A key element missing from *Convergence* is a thorough "no-holds barred" analysis on the effectiveness of programs and friendly networks in combating the threat. Workshops, information sharing, international agreements, and similar programs are undoubtedly steps in the right direction. However, a key question remains unanswered: Are these initiatives making a difference? The authors highlight individual successes, but the work lacks a comprehensive analysis on the overall efficacy of these programs. *IAJ*
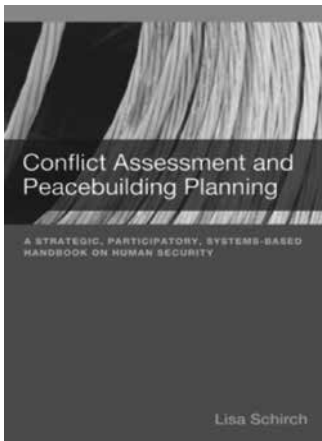
Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning: A Strategic, Participatory, Systems-Based Handbook on Human Security

by Lisa Schirch

Kumarian Press, 250 pp., $22.00.

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Lisa Schirch's volume "aims to improve the effectiveness of peacebuilding by better linking conflict assessment to self-assessment, theories of change, and the design, monitoring, and evaluation of peacebuilding efforts at all levels, from community-based projects to international policies." Her approach shares affinities with other practice-minded studies of conflict mitigation, such as the Berghof Foundation's Advancing Conflict Transformation: The Berghof Handbook II, the U.S. government's "Interagency Conflict and Assessment Framework," and the U.S. Army's Design Methodology. Schirch's contribution represents a thoughtful—and necessary—complement to these predecessors. Yet, I suggest, the volume must be part of a broader, educational effort attuned to the granular realities of conflict dynamics and collective action.

Conflict Assessment and Peacebuilding Planning (CAPP) handbook insists on the use of a structured exploration of peacebuilders' biases and the dynamics of conflict. The book advocates a systems approach, which includes mapping the relationships between "stakeholders" and potential "peacebuilding actors," the "factors driving and mitigating conflict," and "the existing peacebuilding activities taking place in different sectors." These actors, factors, and activities compose an "ecological relationship" characterized by interdependence; hence, the book's approach emphasizes "the importance of understanding the whole system rather than just discrete elements of a conflict."

The author recommends "whole of society" interventions because "neither government nor civil society can build peace alone." Since "peacebuilding includes a wide range of efforts by diverse actors in government and civil society at the community, national, and international levels," the CAPP handbook envisions collective action among multifarious governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Each of these entities is to strive chiefly toward "human security" and accordingly "align" and "link" their more parochial security and organizational interests.

Schirch's volume is to serve as the shared playbook for this coordinated and linked (i.e., "strategic") peacebuilding.

The CAPP handbook includes 13 chapters organized around an explication of five iterative activities. First, self-assessment obliges researchers to "spend less time examining the question of 'What can we do to change them' and more time asking the question of 'What can we do differently that might influence our own role in the conflict?'" Second, conflict assessment requires research in accordance with a journalistic, interrogative framework comprising where, who, why, what, how, and when questions. These questions help researchers uncover a conflict's context, including connections and cleavages among the population, key stakeholders, motivations, grievances, interests, needs, power, means, timelines, and violence-inducing triggers, as well as windows of vulnerability, opportunity, and uncertainty.

Third, the CAPP handbook requires the specification of a theory of change, which "is a statement about how a program hopes to foster change to produce intended outcomes and impacts." Fourth, the author imparts design and planning guidance with an emphasis on "key principles of peacebuilding design," such as the prioritization of local ownership, local leadership, transparency, accountability, and the "do no harm" imperative. Finally, the CAPP handbook offers considerations to help monitor and evaluate "whether the intent of the design matched the impact in the real world."

As a military professional and educator, I see much merit in Schirch's volume. She succeeds in crafting a readable, jargon-free work whose several figures, question sets, and lenses will guide aspiring peacebuilders through conceptual and substantive terrain they would otherwise miss. Its premise is that mindful, systematic research must precede planning and intervention and will productively discomfit those governmental agencies and representatives whose cultural, organizational, and logistical habits discourage sustained research, planning, and cooperative action. Similarly, her emphasis on whole-of-society will force military professionals, whose boots are invariably on the ground in trouble spots, to de-center their approach to conflict intervention by hewing more authentically to a "unified action" mantra, whereby service members work with all partners—governmental, nongovernmental, public, and private—on stabilization and peace.

Yet Schirch's approach does raise questions that relate not to any theoretical weaknesses in her book for it is quite strong, but to the ways in which real wars and conflicts occur. She presents her work as an improvement on other approaches, which tend to fail because they neglect research and planning, local knowledge and dynamics, or assessments. The reader infers that Schirch's is to be the first method that—if adhered to—will be efficacious. But what empirical back-up does she have for such a claim? How can she be sure that whole-of-society is possible and works? Given the reality of complexity that Schirch embraces, what empirical basis do we have to believe that judicious planning really is the one factor among countless others that conduces to hygienic conflict termination? What about the roles of exhaustion, military superiority, coalition building, successful ethnic cleansing and genocide, diplomatic prowess, military strategy, military tactics, fear, financing, foreign intervention, leadership, and good old-fashioned contingency, fog, and friction? When peacebuilding does achieve short-term success via, say, negotiated settlements, how often do these settlements become—over time—counterproductive and bloody? Put simply, what is the author's own "theory of change," such that whole-of-society peacebuilding can overtake these other (often deleterious) factors as the principal cause of peace?

The CAPP handbook envisions strategic planning that "coordinates multiple actors, works at

multiple levels in multiple sectors, and works at both short- and long-term change." What enduring structural factors physically obstruct such coordination? What institutional incentives exist to render Schirch's approach, if not overly optimistic at least a tad too ambitious? What cultural and psychological biases resident among governmental and nongovernmental organizations might render aspects of her approach problematic, even in the wake of a thorough self-assessment?

Despite the foregoing questions, Schirch's volume provokes much less than neglects and "interagency" advocates should study the CAPP handbook. The push for greater "interagency" coordination is well-known; yet, the rhetoric-to-reality ratio remains disappointing. I suspect "whole-of-society" will present an even greater challenge, since the concept is as yet insufficiently theorized, socialized, and, in practice, exponentially more difficult.

I recommend the CAPP handbook as a useful bureaucratic gadfly, but I would supplement it with two texts, each a gateway to further study. First, I recommend The Samaritan's Dilemma: The Political Economy of Development Aid. The authors use Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development Framework to examine—theoretically and empirically—the challenges that confront collective-action problems of the kind peacebuilders encounter. Specifically, aspiring peacebuilders (including military professionals and bureaucrats) should learn to recognize the perverse incentive structures that engender free-riding, moral hazard, principal-agent situations, adverse selection, signaling problems, rent-seeking, and corruption. These pathologies invariably arise in every detail of peacebuilding, but also in every detail of security cooperation, security force assistance, anti-corruption efforts, humanitarian aid, and development assistance.

Second, I suggest aspiring peacebuilders read Stathis Kalyvas's The Logic of Violence in Civil War. This scholarship and others in the same genre (by James Fearon, David Laitin, Paul Collier, Patricia Sullivan, Fotini Christia, Paul Staniland, Elizabeth Wood, Monica Duffy Toft, et al.) have uncovered hidden and counterintuitive dynamics at play that, if known to peacebuilders, might render their interventions more efficacious. Abductive reasoning, or the practice of crafting theory-informed explanations for a specific, real-world problem, is the name of the game. Schirch's volume certainly conduces to abductive reasoning and, thereby, political judgment. But it is a very difficult game indeed, and the integration of expert knowledge of institutional pathology and civil wars can only help. ***IAJ***