A Warning Against 'Social Engineering': Every Peace Process First Needs the Involvement of the Conflict Parties

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Here are some comments on the introductory statement by Corinna Hauswedell.

In most aspects of her presentation, I agree with Corinna Hauswedell. But I would like to make three comments and pose some additional questions we have to deal with if we want to help external actors to make successful interventions in internal conflicts.

I agree with Corinna Hauswedell, especially when she argues that we should differentiate, first, between various forms of outside involvement; second, between different actors who could develop strategies to promote peaceful ways out of internal conflicts; and, third, that conflict escalation processes contain right or wrong—or, at least, better and worse—moments for successful outside involvement.

Comment 1

To concentrate first on the questions about external actors and the central question of this panel "Can external actors make a difference?", we all agree— I think—that different actors are needed for different forms of outside involvement: neighboring states could play a role different from that of the superpower; the potential impacts of international organizations could draw, for example, on their special reputation

of having no self-interest in a given conflict; non-governmental organizations have, for example, better chances to cooperate with societal actors, groups, or networks in a conflict region. But such a broad range of actors gives rise to problems of coherence, coordination, and cooperation in conflict prevention and resolution. Looking at a conflict from the outside, external actors often wish to gain influence on the conflict itself and want other actors to work in the same direction. But if it is more coherence of external activities we are looking for, we may overlook three preconditions needed for any such coordinated strategy:

First: Somebody must have the master-plan for external crisis management or conflict resolution.

Second: Even if we were able to develop such a masterplan for crisis management and conflict resolution, this does not mean that it would automatically be turned into action by the actors concerned or that they would provide the necessary resources and coordinate their activities. Such a plan might outline what is needed, but it cannot guarantee that the political will for implementation is there.

And third: If any success in crisis prevention and conflict resolution is to materialize, the conflict parties and the people affected by conflict and violence must be involved in any plan and

strategy for peacebuilding. This was already a major aspect in Corinna Hauswedell's presentation.

In today's crisis prevention policies, we would be happy to meet 20% of these three preconditions. But this is not to say that we should give up any efforts at crisis prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding from the outside, quite the contrary: Every external activity determined by conflict resolution strategies and not by the self-interests of external actors could help the conflict parties to prevent escalation and violence. But these goals could not be reached by external actors alone, even if they were perfectly coordinated and acted in a coherent manner. Such a masterplan approach would come close to what is referred to in German as *Sozial-technologie*, 'social engineering'. Conflict, and especially the conflicts in which we are not involved, are things where such an approach could not work.

Do not get me wrong! I do not want to argue against any external influence or against coordination for enhanced coherence. But by focusing on conflict and violence as the central problems, we probably underestimate the importance of the actors involved in the conflict and their interests and strategies. This leads me to my second comment:

Comment 2

Corinna Hauswedell asked: "Are some issues in peacebuilding easier to tackle, with more prospects of success by outsiders, than other issues?" I do not believe that conflicts, conflicting parties, and external actors with the will to influence the conflict process are so similar that the conditions for successful peacebuilding activities are the same in different conflicts, and that we could come up with *general* answers to the questions of external peace-building. And to highlight only one argument for this skeptical view:

A large measure of the impact of activities managed from the outside depends on the perceptions of the external actors held by the conflicting parties. This issue, I think, is underestimated in many cases, and Iraq and Afghanistan are relevant examples: Even the best intentions of external actors, and the right strategy, would have been unable to overcome distrust of or former bad experiences with the external actors. And one consequence, in my view, must be that conflict analyses concerning external activities for conflict resolution or peacebuilding must include detailed findings on how potential outside actors are perceived by the conflict parties and the societies in which conflict resolution activities are set to start.

Comment 3

And finally, I would like to comment only on one aspect of the blurred picture of military and civilian forms of intervention. In my view, one main problem in these discussions is the categories into which the activities are broken down. These categories, subsuming all non-military activities under the term 'civilian' forms of intervention, come from internatio-nal—or to put it in a more precise form—from interstate relations: Interactions between states are either the job of the military or diplomatic actions intended to avoid violence. But conflict resolution today is more a field of *trans*national than international relations. The conflict parties in internal conflicts are in many cases non-governmental actors. And looking at the external actors, too, we find more and more important non-governmental organizations and non-military personnel: Their activities may be very different in nature, for example security agents or policemen, on the one hand, and teachers in conflict management or conflict mediation, on the other. Both are called *civil* forms of intervention, although there are major differences between such activities in the field of civil conflict prevention. The only common ground is that the actors themselves are not from the military, but aside from this they have nothing in common. To overcome this dichotomy between military and civil forms of intervention in conflicts, we need more differentiation, especially in the field of non-military conflict prevention activities. We need better concepts and precise terms to mark the diversity of conflict resolution activities. This could also help us to handle the chances and the risks of civil-military cooperation better than we can at the moment.