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Matthew S. Weinert on Constructing Justice and Security after War edited by Charles T. Call. Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2007. 432pp.

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Abstract

A review of:

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This astute volume is a significant addition to the literature on rule of law, institution building, and post-conflict reconciliation. An impressive array of policy and academic experts, many of whom were directly involved in the peace processes about which they write, have produced highly detailed, lucid analyses of justice and security reform in seven countries—Bosnia, East Timor, El Salvador, Haiti, Kosovo, Nicaragua, and South Africa—and one thematic chapter on gender issues. All aim to cull lessons from the specific experiences of justice and security reform in post-conflict societies, and to contribute to theoretical work on state and peace-building. Constructing Justice and Security after War succeeds on both accounts, and proves to be a must-read for all who are interested in issues related to the stabilization of post-conflict societies.

The book begins from a perceived disconnect between existing scholarship on post-conflict reconciliation, rule of law, and state and institution building on the one hand, and the experiences of these countries on the other. Such scholarship, the editor notes, focuses primarily on "long historical patterns and slow-moving factors" rooted in European and North American experiences (16). Post-conflict states of the 1990s do not (and did not) have the luxury of time. Hampered by scarcity of resources and massive "disruptions of population, political regime, and economy," these states faced immediate pressures to reconstruct systems of justice and security (16), often under pressure by and with assistance of international actors. Constructing Justice and Security after War thus asks what we can learn from those experiences and if, moreover, "societies emerging from armed conflict [can] create systems of justice and security that ensure basic rights, apply the law effectively and impartially, and enjoy popular support (6)."

The editor responds with a qualified affirmative—a "yes, but." Yes, because justice and security services and institutions improved in every case examined. But because mistakes were made, resources were limited, and the lofty goals of peace plans—constructed by both national and international agents—were often streamlined or side-stepped in favor of expedient, news-worthy headlines denoting "progress." In summarizing the lessons learned from the case studies, the editor maintains that in most of the countries, new forms of violence and crime increased exponentially within three years after peace (for which national and international agents did not plan or devote adequate resources to combat). The timing and sequencing of demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration programs with respect to elections and "the construction of new security and justice systems" were often uncoordinated (384). And citizen participation in post-conflict processes, though a cornerstone of all the peace plans, was woefully neglected (401).

One particular, compelling aspect of the volume deserves to be highlighted: human security matters. While political violence (for instance, between armed combatants or among ethnic groups) declined after peace in all of the cases, economic violence (i.e. kidnappings, robberies, and organized crime) and social violence (i.e. common crime, youth gang, and family violence) dramatically increased. "In virtually every postwar case," the editor remarks, "public frustration about heightened violent crime and sensations of insecurity emerged within two years after the cessation of hostilities" (377). And such frustration placed considerable strain on already fragile peace and reconciliation processes.

In the end, the authors found, "individual security, or rather *in*security…play[s] an unexpectedly prominent role in the most successful cases of peace consolidation" (15). This unequivocal empirical support of the human security concept, a concept that some have found too broad and therefore too impractical to inform policy and academic analyses, deserves prominent place in approaches to peace consolidation and institution building in post-conflict societies. Citizen participation, "either directly in neighborhood meetings or through civil society intermediaries" (402), must be permitted in the design and implementation of justice and security sector reforms. Unemployed young men, who have proven to be a source of great violence in these countries, must be utilized to the fullest extent possible during reconstruction efforts. International actors must deploy resources to ensure sufficient policing capacity in the period immediately following cessation of hostilities or a negotiated peace. These are a few of many suggestions offered by this most remarkable of books. Anything less could render all efforts towards aid and reconstruction entirely, and woefully, meaningless.

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