



**TIME FOR A RE-WRITE  
OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES  
FOR STABILIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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Though the USIP's *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* have served as an adequate guide to post-conflict peace operations, it is time for a re-write.

Developed as a joint project of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) in 2009, the *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* serve as a good initial response in addressing the need for a document that contributes to the enhancement of interagency coordination. Lacking the glue of doctrine that binds military forces together in peacebuilding operations, civilian agencies are often left with only cooperation and good will as guiding principles. As a first generation reply to the lack of comprehensive strategic guidance for civilian agencies of the U.S. government working in conflict-affected areas,<sup>1</sup> the *Guiding Principles* have served well. However, now it is time to rethink if the *Guiding Principles* are adequate for the peacebuilding challenges we now face and can expect to confront in the future.

A major challenge when designing principles of any type is that they must be broad enough to apply across a broad range of events that have not yet occurred, while simultaneously being specific enough to be useful. The authors of the *Guiding Principles* navigated that challenge well. Nonetheless, the *Guiding Principles* fall short of their potential. They assume a fixed and controllable post-conflict context, with little recognition of complexity. The complexity of modern conflict and peacebuilding is bound up in the recognition that activities occur in the physical, social, and spiritual domains, simultaneously, and at the interpersonal, community, national, and regional levels of analysis.<sup>2</sup>

Peacebuilding is a growth industry, and the spaces in which peace and stability operations are conducted is becoming crowded with Whole-of-Society actors. Coordination between these actors and the agencies they represent is an ongoing challenge. As a living document, it is important to critically review the *Guiding Principles* and determine if they are having a positive impact in contributing to interagency coordination in complex peacebuilding operations.

Possibly the major strength of the *Guiding Principles* is that they offer the interagency system with a shared lexicon. Currently missing from the interagency and military peacebuilding literature is an accepted structure and language that can be used by the multiple actors in a conflict area. The *Guiding Principles* make a tentative step in that direction. However, they should not be viewed as the answer. The *Guiding Principles* seem best applicable in stable conditions where control is possible and complexity is absent — something rarely possible. It is absolutely necessary to recognize that the conflict context should drive any intervention. Policymakers must focus on a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down one where we expect stability to cascade through society. The *Guiding Principles* engender an almost myopic focus on elites.

Anchored to a neo-liberal approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the *Guiding Principles* appear to ignore the importance of non-Western, indigenous peace processes. This leads to a work that is highly prescriptive in nature following an expert model of intervention in contrast to a more elective, ally-centered approach. Local actors are treated as bit-players in someone else's show.

Missing is a discussion on non-state actors and the multiple roles they can play in the peacebuilding process. Non-state actors and groups cannot be wished away. Connected here is the text's recognition that political agreements are necessary in moving forward with stabiliza-

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<sup>1</sup>United States Institute of Peace, "Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction" 2009, [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/guiding\\_principles\\_full.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/guiding_principles_full.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Matyok, Cathryne Schmitz, and Hannah Rose Mendoza, "Deep Analysis: Designing Complexity Into Our Understanding of Conflict," *InterAgency Journal* (Summer 2014), 14-24.

tion and reconstruction activities; however, there is no meaningful discussion of how political agreements are determined. For so important an activity, this is a glaring deficiency in the *Guiding Principles*.

Beginning with existing circumstances, the *Guiding Principles* address only tangentially the potential need for designing peace infrastructures. Peacebuilders should remain attuned to the possibility that the structures themselves are the problem, and that working within them can lead to a loss of credibility with the host population. Working within an inadequate system can inadvertently lead to a band-aid approach to peacebuilding where the damaged social body is patched back together with little regard for whether it is worth repairing.

A multi-track approach to peacebuilding that integrates formal state, non-governmental, and grassroots peacebuilding approaches into a broad range of actions will contribute much to enhancing the utility of the *Guiding Principles*. This holistic approach is needed if we are to better coordinate the multiple actors present in modern conflict-affected areas where chaos, contradiction, and ambiguity are the norm. We must embrace the complexity of these contexts, not avoid it. In order to build complexity into the interagency approach, recognizing the need to operate simultaneously at the interpersonal, community, national, and regional levels will prove useful.

Peacebuilders should rapidly move away from purpose-based *end-states* that suggest static and controlled environments. A broader discussion of *next-states* is desirable. End-state thinking contributes to a linear approach to peacebuilding that restricts the utility of the *Guiding Principles*. History never ends. There can be no end-state, only an altered context. Ideally, we will achieve a better conflict. As peacebuilding professionals, we delude ourselves when we think we can act upon a complex conflict environment and move it to a static end.

Expanding the peacebuilding narrative to incorporate a discussion of the drivers of peace will be useful. Drivers of conflict, and those activities within society that can mitigate the negative effects of context, can unwittingly move the conflict to the least destructive condition. This is a negative approach to conflict management. As the drivers of conflict are reduced, a space for peace is opened, and there needs to be a peace structure that is capable of occupying that newly opened place. Simply mitigating the negative effects of conflict is not enough. Designed peace structures are required.

As mentioned earlier, peacebuilding strategies today require a cultural sensitivity that incorporates indigenous peace processes from the start. Also needed is a cultural awareness that attends to differences within the interagency system. The old saying applies: "if we want people with us on the landing, they need to be with us on the takeoff." The thinking that informs ideas of transition from U.S. peacebuilding practitioners to the post-conflict nation contributes to a linear strategy. Needed is more horizontal and less vertical thinking.

Greed and grievance thinking<sup>3</sup> heavily influences the *Guiding Principles*. This is an outcome of its highly Western approach to peacebuilding and conflict management/resolution. A reliance on the Rational Actor Model of conflict resolution, where individuals follow their interests in an almost game-like process, is shortsighted. Lacking is recognition of the increasing identity-based and religious dimensions of conflict. Religious conflict is at a six-year high,<sup>4</sup> and every indication is that we can expect religion and religious actors to play an increasing role in future conflicts.

This is possibly the biggest gap in the *Guiding Principles* approach to stabilization and re-

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<sup>3</sup>"Greed and grievance" are two common Western conceptions of civil war drivers.

<sup>4</sup>Pew Research Center, January, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/>

construction. Where is the discussion of religion? Religion is wholly missing from the *Guiding Principles*. Ignoring religion as an element of analysis is difficult to understand, especially given religion's global resurgence,<sup>5</sup> and its significance in post-conflict environments.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, not all conflicts are religious in nature; however many — if not most — have a religious dimension. Failing to discuss the potential of religion and religious actors to contribute to peacebuilding leaves a significant intellectual space unfilled.

So, it is past time to re-look the *Guiding Principles* with an eye toward moving them away from a Rational Actor Model of peacebuilding that ignores the complexity and multidimensional nature of conflicts. The next edition of the *Guiding Principles* should include a discussion of how peacebuilding needs to occur at the interpersonal, community, national, and regional levels of analysis and in an environment characterized by the physical, social, and spiritual needs of host nation actors.

#### **About the Authors:**

*Dr. Thomas Matyók* is an assistant professor in the Conflict and Peace Studies program at The University of North Carolina - Greensboro. He has been professionally involved in conflict resolution for over 35 years as a mediator, negotiator, facilitator, trainer, executive and conflict coach, dispute systems designer, researcher, and professor. He has consulted for private, civic, religious, and community organizations. Dr. Matyók has been interviewed for radio and television regarding international conflicts and national security issues. He has negotiated significant international agreements and has been recognized for his abilities by the United States Coast Guard and United States Army as well as national and international human rights organizations. He has presented and testified to industry and government officials regarding cross-cultural conflict and slavery in the transnational merchant marine. His current research interests are violence, global citizenship, missing war narratives, institutions of peace, and the academic preparation of international conflict workers.

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<sup>5</sup>Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: The Global Overview," *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), 1-18.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Cunningham, "Religion in Peacemaking and Statecraft: Whither Faith-Based Diplomacy?" in *Seaford House Papers, 2004*, ed. J.E. Spence (UK: Royal College of Defence Studies, 2004), 142.