Preventing Civil Wars: Lessons for Foreign Policy

GUIDEBOOK FOR PRACTITIONERS

LBJ SCHOOL
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

May 2021

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Introduction

This guidebook, and its associated curriculum, respond to two pressing concerns. First, the vast majority of U.S. officials who work on international diplomacy, development, and security appear to lack significant practical training on strategies to prevent and deescalate civil wars. Second, current U.S. government guidance documents on this topic, such as conflict assessment frameworks, focus mainly on describing the contentious politics of countries, rather than formulating policy responses to minimize violence.[1]

The University of Texas project on "Preventing Civil Wars: Lessons for Foreign Policy" aims to fill such gaps, as recommended recently by experts inside and outside government. In 2019, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) warned that only a few U.S. officials possess expertise in conflict management, and they are pigeon-holed in specialized offices. Foreign policy is thus mainly conducted by officials who lack specialized training on how to reduce violent conflict. CSIS recommended that the U.S. government expand such training to a broad swath of personnel who engage internationally, "moving this from a boutique issue only for some people working only in functional bureaus in some contexts to a core cross-cutting issue that all – whether they are placed in regional or functional bureaus – must acknowledge and appreciate."[2]

Similarly, the U.S. government, in December 2020, published an interagency "Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability," which highlighted the government's dearth of expertise and guidance on policy-making to reduce violence. Accordingly, the strategy pledged to "expand training and tools for U.S. diplomats engaging in fragile countries and regions." Specifically, it said, "State, USAID, and DoD will incorporate lessons into agency training curricula … [and] develop a robust evidence base to … determine the effectiveness of policies and interventions across contexts, conditions, and stakeholders groups."[3] Though some existing training materials touch on policy options,[4] this guidebook aspires to enhance that effort. Ideally, it could contribute to training a wide range of officials,

including those who are in the room when policy decisions are made about foreign civil conflicts.

Over the last three years, the U.S. government has coined a variety of terms for several closely related concepts of preventing violent civil conflict. These include Stabilization,[5] Addressing Global Fragility,[6] Preventing Genocide and Atrocities,[7] and Countering Violent Extremism.[8] The motives for each differ slightly, but the objectives overlap significantly. In every case, the United States advocates a unified, whole-of-government approach to achieve three goals: prevention prior to violence, mitigation during violence, and peacebuilding after violence. This guidebook aims to assist all of those goals.

The seven modules of the guidebook provide key insights from recent scholarship on the causes of violent conflict and how foreign policy can reduce or exacerbate it. Module 1 explains why civil wars ignite and persist longer than seems rational. The subsequent modules analyze policy options to address those root causes. Module 2 examines preventive diplomacy prior to the outbreak of violence. Module 3 explores how the design of constitutions may prevent or help end civil war. Module 4 discusses how and why peace processes may succeed, fail, or backfire. Module 5 examines the challenge of implementing peace agreements. Module 6 elucidates how and why well-intentioned intervention may backfire in predictable ways that can and should be avoided. Lastly, Module 7 offers case studies illustrating lessons from the preceding modules. The guidebook may be read on its own, or in conjunction with our project's 350-page curriculum of edited readings providing further detail and evidence.

Conflict management is especially challenging because it is rife with dilemmas.[9] Sometimes it is possible to achieve justice or peace, but rarely both simultaneously. Mitigating violence in the short run may perpetuate underlying conflict, thereby fostering greater violence in the long run. Forceful intervention almost inevitably causes collateral damage, raising questions about the ethics of killing some civilians to save others. Preventive diplomacy, which can avert civil war at low cost, is neglected because foreign policy tends to focus on conflicts

that already are violent. Finally, the responsibility to protect civilians in a foreign country may conflict with the right of people in that country to control their own destiny. Fortunately, by studying how potential remedies interact with causes of violence, readers of this guidebook may be better equipped to formulate strategies to maximize achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals.

Module 1: Civil War Roots

Key Points
- Civil war is most likely when large ethnic groups are excluded from political power, but less likely when different ethnic groups have some things in common – such as religion, economic class, or neighborhood.
- Rebels are sometimes motivated by greed – especially when the government is weak, natural resources can be stolen and sold, and the terrain provides natural defenses.
- Leaders resist compromise to end civil war because it could imply that past casualties and other sacrifices were meaningless.
- Civil wars now rarely end in victory but more commonly in negotiated agreement or frozen conflict, after which the fighting often recurs but typically at a lower level, so that repeated peacemaking may be necessary.

Understanding why civil war ignites, and persists longer than seems rational, is crucial to designing strategies that reduce rather than exacerbate violence. This first module explores why opposing sides resort to violence and refuse to compromise for peace. The subsequent modules assess policy options to address these root causes. Rebels are commonly motivated by grievance but sometimes also by greed, and states are especially leery of compromises that risk territorial disintegration.

4 Causes of Rebellion
Gurr famously identified four main factors that foster rebellion: (1) salient ethnic identity distinct from the country's nationality; (2) grievance based on *perceived relative deprivation* – that is, obtaining less power or wealth than a group feels entitled to;

(3) capacity to mobilize for collective forceful action; and (4) perceived opportunity for victory due to factors such as state weakness.[10] (See Figure 1.)

Recent research supports this theory and refutes previous skeptics.[11] In the most rigorous study of grievance, Cederman, et al., confirm that rebellion is most likely when relatively large ethnic groups are excluded from political power. This is especially true if they have recently lost power, or previously engaged in violent conflict, both of which amplify grievance and identity salience.[12]

Figure 1. Explaining Rebellion

Gurr's Four Causes of Rebellion
1. Identity Salience
2. Grievance
3. Mobilization Capacity
4. Political Opportunity

However, identity salience is lower if groups have crosscutting cleavages – meaning ethnicity does not overlap with economic, religious, or regional differences. Such crosscutting inhibits rebel mobilization by shrinking the number of people who share identity-based grievance and thus can trust each other to coordinate an uprising. Countries with low rather than high levels of ethnic crosscutting are three-and-a half times more likely to suffer civil war, according to Gubler and Selway (Figure 2).[13] Some of this correlation may be due to reverse causation – because war may erode crosscutting cleavages – but high crosscutting likely also inhibits war.

Greed hypotheses argue that some rebels are motivated by wealth and power even in the absence

of identity-based grievance. If so, rebellion would require only two of Gurr's four factors – political opportunity and mobilization capacity. Quantitative studies suggest that rebellion is indeed more likely in weak states, especially if they have natural resources that can be easily exploited – such as minerals, timber, and illicit drugs – and rough terrain inaccessible to government forces.[14]

Figure 2. Crosscutting Cleavages & Civil War
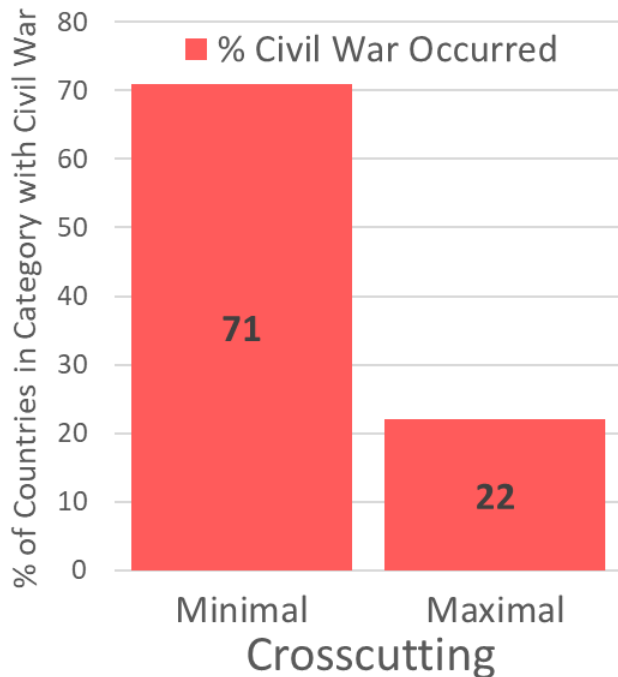
Source: Olivia Hay, based on Gubler and Selway (2012), for years 1945–99.
Note: Crosscutting minimal is low ethnic-crosscutting with all three: income, geography, and religion. Maximal is high ethnic-crosscutting with all three.

Obstacles to Peace
Regardless of how civil wars start, greed also may become an obstacle to ending them, because certain actors benefit from ongoing violence, as Keen explains. Prolonged fighting makes it easier for warlords and states to exploit labor and natural resources, and to profit from the distribution of humanitarian aid. Accordingly, peacemakers must design strategies that address this *political economy of civil war*.[15]

Human psychology and domestic political factors also perpetuate civil wars. For example, combatants' past sacrifices – including leaving their families, living in harsh conditions, suffering injuries, and losing

comrades – make it hard for them to consider compromise even when it would offer a better outcome.[16] Relatedly, political leaders who started a civil war worry that any outcome short of victory might spotlight their initial error of judgment, exposing them to retribution from constituents.[17]

Secessionist civil wars are difficult to end because regionally concentrated rebels can mobilize more easily, and states fear that concessions would risk territorial disintegration. Governments are especially reluctant to compromise with such a movement if the state also faces other potential secessionist regions, according to Walter.[18]

Figure 3. Dramatic Change in Civil War Outcomes
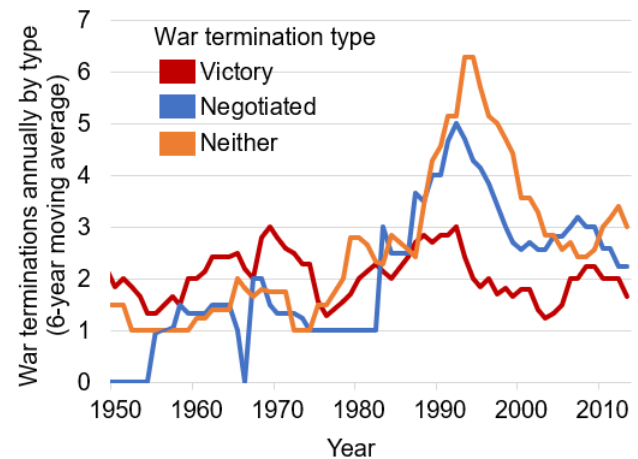
Source: Olivia Hay, based on Merz (2012) and UCDP data on internal armed conflict and internationalized internal conflict, for years 1950 – 2013.

During the last quarter-century, the typical path of civil wars has changed dramatically, as documented by Merz. Victory by one side, which used to be the most common outcome, is now less common than negotiated agreement (peace deal or ceasefire), and the most common outcome is *frozen conflict* in which violence wanes without agreement or victory (Figure 3). This has both good and bad consequences, as recent civil wars are considerably shorter but more likely to lapse back into violence within five years because they lack a decisive victory. A silver lining is that renewed fighting tends to be less violent. War that recurs following a negotiated agreement is on average less than one-fifth as deadly per year as the preceding round of violence. Renewal of fighting is most likely in frozen conflicts,

but the death rate in such recurrences is also the lowest on average. Together, this evidence suggests that civil wars are becoming less deadly – possibly due to increased international conflict management efforts and fewer proxy wars after the Cold War. However, it also means that repeated rounds of peacemaking may be required to end civil wars durably.[19]

Module 2: Prevention

Key Points
- Preventive action can sometimes avert violence, but some strategies – including democratization, economic sanctions, and military intervention – may exacerbate conflict, so additional options should be explored.
- Less risky strategies include promoting nonviolent resistance movements as the alternative to rebellion, and punishing states that attack nonviolent protesters.
- Another prudent option is to support inter-ethnic peace committees, which jointly investigate and adjudicate alleged ethnic crimes, to reduce vigilante retaliation and riots.

Preventive action is potentially the most efficient form of conflict management, because relatively low-cost approaches can avert the outbreak or resumption of violence. Prevention often aims to address causes of rebellion identified in Module 1, such as political exclusion and inadequate crosscutting cleavages, thereby reducing grievance, identity salience, and mobilization capacity for violence. Some common preventive strategies include democracy promotion, economic sanctions, and military intervention. However, these also risk fueling violence, as detailed below and in Module 6. By contrast, other prevention strategies are lower cost, less risky, and potentially more effective. One option is to support nonviolent resistance as the alternative to rebellion. Another is to promote crosscutting cleavages – via inter-ethnic professional associations, joint peace committees to address

rumors of ethnic violence, and electoral rules that incentivize multi-ethnic political campaigns.

Timely Intervention
Early action is crucial for prevention, but it may be difficult to know where precisely to focus resources, because statistical early-warning models are beset by false positives.[20] For example, one of the most prominent scholarly forecasting tools claims to have predicted in retrospect 18 of 21 country-years of instability in a decade – a remarkable 86-percent accuracy.[21] Upon closer inspection, however, the model actually predicted 251 country-years of instability to find those 18, so its false positive rate was 93-percent (Figure 4). If such a model were used to guide future prevention efforts, the vast majority of resources could be wasted. This underscores the potential comparative value of *qualitative* conflict analysis, based on deeper exploration of a country's actors, history, fragility, and resiliencies – especially if integrated with an understanding of the causal mechanisms of violent conflict and mitigation efforts.[22]

Figure 4. Early-Warning Models and False Positives

Country-Years of Instability, 1995-2004			
	Actual		
	Yes	**No**	**Accuracy**
Predicted Yes	**18**	**233**	**7% (18/251)**
Predicted No	3	992	

Source: Goldstone, et al. (2010).

Preventive action can be either structural or acute. Structural prevention is typically longer term and may include promoting economic growth or modifying a country's regime or political institutions – but these also pose significant risks. For example, democratization is statistically correlated with increased incidence of civil war,[23] and economic liberalization often creates grievance that can fuel violence.[24]

Acute preventive action is typically a response to crisis. Tactics may include issuing deterrent threats against a state or its domestic rebels. More coercive

forms of acute prevention, including sanctions and military intervention, raise larger risks and should be weighed against safer alternatives.

Nonviolent Resistance

Nonviolent resistance has at least two favorable attributes: it typically does <u>not</u> provoke large-scale retaliatory state violence, yet it sometimes <u>can</u> achieve political change that redresses grievance. For both the international community and local populations, therefore, nonviolence may be preferable to rebellion, which is much more likely to spur massacres (Figure 5). Although nonviolent resistance also entails risk, it succeeds more often than commonly believed,[25] and Appendix 1 lists 116 nonviolent campaigns that have achieved regime change, secession, or self-determination over the past four decades alone. Chenoweth argues that nonviolent movements are more likely than rebellions to succeed because they engage broad public participation and thereby encourage defections from empathetic regime officials.[26] Popovic identifies four key tactics for success of these movements: making specific demands, forging a broad coalition, targeting key pillars of the regime including security forces, and scrupulously avoiding violence.[27] However, in practice, such movements often contain elements of at least "unarmed violence," which may not always be counter-productive.[28]

Documented nonviolent uprisings have increased in recent years, especially 2019. However, their average efficacy has decreased, apparently because organizational strategy is weak and regimes have learned how to counter them.[29] Recent movements tend to employ less confrontational approaches such as public gatherings, rather than challenging regime stability via general strikes, sit-ins, sabotage, or mass civil disobedience. Their growing reliance on social media also has increased vulnerability to state surveillance and disruption.[30]

Foreign policy can help such movements by training protest leaders, imposing sanctions on states that harm nonviolent protesters, and aiding victims.[31] Promotion of nonviolent resistance does not always succeed but has relatively low cost and risk, and thus is a prudent tool of preventive conflict management.

Figure 5. Nonviolence is Less Likely to Provoke Massacres
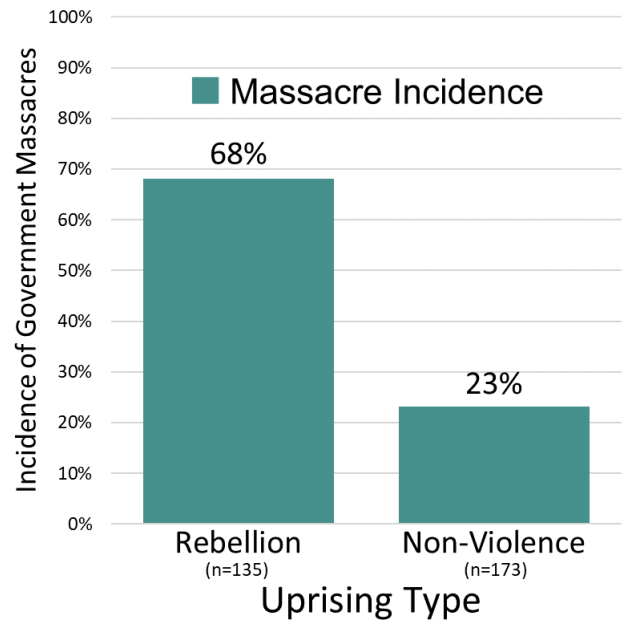
Source: Perkoski and Chenoweth (2018), for years 1955 – 2013. Note: Massacre means the government killed at least 1,000 noncombatants in response to the uprising.

Mitigating Rumors

Riots may be triggered by rumors of inter-ethnic crimes, so a key prevention tactic is to counter misinformation and disinformation. Examining India from 1950 to 1995, Varshney discovered that rumors were less likely to spur riots in cities where Muslims and Hindus interacted regularly.[32] Such interaction was either informal among families – mitigating the mutual demonization that can sustain rumors – or formal in professional associations like unions, creating economic incentives for inter-group cooperation. This often gave rise to local inter-ethnic "peace committees," which investigated rumors, such as a Hindu killing a Muslim. If such a rumor were disproved, the Muslim members reassured their community that no crime had occurred. But if it were confirmed, the Hindu members punished the offender themselves, via *in-group policing*, so the Muslim community felt justice had been served and did not pursue vigilante retribution.

In the West, too, riots are inflamed by false information, facilitated by social media. For example, near Paris in 2019, rumors spread on Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter that ethnic Roma kidnappers were stealing children and trafficking

their organs. Because there was little interaction with this ostracized community, the rumors were not quashed, and 19 Parisians were arrested for organizing and perpetrating revenge attacks. Local police belatedly dispelled the rumors on social media as "fake news."[33]

Although foreign assistance cannot forge inter-ethnic civil society overnight, it can create mechanisms analogous to peace committees. As detailed in Module 7, an international non-governmental organization (NGO) has established text-based services for local residents to submit rumors to an inter-ethnic team, which either dispels them or confirms them after warning officials to prepare for potential backlash. This approach has been employed to mitigate violence in countries such as South Sudan and could be replicated elsewhere, providing another low-cost, low-risk approach to effective prevention of violence.

Module 3: Constitutional Design

> **Key Points**
> - The two main constitutional approaches to preventing civil war rely on opposite strategies: promoting either separate ethnic identities or a unified national one.
> - *Power-sharing* reinforces separate identities by guaranteeing each group a share of government power and benefits, to reduce grievance and fear. However, this also increases the groups' ability to mobilize, and weakens the central government, potentially fostering rebellion in the long run.
> - *Centripetalism* promotes a unified national identity by increasing incentives for candidates to campaign for the votes of other ethnicities. However, if an election results in an ethnic group being excluded from power, it could fuel grievance leading to violence.
> - To create durable peace, the best strategy may be a two-step constitutional reform, starting with power-sharing to end civil war, then switching to centripetalism to promote a unified national identity.

Constitutions in multi-ethnic societies can be structured to reduce risks of inter-group violence, but only some strategies are both ethical and effective. Esman identifies three main historical approaches.[34] First, the government can de-pluralize, meaning outlaw all ethnic identities except the country's nationality. This approach includes genocide and mass expulsions, but also lawful means such as incentivized assimilation. A second path is to reduce the political salience of ethnic identity by prohibiting or disincentivizing ethnic politics in favor of crosscutting politics. The third option legitimizes pluralism by dividing power among existing ethnic groups, aiming to reduce grievance and competition that could spiral into violence. This module focuses on strategies in the latter two categories (Figure 6).

Tradeoffs
Power-sharing, including a prominent approach known as *consociationalism*,[35] promotes peace by guaranteeing each ethnic group a share of political power, while also protecting them against encroachment on their basic rights by other groups. Features may include autonomy for groups or regions where they are concentrated, electoral systems based on proportional representation, veto power over constitutional reform, and quotas in schools, civil service, and the military. Power-sharing is common in peace agreements to end civil war, when the priority is to reduce inter-group political competition and fear to disincentivize violence. However, power-sharing also has downsides in the long-run: reinforcing separate ethnic identities, facilitating ethnic mobilization, undermining a common national identity, and hindering collective action for the common good. These can contribute to inefficiency at best or violence at worst. For example, under autonomy, educational institutions in different communities may teach opposing nationalist histories, thereby perpetuating conflict.

Centripetalism aims to reduce such risks by incentivizing cooperation between different identity groups during political campaigns. Electoral rules can encourage politicians of one ethnicity to appeal to voters of another – for example, by requiring candidates to obtain a threshold level of votes from multiple regions. Another mechanism is ranked-choice voting, which motivates ethnic candidates to

work to be at least the second choice of voters of other ethnicities. Alternatively, the constitution can simply require political parties to be multiethnic. Centripetalism, unlike power-sharing, may reduce the salience of ethnic identity that can contribute to conflict. However, centripetalism is not without risks, including that political campaigns might rely on deals between ethnic elites that foster corruption. Another danger is that some identity-based groups could end up excluded from political power, fostering grievance and potentially violence.

Figure 6. Two Constitutional Strategies

	Power-Sharing	Centripetalism
Goal	Reduce fear & grievance	Strengthen cooperation & national identity
Mechanism	Proportional representation & benefits	Electoral incentives for inter-group campaigns
Strength	Helps achieve peace deals	Promotes national identity & government efficiency
Drawback	Undermines national identity & government efficiency	Electoral losers may feel grievance

Picking a Strategy
The ideal constitutional design for conflict management depends in part on timing. During and immediately after a civil war, when fear and distrust are heightened, power-sharing is the safer choice. Later in the peacebuilding phase, however, centripetalism can promote government efficiency and unified national identity. Thus, peacemakers in civil war should consider a constitutional two-step: power-sharing to end the war, followed by centripetalism to build the peace.[36]

Optimizing constitutions to manage conflict may also depend on the number, relative strength, and territorial distribution of ethnic groups. Centripetal mechanisms are more effective when many ethnic groups are roughly the same size and geographically interspersed. By contrast, where ethnic minorities fear the dominance of a majority group, or where ethnic groups are concentrated geographically, power-sharing may work better.[37]

Module 4: Peace Processes

Key Points
- A mediator can succeed without coercion, but only if the opposing sides already have exhausted attempts at escalation so they are open to a negotiated peace.
- Absent such a military stalemate, mediation can work only by using coercion, but this risks triggering a violent backlash that could harm civilians, so it should be attempted only if the mediator also is willing to deploy a protective force if necessary.
- Spoilers may reject a peace deal out of fear or greed, which mediators can address using a combination of security guarantees, inducements, and sanctions.

Third-party mediation can facilitate peace processes but raises risks if coercion is used. According to *ripeness* theory, opposing sides in a civil war will not even consider compromise until locked in a *mutually hurting stalemate*, meaning they are suffering and unable to escalate to victory. After such a stalemate is reached, non-coercive mediation may persuade the sides that negotiation offers the possibility of a mutually beneficial peace agreement.[38] Prior to a stalemate, mediators can use coercion to forge peace, but this may inadvertently escalate violence.

Interactive Problem-Solving
Non-coercive mediation ideally involves *interactive problem-solving*.[39] For example, a mediator may host informal dialogue between influential but unofficial representatives of the conflicting parties – such as community leaders, parliamentarians, ex-officials, journalists, and academics. Bringing opposing sides together in an intimate setting can help overcome mutual demonization that inhibits compromise. Confidentiality is also key, so participants can brainstorm potential solutions that might harm their reputations if publicized. Participants then return to their communities where they can influence officials to consider a formal deal. For official peace talks, many experts advocate broad inclusion of traditionally neglected or victimized groups including women and youth.[40] In practice, however, mediators may confine initial participation

to armed faction representatives, in hopes of simplifying negotiations to expedite an end to violence. In that case, inclusion should be broadened during implementation, such as when writing a new constitution.

Muscular Mediation

International coercion to facilitate a peace agreement has been dubbed *muscular mediation,* comprising three steps (Figure 7).[41] First, the mediator proposes a peace agreement entailing mutual compromise, but both sides may reject it because they still hope to achieve a better outcome on the battlefield. Next, the mediator coerces the stronger side by reducing its relative power until it accepts the deal. Such coercion may comprise sanctions, military aid to the weaker side, or direct military intervention. Finally, the mediator coerces the other side, by threatening to reverse its recent gains, until it too accepts the deal.

Figure 7. Muscular Mediation

Mediator Steps

1. Draft Compromise

2. Aid A, Punish B

3. Threaten A
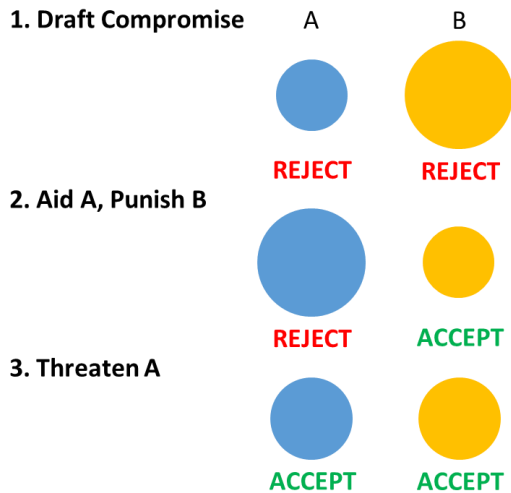
Source: Based on Kuperman (2021).
Note: Circle area represents relative strength of the opposing sides A and B, who either reject or accept the mediator's proposed compromise.

Ideally, muscular mediation pushes both sides towards a deal that ends violence. However, if poorly designed, it may backfire by incentivizing violent escalation, including against civilians. Such unintended consequences are especially likely if the mediator threatens the vital interests of an armed faction but is unwilling to deploy sufficient forces to

protect against a violent backlash. If the mediator lacks political will for military intervention, it should avoid coercion.

Spoilers

Even when negotiations achieve an agreement, peace processes may still be threatened by *spoilers* who oppose the deal and seek to block its implementation.[42] Spoilers may arise because the mediator excluded them from negotiations, or because they chose not to negotiate or splintered from a party that did. The spoilers either don't like the terms of an agreement, or they fear the opposing side will violate it. Accordingly, they may seek to change the deal to obtain greater concessions, or to kill it entirely.

A mediator can pursue at least four strategies to address spoilers: (1) provide a s*ecurity guarantee* to alleviate concerns about cheating; (2) reward parties who comply with the deal, and sanction those who don't; (3) utilize a *departing-train strategy*, portraying the peace deal as unstoppable so that spoilers feel they must join quickly to share its rewards; or (4) threaten to halt mediation, but only if the mediator is confident the spoilers are bluffing and would prefer the peace deal to renewed war, because otherwise this tactic could escalate violence.

Module 5: Peacebuilding

Key Points
- Post-conflict peacebuilding is less risky if pursued gradually rather than with rapid democratization and liberalization that may increase risks of civil war.
- Following a peace deal, deploying peacekeeping forces or monitors can reduce fears of cheating and thus promote compliance.
- To achieve both peace and justice, the best strategy may be to offer amnesty to end the war, then later pursue prosecution after peace is consolidated.
- Grassroots reconciliation can be achieved either face-to-face, or more efficiently via nationwide media efforts.

8

Whether war is ended via negotiation, or averted by prevention, follow-on peacebuilding can help avert future violence. If pursued too quickly, however, some traditional approaches – including democratization, refugee return, and liberalization of the economy and media – may undermine peace, as detailed in Module 6. It is safer to pursue incremental steps: improving security for civilians, incorporating former rebels into politics and society, and implementing dispute resolution mechanisms. Since peace deals often leave some issues unresolved to expedite the halt of violence, it is important during implementation that "the conversation continues, but with a broader group of participants, over a longer period of time," to evolve from mere conflict management to genuine *conflict resolution*.[43] However, pursuit of justice must be careful not to reignite violence. Power-sharing, which may be necessary to end a civil war, can later give way to centripetalism that enhances government efficiency and promotes a unified national identity.

Peacekeeping and Disarmament
Peacebuilding requires former enemies to trust each other's commitments, including demobilization and disarmament. However, combatants typically are reluctant to disarm and demobilize because they fear their opponents will renege. Incentives such as job training often prove inadequate, and weapons buyback programs may actually backfire if rebels turn in decrepit arms just to get money to buy better ones.[44] To guard against cheating, international actors can provide security guarantees, ranging from just verbal pledges to actual deployment of peacekeeping forces.[45] A middle option is to dispatch credible third-party monitors from an international or regional organization, to provide transparency that can both deter cheating and reduce fear of compliance. The international community may also need to prevent nefarious foreign actors from taking sides and reigniting violence.[46]
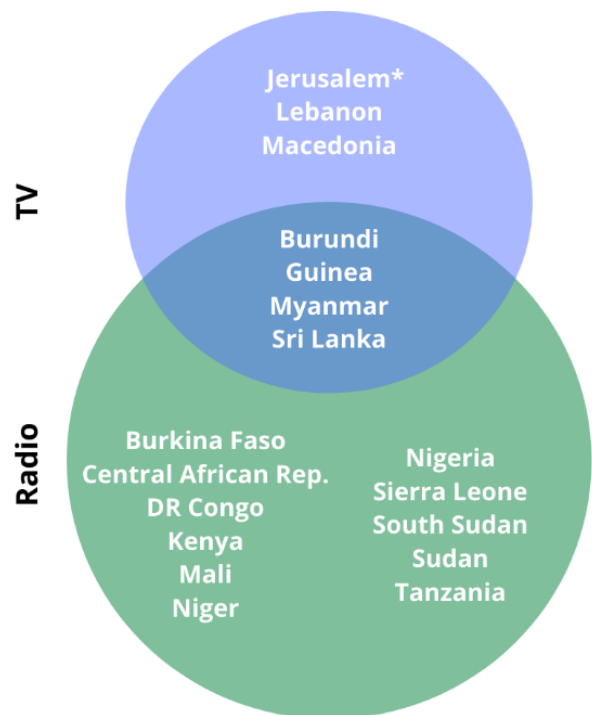
Transitional Justice
The dilemma between peace and justice can be overcome in some cases by proper sequencing, according to Hayner.[47] Demanding justice prematurely, before combatants are reintegrated

into society, may backfire if the alleged perpetrators would prefer to resume fighting than spend years in jail. It is generally more prudent for a peace deal to grant amnesty for past crimes, and for the international community to eschew extraterritorial justice at least initially.[48] However, this need not foster impunity, because civil society can and often does demand justice retroactively, after peace is consolidated, when it is harder for ex-combatants to remobilize. Delaying justice thus does not necessarily deny it, but may actually facilitate the achievement of both peace and justice in the long run. A cautionary note is that revoking amnesty retroactively could make it harder in the future to end wars by offering amnesty.

Transitional justice is often pursued via *truth and reconciliation commissions*, which can take on a variety of tasks. They may publish victim narratives, investigate crimes for prosecution, exchange amnesty for confession, or authorize reparations. The goals typically are to provide psychological closure for survivors, deter future crimes, and promote societal reconciliation.[49]

Figure 8. Radio & TV for Peacebuilding

TV

Jerusalem*
Lebanon
Macedonia

Burundi
Guinea
Myanmar
Sri Lanka

Radio

Burkina Faso
Central African Rep.
DR Congo
Kenya
Mali
Niger

Nigeria
Sierra Leone
South Sudan
Sudan
Tanzania

*Note: Includes only the current initiatives of Search for Common Ground. *The Jerusalem station's audience includes both Israelis and Palestinians.*

Bottom-up Peacebuilding

In contrast to strategies that reconcile a country's elites so that peace can trickle down to society, some initiatives focus on bottom-up reconciliation. The scope of such efforts can range from face-to-face meetings in a village, to nationwide broadcasts on radio, television, or Internet. Local initiatives focus on topics such as psychosocial trauma of war, indigenous reconciliation mechanisms, and peace committees.[50] National efforts can be more efficient, so long as they also reflect local concerns. An illustration is Talking Drum Studio, a radio station in Sierra Leone created by an international NGO, Search for Common Ground.[51] This project fostered post-war reconciliation via a popular soap opera in which the characters themselves confronted and overcame inter-group distrust. The station also provided objective information about politics, to dispel rumors and help build faith in elections. Such media approaches are a relatively inexpensive way to address grassroots hostility that can hinder peacebuilding, and the NGO is currently utilizing it via both radio and TV in 18 countries (Figure 8).

Module 6: Backfire Risks

Key Points
- Intervention based on fake news may reward deception and escalate violence, so it is vital to vet media claims and avoid rushed decisions, despite political pressure.
- Granting regional autonomy to appease the grievance of a minority group may facilitate secessionist war – by bolstering the group's identity and ability to mobilize violence.
- Sanctioning a developing country for ostensible human rights violations, which actually are justifiable efforts to build a strong state, may weaken the government and make it vulnerable to civil war that could inflict much more harm on civilians.
- Pressuring countries to rapidly liberalize their politics, economy, and media can exacerbate inter-group grievances that lead to violence, so gradual reform is safer.

Well-intentioned efforts to reduce violent conflict can backfire in predictable ways. It is vital to learn and apply these lessons to avoid repeating past mistakes.

Propaganda

States and rebel groups sometimes engage in propaganda to win international sympathy by falsely accusing the other side of crimes, as documented by Honig and Reichard.[52] When the international community is duped, it may intervene in ways that unintentionally exacerbate violence, reward deception, and assist malicious actors. This problem is especially prevalent when the disinformation aligns with interveners' biases. One way to mitigate this pathology is to avoid precipitous actions, such as the U.S.-led military intervention in Libya in 2011, which was launched barely a month into the conflict on the basis of dubious claims of impending genocide.[53] Another prophylactic is to employ Red Teams to vet claims made by conflict parties and news media. However, outright censorship can be counter-productive by also blocking lifesaving information. Facebook discovered this in 2019, when it shut accounts linked to Myanmar rebel groups, but human rights groups complained that it deprived them of crucial intelligence about at-risk civilians.[54]

Regional Autonomy

A common prescription to prevent civil war – granting political autonomy to regionally concentrated ethnic groups – is also one of the most perilous. The logic of this approach is to reduce grievance that could trigger rebellion.[55] However, regional autonomy also exacerbates other factors that may facilitate rebellion: identity salience, mobilization capacity, and political opportunity (since the state is weakened). The most elegant study of this dynamic, by Svante Cornell, examined nine ethnic enclaves in the Caucasus, of which four were randomly granted regional autonomy by the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s.[56] Five decades later, when the Soviet Union disintegrated, only the four autonomous enclaves launched secessionist rebellions – and three succeeded (Figure 9). A lesson is that although autonomy might sometimes avert civil violence in the short run, it appears to foster secessionist war in the long run.

Figure 9. Regional Autonomy Fosters Secession in Caucasus

Ethnic Enclave in Caucasus	Territorial Autonomy? (1920s-30s)	Violent Secession? (1990s)
Armenians (Azerbaijan)	✓	✓
Abkhaz (Georgia)	✓	✓
S. Ossetians (Georgia)	✓	✓
Ajars (Georgia)	✓	
Azeris (Armenia)		
Lezgins (Azerbaijan)		
Talysh (Azerbaijan)		
Armenians (Georgia)		
Azeris (Georgia)		

Source: Cornell (2002).

Sanctioning Human Rights Violators

Historically, the creation of successful states – which can extract resources, provide services, and establish a national identity – has required a degree of coercion. Today, however, the international community sanctions developing countries for human rights violations if they employ such coercion. This perpetuates weak states, making them vulnerable to civil war that could inflict much more harm on civilians, according to Ayoob.[57] To protect human rights in the long run, the international community should consider tolerating in the short run coercive measures by developing states that are legitimately aimed at state-building.

Liberalizing Too Quickly

International pressure to liberalize a country's political and economic institutions may unintentionally promote violent conflict, as Paris explains.[58] For example, scheduling elections soon after a peace deal exacerbates political polarization and bolsters extremist candidates. Economic liberalization – including cutting state jobs and subsidies, and eliminating trade protection from foreign imports – fuels at least short-term unemployment and inflation that amplify grievances. A safer post-war approach is to delay elections in favor of transitional power-sharing for several years until fear and resentment recede,[59] and to pursue only gradual economic reform. Media privatization also should be incremental, to guard against incendiary messaging.

Module 7: Case Studies

Key Points
- Prevention strategies are illustrated in three recent cases: the peaceful overthrow of Sudan's longtime dictator; a text-based project to address rumors of violence in South Sudan; and inter-ethnic peace committees in Nigeria.
- Peace process and constitutional design challenges are explored in four cases: Northern Ireland, where confidential negotiations facilitated a peace deal; Lebanon and Burundi, where constitutions struggled to reduce the salience of ethnic identity; and Nepal, where power-sharing had to be expanded to avert resurgent war.
- Peacebuilding failure is exemplified by three cases – Angola, Mozambique, and Colombia – where inadequate reintegration of former rebels enabled resurgent fighting.

Lessons from the preceding modules are highlighted in case studies around the world.

Prevention

The peaceful overthrow of Sudan's longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir, in 2019, highlights non-violent resistance and crosscutting cleavages. Despite the country's ethnic divisions, which had spawned multiple civil wars since the 1950s, pro-democracy campaigners successfully forged a crosscutting movement. They expressed clear demands and then engaged in sustained peaceful protests, sparking some violent retaliation but ultimately persuading the state's security services to switch sides.[60] The U.S. government previously had backed Sudanese rebels diplomatically or militarily in civil wars that had killed millions – in Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and the country's south – on the assumption that rebellion was the only path to liberation. However, the revolution of 2019 demonstrated that nonviolent resistance sometimes can achieve more, and at lower human cost, even in an ethnically divided society confronting a ruthless autocrat.

The neighboring country of South Sudan illustrates how technological innovation can address rumors to prevent violence. An international NGO, the Sentinel Project, sponsored a local initiative called Hagiga Wahid ("One Truth"), enabling residents to submit by text message rumors of inter-group violence.[61] Local authorities and community representatives then investigate, and if a rumor is disproved, a correction is immediately texted to subscribers. However, if a rumor is confirmed, the group first contacts local officials to implement mitigation measures, and only then informs subscribers.

Nigeria demonstrates the potential of inter-ethnic peace committees to prevent violence via joint inquiry and in-group policing. In the country's central plateau, farmers and herders sporadically compete violently over scarce land, and in 2018 this caused 1,800 deaths in just six months. Volunteers responded by forming inter-ethnic patrols, which mediated local disputes before they could escalate, and apprehended alleged perpetrators to avert cycles of revenge attacks.[62]

Peace Processes and Constitutional Design
Northern Ireland highlights confidential mediation, third-party security guarantees, and power-sharing. The violence between Catholics pursuing secession from the United Kingdom, and Protestants opposing it, reached a stalemate in the early 1970s, creating ripeness for negotiations. Confidential mediation then enabled the insurgents' representative in 1993 to accept a compromise behind closed doors that he previously had rejected in public. The United States also helped overcome mutual distrust by serving as a third-party guarantor to forge the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement, which utilized power-sharing to further alleviate fear.[63]

Lebanon illuminates the challenge of designing constitutions for conflict management. The country's electoral system had included both power-sharing quotas for legislative seats, and centripetal multi-sectarian voting districts to incentivize politicians to campaign across sect lines. However, this latter provision eventually caused grievance among Christians who resented that elections for "their" seats could be swayed by Muslim voters. Accordingly, Christian legislators joined with

similarly upset Shiites in a parliamentary committee, voting to eliminate the centripetal mechanism.[64] This underscores how power-sharing may reinforce the salience of separate identities, thereby hindering other constitutional efforts to forge a unified national identity.

Figure 10. Illustrative Case Studies

Prevention
Sudan
South Sudan
Nigeria

Peace Processes & Constitutional Design
Northern Ireland
Lebanon
Burundi
Nepal

Peacebuilding
Angola
Mozambique
Colombia

Burundi's 2005 constitution, which helped end a genocidal civil war, combined power-sharing quotas with a requirement that political parties run multi-ethnic lists of candidates. The latter provision reduced the ethnic nature of parties, so that political competition could focus more on crosscutting issues.[65] However, in 2018, the ruling party spearheaded a constitutional reform eliminating some power-sharing provisions without adding centripetal ones, so ethnic politics may yet resurge.[66]

Nepal provides lessons about peace processes, spoilers, and constitutional design. A 2006 deal to end a ten-year civil war was based on transitional power-sharing between ethnic minority political parties and Maoist rebels, who together were to rule by consensus. However, the deal excluded the

ethnic majority Madhesi, who reacted by launching their own rebellion. These new spoilers were mollified by amending the constitution to increase Madhesi representation and then transition to majority rule.[67] Nepal demonstrates how peace talks sometimes are expedited by including only the most powerful factions, but this may create need for more inclusive participation at a later stage.

Peacebuilding

Angola shows that quick post-war elections can be especially dangerous, and underscores the need for transitional power-sharing, security guarantees, and strategies to address spoilers.[68] The country's civil war erupted in 1975 and killed tens of thousands prior to a 1991 peace deal. However, when the former rebels lost the first election in 1992, they refused to accept the outcome. The United States failed to coerce these spoilers and instead pressured the government to appease them. When that misguided U.S. effort failed, violence reignited, killing more Angolans in the 10 years after the election than the 17 years of preceding war.

Mozambique illustrates how such election fragility may persist if former rebels are insufficiently reintegrated. The country's war ignited in 1977 and ostensibly ended in 1992, when the government and rebels signed a peace agreement. However, in 2009, when the ex-rebel candidate garnered only 16 percent of the presidential vote, he resumed fighting.[69] The new violence was far less deadly, killing only dozens, but compelled the government to negotiate, which boosted the ex-rebels at the polls. This underscores that peacebuilding must provide former combatants better opportunities in civil society than they perceive in returning to war.

Colombia reinforces many peacebuilding lessons, including about security guarantees and transitional justice. The country's civil war lasted half a century and killed more than 200,000. In 2016, the main rebel group signed a peace agreement, earning Colombia's president the Nobel Peace Prize. However, in the absence of a third-party guarantor, the government reneged on its pledges to provide infrastructure and security in rebel areas, and 500 community activists were killed, reigniting local grievances. The peace deal also failed to provide

substantial power-sharing, so when the ex-rebels lost elections, they perceived more to gain from resuming violence. The country's new president compounded this problem by prematurely calling to revoke amnesty and prosecute former rebels. By 2019, more than 40 percent of the ex-rebels had remobilized, and the renewed fighting had displaced over 200,000 civilians.[70]

Conclusion

This guidebook and its associated curriculum offer lessons to inform foreign policy to prevent civil war. However, that objective can be achieved only if the U.S. government provides such training widely, beyond specialist offices, to personnel ranging from those making policy at the top to those implementing it on the front lines. Considering the potential consequences of civil wars – including regional insecurity, refugee flows, violent extremism, weapons proliferation, economic decline, humanitarian suffering, and deployment of U.S. forces – such an investment in prevention could yield large returns.

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Appendix 1. Successful Nonviolent Campaigns, 1979 – 2019

START	END	COUNTRY	CAMPAIGN	START	END	COUNTRY	CAMPAIGN
1979	1985	Taiwan	Pro-democracy	2001	2001	Philippines	2nd People Power
1980	1989	Poland	Solidarity		2001	Zambia	Anti-Chiluba
1983	1986	Philippines	People Power	2002	2002	Nepal	Anti-government
	1989	Chile	Anti-Pinochet		2002	Venezuela	Anti-coup
1984	1985	South Africa	Second Defiance		2006	Madagascar	Pro-democracy
	1994	Brazil	Diretas ja	2003	2003	Haiti	Anti-Aristide
1984	1985	Uruguay	Anti-military		2003	Maldives	Anti-Gayoom
1985	1985	Sudan	Anti-Jaafar	2004	2004	Georgia	Rose Revolution
	1986	Haiti	Anti-Duvalier		2008	Bolivia	Anti-Sanchez de Lozada
1986	1987	South Korea	Anti-military	2004	2004	Ecuador	2004 Anti-Gutierrez
1987	1987	Mexico	Anti-PRI	2005	2005	Ecuador	Rebellion of the Forajidos
	1990	Estonia	Singing Revolution		2005	Kyrgyzstan	Tulip Revolution
	1991	Bangladesh	Anti-Ershad		2005	Lebanon	Cedar Revolution
	2000	Argentina	Anti-coup		2005	Thailand	Anti-Thaksin
1988	1991	Belarus	Anti-communist		2005	Togo	Anti-Gnassingbe
	1991	Lithuania	Pro-democracy		2006	Bolivia	Anti-Mesa, Phase 2
1989	1989	Slovakia	Public Against Violence	2006	2006	Lebanon	Political Crisis
	1989	Slovenia	Anti-communist		2007	East Timor	Anti-Alkatiri
	1990	Hungary	Pro-democracy		2008	Bangladesh	Awami League
	1990	Ivory Coast	Pro-democracy	2007	2008	Pakistan	Anti-Musharraf
	1990	Latvia	Pro-democracy		2011	Egypt	Anti-Mubarak
	1990	Mongolia	Anti-communist	2008	2008	Thailand	People's Alliance for Democracy
	1991	East Timor	Timorese resistance		2009	Iceland	Cutlery Revolution
	1992	Czechoslovakia	Velvet Revolution	2009	2009	Madagascar	Anti-Ravalomanana
	1999	Benin	Anti-communist		2009	Moldova	Grapevine Revolution
1990	1990	Ukraine	Students Union	2010	2010	Nepal	Maoist Anti-Government
	1990	Zambia	Anti-single party rule		2010	Tunisia	Anti-Ben Ali
	1991	Kenya	Anti-Arap Moi		2011	Ivory Coast	Pro-Ouattara
	1991	Kyrgyzstan	Democratic Movement		2011	Kyrgyzstan	2nd Revolution
	1991	Mali	Anti-military	2011	2012	Malawi	Anti-Mutharika
	1991	Nepal	The Stir		2012	Yemen	Anti-Ali Adduallah Saleh
	1991	Niger	Anti-military	2012	2012	Maldives	Anti-Nasheed
	1991	Russia	Pro-democracy		2012	Nepal	Anti-Maoist
	1991	Slovenia	Independence		2012	Romania	Anti-Government
	1992	Central Afr Rep	Pro-democracy		2012	Senegal	Anti-Wade June 23 Movement
	1992	Guyana	Anti-Burnham/Hoyte	2013	2013	Tunisia	Anti-Islamist Government
	1993	Albania	Anti-communist		2013	Ukraine	Euromaidan
1991	1991	Madagascar	Active Voices		2014	Bulgaria	Dance-with-me Campaign
	1993	Cameroon	Pro-democracy		2014	Egypt	Anti-Morsi
1992	1992	Malawi	Anti-Banda campaign		2014	Thailand	Civil Movement for Democracy
	1992	Thailand	Pro-democracy		2014	Tunisia	Protests Against the Crisis Talks
	1994	Brazil	Anti-Collor	2014	2014	Haiti	Anti-Martelly
1993	1993	Nigeria	Anti-military		2016	Burkina Faso	Anti-Compaore
	1999	Guatemala	Anti-Serrano	2015	2015	Romania	Colectiv Revolution
1994	1996	Bangladesh	1994-96 Awami League		2015	South Korea	Anti-Park
1996	2000	Serbia	Anti-Milosevic		2016	Maldives	Anti-Yameen
1997	1997	Indonesia	Anti-Suharto		2017	Guatemala	Guatemala Uprising
	1998	Ecuador	Anti-Bucaram		2017	Macedonia	Colorful Revolution
1999	1999	Paraguay	Anti-Cubas		2019	Brazil	Anti-Rousseff
	1999	Suriname	Anti-Wijdenbosch	2016	2017	Zimbabwe	Anti-Mugabe
	2000	Croatia	Pro-democracy	2017	2018	DR Congo	Anti-Kabila
	2000	Indonesia	Student Protests		2018	South Africa	Anti-Zuma
2000	2000	Ecuador	Anti-Mahuad	2018	2018	Sudan	Sudan Uprising
	2000	Fiji	Anti-Chaudhry		2019	Armenia	Anti-government
	2000	Ghana	Anti-Rawlings	2019	2019	Algeria	Smile Revolution
	2000	Ivory Coast	Anti-Guei		2019	Bolivia	Anti-Morales
	2000	Peru	Anti-Fujimori		2019	Iraq	Anti-Mahdi
	2000	Senegal	Anti-Diouf		2019	Lebanon	October Revolution

Source: Chenoweth and Shay (2020).
Note: Successful means the campaign achieved its stated goal of regime change, secession, or self-determination within a year of the peak of its activities, and the success was a direct result of the campaign's activities.

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