Introduction

paix sans frontières: building peace across borders

Alexander Ramsbotham and I William Zartman

Armed conflict does not respect political or territorial boundaries, but forms part of wider, regional conflict systems through dynamics that cross borders: refugee flows, ‘nomadic’ armed groups, narcotic or criminal networks, illicit trade in ‘blood diamonds’ or small arms or cross-border political, economic and social ties [see box 1].

Policy is well established – if not always well applied – between states (diplomacy) and within them (governance). But there is a policy gap across borders and in borderlands where governance and diplomacy can struggle to reach, as conflict response strategies still focus on the nation state as the central unit of analysis and intervention.

Early findings of the 2011 World Development Report acknowledge this gap, asserting that conflict-affected and fragile states are experiencing ‘repeated and interlinked violence that crosses borders’, and that ‘excessive focus on assistance to the individual nation state is mismatched with the challenge of transnational and cyclical violence’. This twenty-second publication in Conciliation Resources’ Accord series tries to address this gap.

Accord has always sought to tackle the practical challenges of peacebuilding, and to develop insights into how to overcome these challenges drawn from real experiences of local and international peacebuilders on the ground. Motivation for looking at ‘cross-border peacebuilding’ came initially from CR’s regional programmes and their local partners in East and Central Africa, the South Caucasus, West Africa, Kashmir and Central America where the challenges of cross-border peacebuilding have become increasingly prominent and problematic. Case studies from all of these regions and from around the world are featured in this publication.

In order to tackle the challenges of cross-border peacebuilding, the publication explores how peacebuilding strategies and capacity need to ‘think outside the state’: beyond it, through regional engagement; and below it, through cross-border community or trade networks. And it looks at how beyond and below can be connected.

Terminology

Some of the following definitions are explanatory of terms used in this Accord publication.

Borders: de jure and de facto borders that delineate state or quasi-state territorial boundaries. In many contexts of armed violence, such borders are disputed or not recognised by groups in conflict.

Cross-border conflict dynamics: dynamics of an armed conflict system that cross borders. Recognising that conflict systems are inherently complex and transnational, in the context of this project, cross-border conflict dynamics have in common that the communities most affected by them are geographically proximate. Dynamics can be both material and psychosocial.

Peacebuilding: working with local people in fragile and conflict-affected states to prevent violence, promote justice and transform conflict into opportunities for development. Peacebuilding aims to establish sustainable political settlements and peace processes that are locally supported and complemented by international engagement.

Cross-border peacebuilding: peacebuilding initiatives that respond to challenges of cross-border conflict dynamics.

Structure of the publication

The publication is divided into five sections. The first section, ‘Thinking outside the state’, presents three conceptual analyses
of the challenges of ‘cross-border peacebuilding’ from global, systems analysis and legal perspectives. Sections 2, 3 and 4 present case studies of cross-border peacebuilding initiatives from around the world, looking ‘Beyond the state’, focusing primarily on regional inter-state responses, and ‘Below the state’, looking at cross-border community relations, and at cross-border trade and natural resources. A fifth, final section draws policy conclusions from the analysis.

The case studies in this publication respond to three questions:

1. What is the cross-border conflict problem – ie the cross-border conflict dynamic that needs to be addressed?

2. What is the cross-border peacebuilding gap – what is missing from or blocked in international conflict response architecture (strategies and capacity)?

3. What has been the cross-border peacebuilding response – how have local and international peacebuilders tried to overcome blockages and gaps to tackle the cross-border peacebuilding problem?

**Thinking outside the state**

The first article by I William Zartman looks at *Boundaries in war and peace*. There are two types of transboundary disputes: disputes over (about) boundaries and disputes over (across) boundaries. Disputes about boundaries occur because we do not know where the line is, or we do not like where the line is. Disputes that cross boundaries are more complex. They are likely to involve other bordering areas between the two countries, often otherwise not in dispute. A second circle carries the dispute to the two capitals, the centre of the peripheries. A third circle then encompasses the two countries’ allies, for each country will seek additional power by engaging support from abroad. Disputes across boundaries by their very nature involve at least the threat and most likely the lure of escalation, ie conflict beyond boundaries. While such disputes are bound to occur, there are specific ways outlined in the article by which their occurrence can be prevented and their effects can be reduced.

Professor Robert Ricigliano then describes a systems approach to conflict analysis and peacebuilding, explaining how strategies that refer to systems rather than states can shape more flexible and appropriate responses to cross-border conflicts, to identify actors or dynamics that exist outside state borders, such as narcotic networks that support insurgent groups, and to incorporate these into peacebuilding interventions.

Next, Clonadh Raligh briefly describes the groundbreaking Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) data set, which records violence spatially and temporally, and enables violent activity to be tracked by location (instead of by state), across borders over time.

Finally in this section, Professor Geoff Gilbert and Clara Sandoval explore some of the international legal challenges presented by the cross-border impact of conflict, especially pertaining to the international law of armed conflict, international human rights law, international criminal law, the law relating to the protection of internally and internationally displaced persons, and transitional justice.

**Building peace beyond the state**

Section 2 of the publication looks at the political, governance and security challenges of cross-border peacebuilding. An introductory article to the section by Cedric Barnes suggests that regional diplomacy or institutions can help to level the ‘political playing-field’ for cross-border state-to-state dialogue by counterbalancing perceptions of power inequality among states. Regional bodies can instil confidence in peace processes, add impetus to inter-state peace processes and bring practical assistance in delivering peace dividends. But regional institutions may lack capacity, or member states can refuse to divest sovereignty. Barnes suggests that developing links between regional organisations and cross-border civil society networks would enhance regional capability for conflict prevention and resolution.

Case studies in section 2 include three analyses of the role of the European Union (EU) in cross-border peacebuilding: two within Europe – in Ireland and the Basque country – and one on the border between eastern Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR).

Katy Hayward describes how European integration over time helped to dilute the political significance of the border between Ireland and Britain, which contributed to the signing of the 1993 Anglo-Irish Agreement. The EU has more recently tried to smooth tensions across the Irish border more explicitly through ‘PEACE’ initiatives, rehabilitating marginalised borderland areas and facilitating cross-border cooperation at national levels. But despite such direct EU community engagement, the sustainability of cross-border peacebuilding at a local level is questionable.

Next, Professor Julen Zabalo and Oier Imaz discuss the Basque conflict, writing from a Basque nationalist perspective. ETA’s ceasefire declaration of September 2010 suggests political transition and perhaps progress on the Basque issue. The authors ask whether the EU’s experiences in Ireland provide any lessons for the Basque case, and question why Brussels has so far failed to engage on the Basque question.
In responding to the regional conflict system in eastern Chad, the EU innovatively sought to deploy a peacekeeping force (EUFOR) across the border with CAR. But David Lanz asserts that, in practice, EUFOR Chad/CAR did not patrol the insecure border area. Ultimately EUFOR’s impact on security was minimal. And Brussels’ focus on EUFOR eclipsed vital political engagement.

Ben Shepherd looks at another African regional conflict system in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). International pressure convinced Rwanda to withdraw support for Laurent Nkunda’s National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), and encouraged dialogue between Rwanda and DRC. But although large-scale violence was reduced, such inter-state security cooperation has failed to tackle structural drivers of violence in eastern DRC related to governance and borderland marginalisation.

The Esquipulas process in Central America in the 1980s and 1990s shows how regional diplomacy can respond to regional security complexes. Jordi Urgell Garcia describes how regional initiatives had previously foundered in the context of Cold War proxy conflicts and externally sponsored dictatorships. The spread of democratisation and the de-escalation of the Cold War enabled Esquipulas to get a solid footing, but it took many years and came at a distinct historical juncture, and momentum has subsequently waned.

**Building peace below the state**

Sections 3 and 4 look at efforts to build peace below the state, through cross-border community or trade networks.

**Cross-border community relations**

Section 3 looks to social and community networks and relations. In an introductory article to the section, Kristian Herbolzheimer notes that borders can be much less relevant to peoples than to states, and that understanding the social and cultural conditions of borderland communities is key to tackling cross-border conflicts. Social and cultural ties can span state borders. State presence may be weak in remote borderlands where local people are left to provide for their own needs. This can mean looking outwards across borders to other communities, rather than inwards to administrative capitals. Herbolzheimer asserts that borderland communities have the insight and capability to respond to cross-border conflicts, and he shows how international support can help to strengthen this capacity and link it to formal peacebuilding processes.

In conversation with Accord, John Baptist Odama, Archbishop of Gulu, northern Uganda, describes the efforts of a Regional Civil Society Task Force to respond to the Lord’s Resistance

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**Box 1**

**Cross-border conflict dynamics**

**Conflicts over and across borders**

Conflict can be about borders that are uncertain or unaccepted. Conflict can also be across borders, and between or over borderlands. Layers of conflict dynamics can flow across several states and quasi-states, as well as across multiple levels – international, regional, national and local or provincial.

**Material cross-border conflict dynamics**

Borders can be ignored or contested by ‘nomadic’ conflict actors such as the Lord’s Resistance Army. Inter-connected civil wars and insecurity complexes can involve whole regions, and armed groups can seek sanctuary or anonymity across sympathetic borders or in ungoverned borderlands.

Populations can be displaced across borders. Weak, corrupt or militarised borders can interrupt essential cross-border traffic and trade, and cause resentment or be a direct source of violence and exploitation, such as in the Mano River Union in West Africa.

Terrorist or narcotic networks can exist across porous and badly managed borders, such as in the borderlands between Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador, or illicit trade in blood diamonds and small arms can sustain regional conflict systems, such as in West Africa.

**Psychosocial and economic cross-border conflict dynamics**

Borders and boundaries can cut across ethnic or cultural sources of societal cohesion. Inequalities of political capital between communities across borders can cause tension and grievance. Contrived or contested borders can epitomise much bigger political cleavages, such as in Kashmir.

Inter-community cross-border conflicts occur where different communities have claims of exclusive access to, or ownership of, a given territory, such as in the Middle East. Iredentist or secessionist aspirations inevitably challenge borders, such in the Basque Country, and war economies can be regionalised through cross-border trade, such as in the African Great Lakes.
Army's (LRA) conflict. Now that violence related to the LRA conflict extends into four separate states across East and Central Africa, traditional, religious and civil leaders from affected countries have joined together to share learning, assist affected communities and advocate for a regional non-violent response. Archbishop Odama asserts that the regional military offensive, Operation Lightening Thunder, was like “throwing stones at bees; the swarm scattered and bees are now stinging people everywhere”. He explains how civil leaders from northern Uganda are using their long experience of dealing with the LRA to empower newly affected communities in Sudan, DRC and CAR to transform themselves from LRA victims into ‘anchors of resilience’ to the violence.

Socorro Ramirez shows how the spread of violence across Colombia’s borders has tested diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries. She describes how the impact of cross-border violence is felt most keenly among local communities living in borderlands in Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador. Civil society has developed links across national boundaries between all three countries to respond directly to peacebuilding priorities in borderlands and to promote better relations between capitals.

Kamarulzaman Askandar explains that long-standing cultural links and affinity between Aceh and Penang in Malaysia made Penang a natural home for Acehnese refugee peacebuilders who were displaced by the war in Aceh. The Universiti Sains Malaysia’s Research and Education for Peace (REPUSM) unit helped set up the Aceh Peace Programme (APP) as the base for peace activity. Together, REPUSM and APP were able to contribute to the resolution of the conflict in Aceh through advocacy, capacity building, networking, institution building, and local (Acehnese) ownership of the activities.

Peter Albrecht and Elizabeth Drew describe how poor border management has undermined legitimate cross-border movement and commerce in the Mano River Union (MRU), where informal cross-border trade in livestock or manufactured goods underpins many local livelihoods. Women are especially vulnerable to sexual assault and harassment by corrupt security services. Empowering local communities can increase collective oversight of security services and promote border security governance, but borderland communities need more information about their rights and responsibilities and greater access to security sectors.

Rachel Clogg and Jenny Norton state that the south Caucasus has been in a state of ‘no peace, no war’ since the early 1990s, interlaced by closed borders, front lines, and abandoned roads and railways. Contact between ordinary people has been severely restricted, but Clogg and Norton stress how the media has been helping to reconnect people and to rebuild ties severed by violence.

Mossi Raz describes the All for Peace radio station, currently the only fully independent, Israeli-Palestinian collaborative communications venture operating in the Middle East. It promotes cross-border dialogue, human rights and collaborative civil society peacebuilding initiatives in order to break down misperceptions and strengthen democracy in the region.

Cross-border trade and natural resources

Section 4 of the publication looks at trade and natural resources as ‘entry points’ for cross-border peacebuilding. Diana Klein introduces the section. She describes how economic or environmental cooperation across borders in pursuit of a shared goal, such as access to end markets for local traders, regional economic interaction to promote development and integration, or better management of shared natural resources, can open trade channels that contribute to building trust, or establish interdependencies across borders that provide incentives for cooperation and increase the costs of war. She warns that cross-border economic cooperation can also promote violent conflict if profits are used for war. Nor can a peacebuilding outcome be assumed; rather, initiatives need to mainstream a peacebuilding objective in order to maximise effectiveness and impact, for instance so that increased cross-border trade extends beyond economic activity and addresses the needs of peacebuilding.

Ayesha Saeed explains how trade across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir has helped to ‘soften’ the border and re-establish links between divided Kashmiri families, trading communities and civil societies. But the impact of the initiative has been limited as both an economic and a reconciliation enterprise, as traders have to use an inefficient barter system, and exchange of goods across the LoC takes place through intermediaries, leaving little people-to-people contact.

In eastern DRC, mineral extraction and trade is often portrayed as an exclusive driver of regional violence. But Nicholas Garret and Laura Seay stress that weak governance, not trade, underpins conflict in the African Great Lakes – and is key to resolving it. Efforts to simply suppress the mineral trade are not only impracticable, but ignore its developmental potential and exaggerate its significance.

In West Africa, diamonds were valuable assets in the regional conflict system, funding Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone, and sustaining Charles Taylor’s grip
on power in neighbouring Liberia. Alex Vines describes how regulating the ‘blood diamond’ trade through the Kimberley certification scheme has helped to de-link it from a regional war economy. The system is far from perfect, but the industry is in better shape than in the late 1990s.

Annika Kramer states that scarce water resources have interacted with asymmetric power relations between Israel, Jordan and the occupied Palestinian territory. She suggests that water cooperation is not only essential for environmental and humanitarian reasons, but could contribute to peacebuilding and human security.

I William Zartman looks at trans-border conflict in the Maghreb, where the solution is obvious: regional cooperation among the neighbouring countries would increase the economic welfare of all of them significantly. Instead, there is endemic rivalry among them and specifically a dispute over the decolonised territory of Western (formerly Spanish) Sahara that blocks cooperation, keeps borders closed, and fuels costly competition in trade and arms. Underneath this situation lies the fact that the central state, Algeria feels no need for enhanced economic benefits because of its oil cushion.

Building peace across borders

A fifth, concluding section looks in more detail at how peacebuilders can strategise ‘holistically’, focusing on conflict systems rather than states, and at ways to ‘humanise’ regional security cooperation to engage better with conflict prevention and resolution.

Alexander Ramsbotham has been Accord Series Editor at Conciliation Resources since August 2008. Previously he was a research fellow in the international programme at the Institute for Public Policy Research in London. He worked as specialist adviser to the UK House of Lords European Union (EU) Select Committee in its inquiry into the EU Strategy for Africa, before which he was head of the Peace and Security Programme at the United Nations Association-UK. He has also been an associate fellow in the International Security Programme at Chatham House.

I William Zartman is the Jacob Blaustein Professor Emeritus at the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at the John Hopkins University, and member of the Processes of International Negotiation (PIN) Program at Clingendael. His doctorate is from Yale (1956) and his honorary doctorate from Louvain (1997). His books include Negotiation and Conflict Management (Routlege - 2008), and Understanding Life in the Borderlands: boundaries in depth and motion (ed.) (University of Georgia Press 2010). He is president of the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies (TALIM), and was founding president of the American Institute for Maghreb Studies and past President of the Middle East Studies Association.