

FROM WARLORDS TO PEACELORDS: Local Leadership Capacity in Peace Processes

Gordon Peake
Cathy Gormley-Heenan
Mari Fitzduff

FEBRUARY 2004

The starting point for the research upon which the report is based has been our interest in the phenomenon of political leaders in conflict and peace building. In particular, this report has considered leadership in three countries known for their protracted and brutal conflicts – Afghanistan, Kosovo and Sierra Leone. Each country is now considered to be at formal ‘peace’, though political and structural violence remain and Kosovo’s constitutional future is unclear.

The research sought to explain something of an irony that holds true for many conflicts: that many of the local political leaders who played a central part in perpetuating conflict remain a feature in the subsequent peace process. How does this transformation from ‘warlord’ to ‘peacelord’ take place? What influences can be attributed to their apparent changes of heart and willingness to engage in processes of reconciliation and renegotiated constitutional arrangements? Is it the influence of

constituents or followers? Is it the influence of other local leaders? Or is the true source of pressure more exogenous in nature?

The study aimed to explore how these leaders emerge, how they are sustained and what sparked their change from a seemingly negative to a more positive style of leadership. The research showed that while leaders were adroit at dragging their countries and followers into conflict they were not so adept at pulling them out of it. The key force for change was not so much local leadership per se, but international leaders and their states and organisations which are increasingly becoming a fixed part of the transition process.

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

The relationship between local and international leadership is fraught with difficulties – for the international community, there is the desire to stabilise a region (for whatever motive); for the local political leaders



there is the desire to hold on to the 'spoils of war' and the benefits accrued through the perpetuation of conflict. This amounts to something of an oxymoron, given that to create much-needed stability in a region, the international leaders need to work with those very actors that were deemed to be the cause of much of the instability of the past.

As the research shows, a feature of many peace agreements is an international presence. It is seldom that peace agreements are not negotiated and mid-wifed by an international actor, whether a state or international organisation such as the UN. Their weight and consequent influence is so extensive that it affords significant levels of influence over the process and the local leaders. International leaders can utilise their positions of influence to 'encourage' local leaders to accept terms that they might not otherwise do on their own, as well as creating mechanisms that reward, sanction and regulate their behaviour. For those who seek to find strategies or the means to effect or change leadership behaviour, the international involvement in pushing forward a peace process offers great potential. Its force can compel 'negative' leaders to be more positive. Although international interests are never exclusively angelic¹, the role of international actors – whether that be the United States, the United Nations, regional organisations of nations, or NGOs – can have positive effects on the behaviour of local leaders.

CARROTS, STICKS AND CONSEQUENCES

The study shows that this potential is already being utilised over local leaders but it has yet to be systematized. The three case studies demonstrate that different combinations of

carrots and sticks are adopted by the international community towards political leaders. This has yielded three different consequences. In Afghanistan, minimal pressure has been exerted, meaning that leaders continue to behave in as divisive and selfish a manner as before. The international overlords of Kosovo have restricted the powers of local leaders, erecting new political institutions with limited functionality or competence. In Sierra Leone, the international community is sanctioning local leaders through a special court designed to prosecute those who bear greatest responsibility for crimes committed during the civil war.

It seems that international leaders at the helm matter every bit as much as local leaders: the presence and potential pressure affords a better chance at getting leaders to alter their behaviour than the leaders would ever do on their own. That is not to say that local leaders are not important. They are much more than just satraps in an internationalised context. Leaders continue to combine the traits of charm, ruthlessness, and the ability to marshal resources in a way that allows them to preserve their own ascendant position.

MOTIVES AND MODELS

The issue of 'motive' is one which holds much resonance for this research. Assumptions of the existence of 'transformational' models of leadership – or Mandela like figures – do not always fit with the realities of violent conflict and the road towards peace. Motives for engaging in peace processes are rarely altruistic or for the greater good of conflict reduction or resolution. They are almost always 'transactional' in nature, based on a system of give and take with the international community

rather than with a leader's constituency base.

Conclusions

1. In looking for 'positive leadership' academics and policy makers may be searching for a chimera and hence will be disappointed. The reality is, perhaps, that this particular model of leadership rarely exists in this context of violent conflict. This is why a Mandela figure stands out so sharply.
2. In an increasingly internationalised world, local leaders have little power over grand issues of conflict and peace. Despite the innumerable attempts, seen in each of the three case studies, leaders themselves were apparently unable to make progress towards conflict resolution. Each conflict was punctuated by accords, plans, understandings, agreements, ceasefires, yet not one of them was sustainable. The glue that has held any agreement together has been international pressure, used to bring parties to the table. Although leaders may have played a large part in getting their countries into conflict they are often unable to get their countries out of it. In none of the countries studied did leaders provide the momentum to begin a process; they were either coaxed into settlements, or catapulted along as part of a process over which they have little control. Put simply, too much is expected of leaders to bring about change, while no past evidence indicates that they are likely to do so.
3. Local leaders often lack administrative capabilities and administrative capacity. Well versed in the politics of conflict, they are less familiar with the humdrum practicalities of

basic administration. Compounding this, the new administrations of which they are part lack many of the basic structures of effective governance. Leaders cannot conjure up a new dispensation if their box of tricks is strictly limited.

4. Followers have little influence over the actions of leaders. In large part this is because each of these countries have both unstable histories of democracy as well as a 'distance' between a leader and his followers. Instead there appears to be the glum acceptance by many that they can do little to effect change.

Consequently, the research findings suggest we should not concentrate exclusively on local leaders as the means to end conflicts and build peace. Instead, we should focus as much on the influence of the international leaders and organisations, not least in terms of how to use that influence on leaders. As seen in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, powerful international actors can bring about positive change. The question is how this potential can be further harnessed.

Some Recommendations

Such is the nebulous nature of this research area, it often provokes more questions than it answers. The relevant literature is somewhat deficient in failing to sufficiently examine the influence of international actors upon local leaders. Therefore our recommendations for further research centre upon suggesting further ways of explaining this relationship.

1. Further research should be undertaken into the interplay between local leaders and the international organisations that play a part in conflict resolution and peace building. We

have clearly shown that there is some relationship, but mapping its exact contours in a greater number of case studies would provide further detail and clarity.

2. International responses towards local leadership has yet to be systematised. All too often international organisations work in a muddled milieu with lack of co-ordination among each other. A detailed audit should be undertaken that will clearly set out approaches, and attitudes among international organisations towards local leaders and the relationships therein.
3. In policy terms, there could be more emphasis and efforts to train a cadre of acceptable and representative leaders in areas that are vulnerable to conflict. This should be seen as a preventative measure, as preferable to dealing with the belligerents already in place. Such training should also include technocrats who are vital in the development of appropriate social, economic and governance processes.
4. One feature in many of the post-conflict societies is the return of both an émigré business and technocrat class who left during conflict and have subsequently returned. These individuals tend to have more of the basic building block skills, necessary to turn a post-conflict society around, skills that many of the 'big name'

leaders in these societies lack. Efforts should be concentrated upon harnessing this cadre of relatively untapped potential.

ⁱWe found in all of the three case studies that this was most clearly illustrated in the attitude of the US to the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Despite being the primary driving force and financial backers of the Court the US has so far refused to sign up to an 'international equivalent' – the International Criminal Court.

INCORE would like to acknowledge the financial support received for this study from the Milt Lauenstein Fund via the Vanguard Charitable Trust.

INCORE

University of Ulster, Magee Campus, Aberfoyle House
Northland Road, Londonderry, Northern Ireland, BT48 7JA

Tel: +44 (0) 28 7137 5500, Fax: +44 (0) 28 7137 5510, Email: incore@incore.ulst.ac.uk