

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: UOA21
Title of case study: Introducing benchmarking practices for UN peacebuilding (21-08)
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor Richard Caplan's research explores the challenges that arise in the context of post-conflict peace- and state-building. His work on exit strategies and peace consolidation led the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) to ask him to examine specific challenges to designing and implementing transitional strategies in peace operations, and to suggest how these challenges could be met more effectively. This work initiated a process within the UN to introduce more rigorous benchmarking practices for peacebuilding, laid the foundations for the development of a common UN methodology for measuring peace consolidation and played an instrumental role in the production of a United Nations handbook on peace consolidation monitoring, entitled <i>Monitoring Peace Consolidation – United Nations Practitioners' Guide to Benchmarking</i> (United Nations, 2010). The handbook is being used to support practitioners engaged in peacebuilding across the UN system.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since the 1990s, states and multilateral organizations have actively sought to rebuild war-torn societies, as evidenced by peace- and state-building operations in Africa, the Western Balkans, Asia and the Middle East. Caplan's Adelphi Paper, <i>A New Trusteeship?</i> was one of the first pieces of major research to examine the international administration of war-torn territories, a form of post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding, to which the international community had begun to make increasingly frequent recourse. Caplan developed this research agenda in a co-edited special issue of <i>Global Governance</i> (2004) [R1], his monograph, <i>International Governance of War-Torn Territories</i> (2005) [R2] and a wide range of journal articles, including in <i>International Peacekeeping</i> (2005) [R3], <i>Civil Wars</i> (2006) [R4] and <i>Third World Quarterly</i> (2007) [R5].</p> <p>This body of research examines the nature of international territorial administrations—their mandates, structures and powers. The work also explores the key challenges—operational, political and normative—that arise in the context of administration by international organizations and assesses the effectiveness of international authorities in meeting these challenges. It probes the policy implications of recent experiences, recommending reforms or new approaches to the practices associated with international territorial administration.</p> <p>Building on this research, Caplan began to focus more specifically on the challenges associated with transitional and exit strategies. In 2007 he initiated and led a project on 'Exit Strategies and Peace Consolidation', bringing together a team of 15 leading scholars and practitioners to explore the experiences of, and scholarly and policy questions associated with, exit in relation to four types of international operations where state-building had been an objective: notably colonial administrations, complex peace operations, international administrations and transformative military occupations.</p> <p>Three research findings stand out for the later interest and impact that they would generate among practitioners:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the conditions for the successful completion of exit processes: The research demonstrated that an exit is not an event but a process of transition that is facilitated by successful mandate implementation (if the mandate is suitably designed and resourced) and the ability to refine the mandate to fit the circumstances on the ground as they evolve. This requires a degree of flexibility and coordination that is often difficult to achieve in the large and complex state-building operations that characterise many peacebuilding efforts today. Demonstrating lacunae in the current understanding of the requirements for stable

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peace: The work demonstrated the absence of a clear understanding among scholars and practitioners of the requirements for a stable peace, generally or in relation to specific cases, as a consequence of which an exit or transition may imperil a fragile peace. This finding points to the need for more robust forms of assessment of efforts to achieve peace consolidation.

- c) **Understanding the political nature of exit processes:** The research showed that exit is fundamentally a political process, the timing and the nature of which are inevitably influenced by political factors which may have little to do with progress on the ground. Effective leadership may be required to counter pressures for withdrawal from donors, troop-contributing countries and local authorities that can undermine a fragile peace. [R6]

Findings of the research project were presented at a conference co-chaired by Caplan at Wilton Park, the British Foreign Office-sponsored conference centre, on 13-15 March 2009, which brought together some 35 representatives of governments and international organizations (including the United Nations, NATO, the European Council, and the African Union) with members of the research group. The project culminated with the publication of Caplan's edited book *Exit Strategies and State Building* (2012) [R6], and articles in *Survival* (2012) [R7] and other publications.

The research was conducted at Oxford, where Richard Caplan was a Research Fellow at the Department's Centre for International Studies from 2001-2003, when he was appointed a University Lecturer in International Relations. He was made a Professor in 2006.

3. References to the research

- [R1] Richard Caplan (co-editor with Mats Berdal), special issue of *Global Governance* on 'The Politics of International Administration' 10:1 (2004).
- [R2] Richard Caplan, *International Governance of War-Torn Territories: Rule and Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2005), ISBN 0199263450.
- [R3] Richard Caplan, 'Who Guards the Guardians? International Accountability in Bosnia', *International Peacekeeping* 12:3 (2005).
- [R4] Richard Caplan, 'After Exit: Successor Missions and Peace Consolidation', *Civil Wars* 8:3-4 (2006).
- [R5] Richard Caplan, 'From Collapsing States to Neo-Trusteeship: The Limits to Solving the Problem of "Precarious Statehood" in the 21st Century', *Third World Quarterly* 28:2 (2007).
- [R6] Richard Caplan (ed.), *Exit Strategies and State Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), ISBN 9780199760114.
- [R7] Richard Caplan, 'Devising Exit Strategies', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 54:3 (2012).

Research grants (totalling £100,800) 'Exit Strategies and Peace Consolidation' was funded by the Folke Bernadotte Academy, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and the University's internal research fund, with additional support from the Norwegian Peacebuilding Fund: http://cis.politics.ox.ac.uk/research/Projects/consolidation_peace.asp (March 2007-October 2011).

4. Details of the impact

The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has responsibility within the UN system for advising on and proposing integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery. Caplan's scholarship [R2, R4] and his research project on exit strategies came to the attention of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the Secretariat of the PBC, in 2007 and was subsequently circulated widely within the PBSO and across the UN system [C1]. The PBSO asked Caplan to draw on and extend his previous research to understand how they might better support the transition of a peace operation as it moves from initial stabilization towards consolidation. It was interested specifically in research that might assist it in making recommendations to the Commission on when to 'graduate' a country on its agenda.

(1) Identifying operational challenges to UN transitional strategies

Building on his research insights [R2], Caplan produced a study for the PBSO, published as an inter-agency briefing paper in March 2008, which demonstrated:

- a lack of conceptual clarity within the UN system with regard to ‘peace consolidation,’ ‘transition’ and ‘exit strategies’ and other key concepts;
- the absence of agreed-upon criteria with respect to gauging the achievement of a peace operation’s principal objectives;
- the absence of system-wide country monitoring methodologies to inform UN planning;
- the inappropriate use of benchmarking to chart progress towards consolidated peace within countries;
- limited planning capacity within and between some UN agencies to support sequencing and transition and a lack of adequate structures to share information and plan jointly;
- lack of broad knowledge in the UN system concerning the actual experience of transition and exit; and
- structural and political factors inhibiting the emergence of effective strategies to support transition, including uncertainty with regard to the time and resources available, making it difficult to develop sound strategic plans [C2].

Caplan presented the initial findings of his research to the UN Peacebuilding Commission in New York on 17 December 2007. This briefing was the first time an academic had been invited to address the PBC. Caplan also presented his findings at a UN inter-agency seminar in New York on 20 December 2007 attended by representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the UN Development Programme, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. At the request of the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Caplan discussed the findings of his research with representatives of Member States invited to the Japanese Mission on 18 December 2007. (The chair of the PBSO was Japan’s representative to the UN.)

The briefing paper formed the basis of an extensive UN Peacebuilding Community of Practice (CoP) e-discussion on peace consolidation metrics conducted in April and May 2008 that circulated to some 450 practitioners in 20 UN agencies and departments. The consultation was widely welcomed by participants and summaries show that the ideas for benchmarking of peace consolidation as set out in Caplan’s briefing paper were considered for the most part both desirable and feasible [C3].

(2) Defining an approach to UN benchmarking and the need for a handbook

Thirty-five percent of all violent conflicts re-ignite within five years of a negotiated peace. To respond to the fragility of the peace process, Caplan’s briefing paper recommended the production of a UN practitioners’ guide to benchmarking. By promoting more rigorous and systematic assessment of progress towards a consolidated peace Caplan argued that peacebuilding efforts could be recalibrated without jeopardising the peace. Drawing on his research [R2, R4], Caplan recommended that a practitioners’ guide to benchmarking should:

- define key terms and offer broad-based criteria for measuring peace consolidation;
- present a Comprehensive Peace Consolidation Monitoring Matrix with detailed benchmarking and indicative examples;
- share the positive and negative lessons derived from benchmarking exercises in UN peacebuilding operations;
- make practical recommendations on the technical and financial resources necessary for tracking progress across multiple sectors, including critical national capacity gaps;
- provide comparative country examples about the multiple factors that can determine the pace of change towards a national environment conducive to peace consolidation;
- strengthen the UN’s capacity for practical guidance to nationally led and UN-supported Monitoring and Tracking Mechanisms.

The briefing paper’s recommendation for a handbook was adopted by the PBC’s Organizational

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Committee in June 2008 and a PBSO-sponsored UN Peace Consolidation Benchmarking Experts workshop was held in New York in November 2008. The background paper produced by the UN for the workshop explicitly acknowledges the genesis of the handbook project in Caplan's briefing paper, in its reference to the *Measuring Peace Consolidation and Supporting Transition* briefing paper that informed this study and the wider peace consolidation benchmarking project [C4].

In 2010, the United Nations, in cooperation with the Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre, published *Monitoring Peace Consolidation: United Nations Practitioners' Guide to Benchmarking* [C5]. The contribution of Caplan's briefing paper is again acknowledged—both directly and indirectly—through the verbatim and paraphrased use of portions of the briefing paper in the guide [C6].

(3) Integrating benchmarking and the use of the handbook within UN policy and practice

Efforts have been under way since 2010 to integrate the guidance into UN practice. These include use in regional training workshops and discussions within PBSO about further development of benchmarking procedures and systems. In December 2012 Caplan was consulted by personnel of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations regarding the preparation of a concept note that led to the adoption by the UN Secretary-General of a 'Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal' in February 2013. The Policy affirms several key principles of sound management of transitions that were articulated in Caplan's study [C2], notably early planning, UN integration, national ownership and national capacity development [C7]. In February 2013 Caplan was invited by the PBSO to undertake further research into political, social and economic indicators of a stable peace in post-conflict settings to assist with strengthening the development of UN benchmarking practices [C8].

Peacebuilding is an increasingly important component of strategy within the international community, but it is a complex and often fraught process. Caplan's research has helped UN institutions develop more systematic criteria for evaluating progress on the road to peace.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [C1] Former Senior Policy Analyst, PBSO, confirms the circulation of Caplan's research within the PBSO and across the UN system.
- [C2] 'Measuring Peace Consolidation and Supporting Transition', an inter-agency briefing paper prepared for the UN Peacebuilding Commission (New York, United Nations, 2008) (copy held on file).
- [C3] 'Consolidated Reply—e-Discussion: Measuring Peace Consolidation and Supporting Transition', 9 April and 15 May 2008, <http://groups.undp.org/read/messages?id=245888>.
- [C4] 'Peace Consolidation Benchmarking', background paper for the United Nations Peace Consolidation Benchmarking Workshop, 17-19 November 2008 (copy on file).
- [C5] United Nations, *Monitoring Peace Consolidation: UN Practitioners' Guide to Benchmarking* (New York: United Nations, 2010), <http://www.unpbf.org/news/united-nations-practitioners%E2%80%99-guide-to-benchmarking>.
- [C6] Senior Researcher, Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies and principal author of *Monitoring Peace Consolidation – United Nations Practitioners' Guide to Benchmarking* (United Nations 2010) confirms that Caplan's study played an 'instrumental role' in the development of the handbook project.
- [C7] 'Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal', internal policy endorsed by the UN Secretary-General on 4 February 2013 (copy on file).
- [C8] Invitation from senior official, PBSO, dated 4 February and 7 May 2013 to assist with further development of benchmarking practices (copy on file).