THE LIBERAL PEACE: A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL MODEL?

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Abstract - Successive failures of the UN in response to humanitarian crises triggered by bloody conflicts in the aftermath of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to a new type of intervention of the international community: peacebuilding. This intervention of the UN , however, has recently come under severe criticism as the reproduction and imposition of Western models . This essay presents diverse critiques of the Western-crafted one-size-fits-all model of liberal peacebuilding by focusing on the three main points: (1) criticizing the liberal peacebuilding as a new form of imperialism, (2) questioning the universality of liberal values, and (3) reassessing the manner in which the liberal peace is pursued in post-conflict milieus. The article also reviews the case of Cambodia to assess whether, the critiques are appropriate and to what degree they are justified.

Key words - liberal peace; peacebuilding; universality of liberal values; political liberalization; economic liberalization; new form of imperialism.

1. Introduction

The international landscape following the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s was characterized by failing states and internecine violence across Africa, East Asia and even Europe. This posed serious threats to global strategic security as well as human security. Collapsing states triggered by long-lasting bloodshed and internal strife made divided societies devolve into human crises, inflicting appalling losses on innocent civilians. In response to these human catastrophes, the international community (coordinated by the UN Security Council) has devised and put in place a new type of intervention rather than that of traditional peacekeeping that repeatedly failed to restore sustainable peace for these war-shattered societies. Comprehensive, more complex and qualitatively different peace operations have thereby been launched, such as UNTAG in Namibia in1989, UNTAC in Cambodia in 1992. Most of these peace operations share the same Western-designed model of liberal peacebuilding.

The lack of success in international peacebuilding efforts, however, has led to a wave of criticism of liberal peacebuilding operations conducted in the aftermath of the Cold War. The core of the critique mirrors the reproduction and imposition of Western models in a bid to transform war-shattered societies through political and economic liberalization (Chandler 2010: 1). In an attempt to provide a diagnosis of what goes wrong when things go wrong in liberal peacebuilding operations, however, critics state that the problem is not with the aspiration of the liberal peace but with the practice of intervention per se (Begby and Burgess 2009: 100)

Although there are various approaches that make up the critique of the liberal peace, this essay presents diverse critiques by framing them within three broad and distinct approaches: (1) criticize the liberal peacebuilding as a new form of imperialism, (2) question the universality of liberal

values, and (3) reassess the manner in which the liberal peace is pursued in post-conflict milieus. The case of Cambodia is briefly reviewed to assess whether, and to what degree, the critiques are appropriate or justified.

2. Liberal peace

The original notion of liberal peace can be traced back to Kant's theory about 'republicanism'. Central and fundamental for Kant's reasoning behind liberal peace are the three pillars: democracy, liberalism, and constitutionalism (Danilovic and Clare 2007: 397). This assumption is then absorbed and interpreted by Woodrow Wilson, the twenty-eighth president of the US, in the sense that liberalism is the key to peace (Paris 2004: 5-7). The end of the Cold War, characterized by bankruptcy of the communist (state-controlled) economic and political model in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s, brought about an advantageous ground for the values of liberalism to flourish. Fukuayama (1989: 3-4) even could not help articulate his explicit, if not arrogant, optimistism about *The End of History* in the sense of an absolute triumph of "economic and political liberalism," opening a new era of "universalization of Western liberal democracy." Along this line, when it was coined by Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his report titled An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping *(*Boutros Ghali 1992) submitted to the UN Security Council in 1992, the term 'peacebuilding' by and large implied 'liberal peacebuilding'.

Today, there is a widespread understanding of the liberal peace in the IR literature as a terminology whose main components include democratization, the rule of law, human rights, free and globalised markets, and neo-liberal development (Richmond 2006: 292). Liberal peacebuilding has become the most common intervention in post-conflict environments by the international community in the aftermath of the Cold War (Paris 2004: 5). It is international efforts (interventions) to transform war-torn societies into peaceful ones through political and economic liberalization. In the political realm, they tend to establish a liberal democracy via the promotion of periodic and genuine elections, constitutional limitations on the exercise of governmental power, and respect for human rights, including freedom of speech, assembly, and the like (Paris 2004: 5). In the economic realm, they work toward advocating a market-oriented economic model, including measures aimed at minimizing government intervention in the economy, and encouraging the development of private sectors (Paris 2004: 5). Liberal peacebuilding has become a dominant transformational and developmental model.

2.1. New form of imperialism

The transformational model of liberal peacebuilding,

however, has never gone beyond criticism. The arguments taken to be the critique of the liberal peace are diverse, and will be hereinafter investigated in what follows in this article. In the first place, liberal peacebuilding has been often criticized as a new form of imperialism. This postulation hinges primarily on the ground that liberal peacebuilding is nothing other than the imposition of the West's liberal values on post-conflict societies in the name of security and humanity. UN high-profile peace operations are not designed and conducted on the basis of a dialogue between international agents and stakeholders; instead "they tend to be based on a strategic bargain, where outside actors dictate the terms of the peace settlement and expect local actors to comply with their demands" (Yordan 2009: 59). This reminds us of European colonialism when liberal peace operations are described as "a modern rendering of mission civilisatrice" (Roland Paris 2002: 638). Assuming the 'mission civilisatrice' to civilize post-conflict societies, the West is accused of conducting an elite-driven, top-down and outside-in experiment in social engineering that lacked local legitimacy (Hoffman 2009: 10). In reality, those peace operations in countries as diverse as East Timor and Sierra Leone, the Congo and Liberia, Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to be conceived as outside-in and top-down interventions in the name of liberal peace. These missions, despite plenty of differences deemed appropriate to each case, have all been largely shaped and controlled by the hands of Europeans and North Americans (Jabri 2010: 41). They all aim at advocating, if not directly reshaping, a government in each intervened country in liberal terms. This imposition, no matter for what purposes it may be interpreted, deprives target societies (their people) of self-determination (Jabri 2010: 41)

More seriously, critics seek to demonstrate that the pursuit of a liberal peace is a cover for the political and economic interests of the West (Hoffman 2009: 11). The outside intervention in the form of liberal peacebuilding seeks to promote, by imposing, the western political and socio-economic values in the interest of the intervener rather than that of the intervened, if not at the expense of the interests of the people directly affected by the conflict (Richmond 2002: 187). In the same line, but in more explicit manner, Schellhaas and Seegers (2007:10) view the liberal peacebuilding as "imperialism's new disguise" because "the Bretton Woods hegemons talk about a 'liberal peace' but actually want to re-colonize the South to gain or increase access to its raw materials and cheap labor force." Tandon (2000: 166) endorses this view, claiming that the strategy of 'liberal peace' is motivated primarily by profit. Kimberly Marten Zisk (2004: 59–92), building on a detailed comparison of post-Cold War 'complex peace operations' and European colonialism, asserts that liberal peacebuilders intervene when their interests are at stake. In sum, this critical approach, also referred to as 'power-based' or 'interest-based', critiques the liberal peace on the ground that it reflects hegemonic values and the political, economic and geo-strategic needs of Western states (Chandler 2010: 3-4). This imperialist-modeled coercion of the policies of the liberal peace for the reconstruction of post-conflict societies, in serving the interests of dominant Western powers and the international financial institutions may run the risk of reproducing the conditions and possibilities for conflict (Chandler 2010: 3-4)

2.2. Universality of liberal peace

The other critical argument questions the universality of the liberal peace. The commentators with this argument doubt the possibility of application of the paternalistic and technocratic one-size-fits-all approach by questioning the grounding universalizing assumptions of liberal policy discourse (Chandler 2010: 6). While not denying the values of democracy and the free market aspirationally, these critics doubt the compatibility of the liberal peace approach in the context of post-conflict states and situations of state failure (Chandler 2010: 6). Specifically, Hoffman (2009: 11) points out that the Western institutions are by no means easily replicated in non-western political and legal landscapes. In economic terms, for instance, the failure of the structural adjustment programs imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) in Africa and Latin America in the early 1980s, though not in the context of post-conflict peacebuilding, is always good food for thought. The policy of economic liberalization, such as devaluation, privatization, removal of import control and ruthless downsizing of the public sector, is described as the recipe for the impoverishment of, instead of improvement, millions of people (Davis 2006: 153). The mechanistic replication of the West's neoliberal economic policies did wreck havoc in Africa and Latin America, leaving consequences even "more severe and long-lasting than the Great Depression" (Davis 2006: 155). Culturally, the Western ideals that lay emphasis on individual rights, obligations and accountability can hardly establish well within cultures where individualism is always second to community and the family. Similarly, Fareed Zakharia (2003) argues that while the West has historically associated with liberalism and democracy, much of the non-western world view them as something alien. The fact is that a success story in the West does not necessarily secure that in the East (or where else), nor will it be fruitful in the future once it was in the past.

These critics of liberal peace, by and large, assume that rather than taking for granted the liberal peace as a universal version of values that fits all, the pursuit of the liberal peace has to take into account the non-liberal context in which intervention takes place. To overcome this challenge of local identity and specific context, there need be a 'buffer zone' for a smooth introduction of liberal values. This buffer zone may include, but not limited to, the creation of the institutional conditions necessary for successful democratization and merketization. That is because in the absence of the institutional framework, "elections [will] provide a cover for authoritarianism" and "merely legitimize power grabs" (Zakharia 2003: 98-99). In this regard, Paris (2004: 45, 179) advocates an alternative approach of 'Institutionalization before Liberalization' to establish the necessary regulatory frameworks for democracy and free market since he doubts

the assumption that "liberalization fosters peace."

This, however, merges into the third approach that critiques the manner in which the liberal peace is pursued in post-conflict societies. In addition to critiques of the liberal peace on the ground that it is implemented either with little or no detailed knowledge of local conditions or inadequate attention to the institutional conditions necessary for successful democratization and market reform as earlier analyzed, this critical perspective criticizes the 'haste' of the outside peacebuilders in creating a democracy and neoliberal economy. The critique points out that rapid liberalization is often counterproductive, since liberalization is assumed as an inherently tumultuous and conflict inducing process that is capable of undermining a fragile peace (Paris 2004: 235). Paris (2004: 235) accuses rapid democratization and marketization of generating a number of destabilizing side effects. Instead of consolidating peace in countries that were just emerging from civil wars, the immediate liberalization turned out to jeopardize "the very peace that such policies were intended to strengthen" (Paris 2004: 235). In the political realm, Roland Paris clearly demonstrates two destabilizing effects of rapid democratization. First, the western-styled 'winner-take-all' election stirs intimidation and fraud. Second, since political parties are typically constituted on the basis of ethnic groups, free elections are likely to destabilize the situations and exacerbate tensions among divided societies. In the meantime, economic liberalization in the sense of promotion of competition can worsen the relationships among rivalries, instead of creating a healthier economic environment for development. The minimization of the government role and downsizing the public sector in accordance with neoliberal principles will leave a vacancy in provision of basic services and infrastructures. This may give rise to certain disruptions, increasing the burden on the population composed of the majority of the poor.

In response to this, Roland Paris suggests the approach 'institutionalization before liberalization'. He argues that the competitive forces of free election and market economies should only be applied when the state and society have the capacity sufficient to manage and regulate competition, and minimize its negative effects (Bellamy 2010: 261). On the one hand, election should be delayed until conditions are ripe, economic liberalization should be slowed to mitigate its side effects on the other (Paris 2004: 188).

3. The case of Cambodia

Cambodia had undergone turbulent decades in politics, characterized by the ups and downs of various political factions alternatively ruling this South East Asian country since it gained its independence from France in 1953. Political instability and internal conflicts that were triggered by amounted tensions among different factions and complicated by foreign interventions, direct and indirect, did not come to an end until the early 1990s. In September 1990, after several rounds of negotiations, the four Cambodian parties, the government headed by Hun Sen, the Khmer Rouge, the Pacifique et Cooperatif

(FUNCINPEC) led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), reached an agreement on a framework for the comprehensive settlement of the Cambodian conflict. This framework then served as the groundwork for an official peace agreement, formally accepted by the Cambodian parties at a peace conference in Paris on October 23, 1991 (Paris 2004: 81). The Paris Peace Accords of October 1991 technically brought to an end the long-lasting and bloody internal strife with foreign interventions in Cambodia, offering this war-torn nation an opportunity of peace.

Following this peace agreement, a new United Nations peace operation known as the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was created in February 1992 to oversee the implementation of the peace accord. UNTAC's extensive mandate included supervising Cambodia's civilian police, monitoring the cease-fire and the demobilization of factional armies, investigating human rights complaints, repatriating refugees, and coordinating an international campaign to reconstruct Cambodia's war-damaged infrastructure, as well as organizing and conducting national elections (Paris 2004: 81). UNTAC ended its mandate and withdrew from Cambodia four months after the March 1993 elections. The high profile withdrawal of UNTAC has been widely described as a great success (Thayer 1998: 162; Akashi 2001: 149) because it is putatively believed to have replaced a bloody internal strife with the architecture of liberal peace. However, Richmond and Frank (2009: 18) claim that the liberal peacebuilding project in Cambodia has just created a "virtual peace," and been far from successful. The case of Cambodia will be, in what follows, further examined vis-à-vis the arguments against the liberal peace.

Firstly, there is little doubt that the peacebuilding process UNTAC conducted in Cambodia in 1992-1993 is a type of imposing liberal peace. Though formally accepted by the Cambodian parties, the Paris Peace Accords was devised by the UN Security Council. The agreement explicitly set out a detailed plan for transforming Cambodia into a peaceful liberal democracy (Paris 2004: 81). It specified the main principles for a new constitution whereby Cambodia would follow a system of liberal democracy, on the basis of pluralism, including periodic and genuine elections by secret ballot and universal suffrage, civil liberties enshrined in a declaration of fundamental rights, and an independent judiciary empowered to enforce these rights (Paris 2004: 81). With Paris Peace Accords, the political future of Cambodia, a system of liberal democracy, can be safely said to have been decided from outside in the name of peace, although Cambodian parties "accepted with slight modifications" (Paris 2004: 81). In light of this agreement, the underlying assumption of UNTAC was that the success of democratic elections would create a power-sharing political polity, coupled with the implementation of liberal reforms and the introduction of market economy "liberal order would naturally follow, and Cambodia would be guided from civil war into a situation of sustainable peace" (Richmond and Frank 2009: 21). In fact, the nature of peace brought about

in Cambodia by UNTAC was of "conservative liberal peace" because it was achieved by force and diplomacy, "instituted and imposed on Cambodia entirely from outside" (Richmond and Frank 2009: 22). In this regard, Cambodia is a "working example" of a western-styled top-down imposition, though this imposition might have been done in the interest of, and for a better tomorrow of, Cambodia.

This imposition, however, is far from able to be interpreted in the interest of the West, except for their real efforts in advocating liberal values, political and economic. The material interests, if any the international interveners could have, were presumably confined merely to a large amount from international aid for Cambodia that was spent on outside experts' salary (EIC 2005, cited in Richmond and frank 2007: 42). This, however, just means interests of some individuals, rather than those of the West as the developed capitalist world. There is also little evidence to ascribe UNTAC mandate as installing a pro-West political polity (government) in Cambodia to pave the way for the West to exploit natural resources of this country.

Secondly, Richmond and Frank (2009: 22-46), via thorough investigation of empirical situation of Cambodia, argue that what is left in the country is far from the liberal peace that the international community desired to impose. Liberal peace in Cambodia, they claim, is a "virtual peace" (Richmond and Frank 2009: 27). Politically, Cambodia is depicted as a fake democracy, a country with merely democratic façade, made up apparently democratic institutions which in fact operate in an autocratic manner (Richmond and Frank 2009: 27). All the core tenets of the liberal peace are of poor records in Cambodia. The democratic government is paralyzed (intimidated by Hun Sen in a coup in 1997), the rule of laws and human rights are not respected, corruption becomes pervasive at all levels. In regard to economic liberalization, the facts and figures are "not encouraging" (Richmond and Frank 2009: 29). Low economic growth, high inflation and weak exchange rate of the Riel against the US dollar form conspicuous features of Cambodian economy. The gap between the rich and the poor has become gradually widened; and this is viewed as a "consequence of liberalization without adequate state intervention or protection" (Richmond and Frank 2009: 31)

What is noteworthy is that Richmond and Frank (2007, 2009) attribute this failure of the liberal peace in Cambodia to its 'incompatibility' with Cambodia. Richmond and Frank (2007: 1, 2009: 44), question the transferability of the liberal peace on the ground that it is not suitable for the South East Asian country of Cambodia. There are plenty of differences in the perception between the Western-based interveners and locals regarding political and economic practices that hinder the adoption of the liberal peace. They metaphorically generalize these differences in a 'visual' phrase "a square peg for a round hole" (Richmond and Frank 2009: 44). Specifically, Cambodian cultural and historical structures centre on the notion of political power as a zero-sum game (in which one's gain is another's loss) and more on the importance of community that an

individual (Richmond and Frank 2009: 44). This contradicts the win-win scenario of power sharing political polity, and obstructs severely the promotion of human rights. The case of Cambodia, in this sense, challenges the universality of the liberal peace, reconfirming that what works in the West may not in the East.

Finally, the case of Cambodia does not associate liberal values with instability, yet the country became *more* stable in the late 1990s as Hun Sen increasingly backed away from his earlier democratic commitments (Paris 2004: 90). Hun Sen in fact was said to have started using (right after the 1993 elections) a strategy of violence and intimidation to weaken the ability of his opponents to challenge his power (Paris 2004: 80). The 1997 coup that brought Hun Sen into a little competitive dominant position seriously weakened his rival of FUNCINPEC and represented "a glaring example of violence against the democratic spirit" (Maley 1998, cited in Paris 2004: 80). By the end of the 1990s, Cambodia just remained the cover of democracy, and Hun Sen ruled the country "by virtue of a monopoly of muscle, the readiness of thuggish subordinates to use it and a tight grip on the machinery and resources of the state" (Roberts 2001, cited in Paris 2004: 80). It is arguably the fact that after 1997 Cambodia became more stable, although it is unclear to what degree Cambodia's relative stability can be attributed to the international efforts of liberal peacebuilding, or instead to Hun Sen's efforts to suppress political opposition in the country (Paris 2004: 80). What is certain is that the 1997 coup mirrored a backslide into traditional yet fundamentally undemocratic methods for establishing political order in Cambodia. This return to the 'old habit' simultaneously means a further distance from democratic values of the liberal peace.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the critiques are not really critical as they focus less on the core values of liberal peace than on how these values are transplanted in post-conflict societies. The critiques almost do not question the underlying virtues of the liberal peace. Nor are they anti-liberal; they merely suggest that liberalism take into account the non-liberal context in which peacebuilding operations are deployed (Chandler 2010: 7). In other words, their critical analysis does not reject the fundamental qualities of the liberal peace, but raises concerns about how, and in whose interests, it has been pursued in post-conflict societies (Hoffman 2009: 11)

The examination of the case of Cambodia confirms the "undemocratic" imposition of liberal values in this war-torn country. The Paris Peace Accords not only explicitly dictate a detailed plan for transforming Cambodia into a peaceful liberal democracy, but also set out the main principles for a new constitution whereby Cambodia would follow a system of liberal democracy on the basis of pluralism. The entire plan of liberal peacebuilding is designed by the 'outsiders' and implemented in an elite-driven and top-down manner with little inputs from the local actors. However, there is little evidence to claim this peace mission was carried out in the interest of the West,

except for their tremendous efforts in replicating liberal values in this country.

The situation of Cambodia after the departure of UNTAC reflects the country's 'unreadiness' for the adoption of liberal values. Social and cultural differences remain significant obstacles for the West's values to be transplanted in this nation. Interestingly, some developments that distanced from democratic commitments, such as political intimidation and violence, especially the coup in 1997, apparently brought in more stability for the country.

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