at all levels of society.

The Praxis: Sustaining Peace as a Deliberate Meta-Policy

So far, we have argued that sustaining peace applies to all societies and is not necessarily confined to unstable environments or designed to calm the ravages of violent conflicts. It is a multi-sectoral, endogenous, and ongoing process that is the shared responsibility of states and all citizens. This begs the question: How do we sustain peace in practice?

One could assume that peace is an automatic outcome for states that have inclusive, transparent, and accountable institutions, fair legal frameworks, inclusive economic policies, and a culture of tolerance. However, by relegating peace to the status of an implicit consequence of other national policies, we risk overlooking fundamental factors that contribute to peace. Sustaining peace also relies on the intention and willingness to foster peaceful societies. Hence, peace needs to be made a deliberate policy objective of the state. This means that core government ministries, in addition to fulfilling their intrinsic functions, must explicitly address challenges to peace and contribute to its sustainability.

Seen from this perspective, sustaining peace cannot simply sit alongside economic, social, or security policies. It must be positioned above all the different sectors, akin to a meta-policy that builds on and accounts for all other policies. All policies must be infused with the intention to sustain peace, which in turn will make them more durable and coherent. The mandate to sustain peace should be housed at the apex of national and local government structures.

A case in point is Ghana's creation of a National Peace Council in 2011, whose mandate is to facilitate and develop mechanisms for preventing, managing, and resolving conflict and building sustainable peace.⁹ Another country that has made peace a deliberate policy objective is Costa Rica, which in 2009 created a Ministry of Justice and

⁹ William A. Awinador-Kanyirige, "Ghana's National Peace Council," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, August 2014, available at www.globalr2p.org/media/files/2014-august-policy-brief-ghana-national-peace-council.pdf; Paul van Tongeren, "Infrastructures for Peace Is a Promising Approach," Peace Monitor, April 1, 2013, available at <http://peacemonitor.org/?p=427>.

Peace, signaling a policy shift from preventing violence to promoting peace.¹⁰ As another example, in 2015 the Kenyan Parliament adopted a peace policy after more than ten years of national stakeholder consultations. The policy and the infrastructure for peace it sets out, including a National Peace Council, are expected to prevent a range of conflicts, including resource-based, religious, cross-border, and wildlife-related conflicts.¹¹

Given that positive peace is both an outcome and an enabler of sustainable development, the effective implementation of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets can be used as a vehicle for building sustainable peace.¹² This symbiosis can be depicted as a wheel where the hub is peace and the SDGs are spokes pointing toward and away from it.

Peace is more than the sum of its parts (or pillars). Subtler, less visible policies such as building trust between individuals and groups, as well as between the state and its citizens, need to be nurtured through dialogue and open, safe channels of communication. Tunisia's attempt to create a national council for social dialogue is an example of movement toward such policies.

Implications for the UN Reform Agenda

As described above, “sustaining peace” is a thoroughly endogenous process; states need to institute national policies whose objective it is to lay the foundations for sustainable peace. A final point that needs to be addressed, then, is the role of the international community. Bilateral and multilateral institutions have committed billions of dollars to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and other crisis management activities around the world.

The shift toward sustaining peace does not

obviate the need or absolve these actors of the responsibility to support peace. It does, however, call for a new approach to international interventions. They should place greater emphasis on identifying factors of resilience within societies and carving out the space needed for national stakeholders to play a leadership role in fostering peace, no matter how weakened by war and strife they may appear.¹⁴ New situations calling for the deployment of international peacekeeping operations may still arise, but the hope is that with more countries subscribing to an agenda for sustaining peace, these circumstances will be less frequent. Even where they do arise, a sustaining peace approach should render peacekeeping operations more effective as they take on a more enabling and less intrusive role.

As Secretary-General António Guterres continues to ponder how best to pursue his “diplomacy for peace” agenda, the conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Libya could paradoxically provide useful entry points—provided the outcome, beyond ending violence and stabilizing shattered societies, is also formulated from a sustaining peace perspective. The updating and implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel in collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission could also benefit from a sustaining peace approach.¹⁵

Similarly, as the secretary-general leads an overhaul of UN peace operations and the supporting governance structures, he should look at these operations from the perspective of prevention and sustaining peace. For example, the UN stabilization missions in Mali and the Central African Republic could benefit from such an approach, drawing on lessons from the engagement of the UN and regional organizations in both countries over the past several years. In particular, this approach could be applied to context analysis

10 Susie Shutts, “Costa Rica Creates Department of Peace,” *Yes! Magazine*, September 22, 2009, available at www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/costa-rica-creates-department-of-peace.

11 Maria Osula, “Finally! A Peace Policy for Kenya,” *Saferworld*, November 4, 2015, available at www.saferworld.org.uk/news-and-views/comment/189-finally-a-peace-policy-for-kenya.

12 Delphine Mechoulan, Youssef Mahmoud, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Jimena Leiva Roesch, “The SDGs and Prevention for Sustaining Peace: Exploring the Transformative Potential of the Goal on Gender Equality,” *International Peace Institute*, November 10, 2016, available at www.ipinst.org/2016/11/sdgs-goal-gender-equality.

13 “Projet de loi sur la création d’un Conseil national pour le dialogue,” *Le Temps*, November 13, 2016, available at www.letemps.com.tn/article/100083/projet-de-loi-sur-la-cr%C3%A9ation-d%E2%80%99un-conseil-national-pour-le-dialogue.

14 Interpeace, “Fostering Resilience for Peace: Annual Report 2015,” available at <http://3n589z370e6o2eata9wahf4.wpengin.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Interpeace-2015-Annual-Report2.pdf>.

15 UN Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/PRST/2017/2, January 20, 2017.

and periodic reporting and briefings to the Security Council on these two countries. As the peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Haiti draw to an end amidst debate on how best to consolidate peace gains,¹⁶ the same approach could be applied there, taking into account the contributions the Peacebuilding Commission could make under its revitalized mandate.¹⁷

This shift in perspective would require the UN to develop a qualitatively different way of conducting peace and conflict analysis and programs that give politics, people, and inclusive national ownership an uncontested home.¹⁸ Tinkering with the tools as if perfecting them were the objective in and of itself

would do injustice to the secretary-general's ambition.

Sustaining peace constitutes a paradigm shift in how we think about peace and how we address conflict. As a process and a goal, building sustainable peace is not the burden of outsiders. Even under the direst of circumstances, external interventions should endeavor to build on what people know and what they have. Societies that have developed national infrastructures for peace offer valuable lessons for this eminently internal enterprise. More needs to be done to demystify the concept at the national and global levels. This paper merely starts the conversation.

16 United Nations, "Security Council Extends Mandate of United Nations Mission in Liberia, Adopting Resolution 2333 (2016) by 12 Votes in Favour, 3 Abstentions," December 23, 2016, available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12654.doc.htm> .

17 Under the identical Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on sustaining Peace (Resolutions 2282 and 70/262, respectively).

18 Mahmoud, "What Would It Take to Make a 'Surge in Diplomacy for Peace' Work?" IPI Global Observatory, January 19, 2017, available at <http://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/01/sustaining-peace-diplomacy-antonio-guterres/> .

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