Security and Development: Searching for Critical Connections

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Academic research bears some good news: the number of wars and the lethality of warfare have been declining since 1992. This includes civil wars, which decreased from a high of forty-six in 1992 to twenty-one in 2006. In the same stretch of time, the most severe conflicts declined by 80 percent. Yet deeper analysis of these trends provides disturbing findings. The University of Maryland’s report *Peace and Conflict 2008* notes that the downward trend in conflict is not the result of effective prevention of new conflicts but rather the termination of ongoing wars. The report confirms that the number of ongoing active conflicts dropped significantly over the post–Cold War period. Meanwhile, there has been no discernible change in the number of newly initiated conflicts. In fact, in the report’s words, “for the past sixty years, the rate at which new armed conflicts emerge each year has been essentially unchanged.” This suggests that, despite almost two decades of research, advocacy, and action, international efforts to prevent violent conflicts have seriously lagged behind efforts to resolve existing conflicts. If the steady outbreak of new wars is to be arrested and reversed, the conflict prevention agenda that gained prominence in the immediate post–Cold War years needs to be revitalized. This requires deeper investigation of the sources of violent intrastate conflicts that threaten both human and international security.

Not all countries face an equal risk of conflict. Some are more vulnerable than others. Various institutions have developed indexes or criteria to classify and rank the countries at greatest risk of conflict and insecurity, referring to them as either “fragile states,” “failed states,” “weak states,” or “countries at risk of instability.” Many of these countries are also home to the world’s poorest, comprising the
The "bottom billion" of the globe’s population, living in some fifty-eight countries. Of these, seventy percent are in Africa, but various lists also include countries from other regions like Haiti, Bolivia, Yemen, Tajikistan, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and North Korea. The combined gross domestic product (GDP) of these countries is estimated at about US$350 billion per year, less than the GDP of metropolitan Chicago.

Many of these countries are chronic development laggards: their economic conditions have remained weak or shown little improvement year after year. In addition to suffering from underdevelopment, these countries also tend to be in constant turmoil—experiencing widespread human insecurity, political instability, political and criminal violence, and various forms of ethnic or religious conflict. Paul Collier, who popularized the concept of the bottom billion, asserts that “seventy-three percent of people in the societies of the bottom billion have recently been through a civil war or are still in one.” They are increasingly seen as being caught in a so-called conflict trap, created by a vicious circle of insecurity and underdevelopment.

The overlapping development and security challenges facing these countries have increasingly led to a new international agenda that calls for integrated security and development policies. Initially motivated by the activist internationalism of the immediate post–Cold War years, the new agenda gained greater urgency after September 11, 2001, due to heightened awareness of the impact of insecurity in distant countries on the vital interests of the world’s major powers. From the United Nations to the African Union, from bilateral donors to international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), policymakers and practitioners have enthusiastically embraced the refrain that security and development are interdependent and require integrated policies. The final outcome of the September 2005 World Summit at the United Nations was a document that boldly declared, “Without security there is no development, and without development there is no security.” Contributing to the impetus behind this agenda was growing acceptance of the idea of human security. Its proponents sought to broaden the definition of security outside its traditional association with interstate relations and apply it to the wider dimensions of human welfare, thus incorporating both security and development in a single overarching concept.

Despite the new policy discourse, the nature of the interplay between security and development and its policy implications are far from clear. The interdependence between security and development is often assumed to apply indiscriminately to greatly differing phases of conflict, different time frames, and far-reaching policy activity at the
local, national, regional, and international levels. Another crucial distinction that gets muddied in the current discourse is that between security and development as societal goals and as policies to achieve goals. These ambiguities in the discourse often lead to broad assumptions that development and security conditions change in tandem, and that policy interventions in one area will have concurrent impacts in the other. Such assumptions have led to the mantra that there is no development without security and no security without development.

Given the breadth and vagueness of the security-development nexus proposition, this study approaches their presumed interdependence as an open question. Its central aim is to examine the nature of their actual interactions as evidenced within both the existing general research and the particular developing countries that have already experienced various forms of violent conflict. The study’s focus is particularly relevant for the UN, as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has strongly affirmed his intention to make conflict prevention, along with a commitment to the bottom billion, high priorities during his tenure, which began on January 1, 2007. This is a welcome development, provided that international strategies for conflict prevention and sustainable development are firmly grounded in reality rather than in high-minded, generalized rhetoric. While recognizing the impressive body of literature on conflict prevention that has been produced since the mid-1990s, we as the authors of this study have been motivated by the continued shortcomings of international efforts in preventing deadly conflict. Thus, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of the utility as well as the limitations of the call for integrated security-development policies that reflect a renewed commitment to the international conflict-prevention agenda.

Searching for Critical Connections

At a general level, there is considerable evidence of a correlation between levels of underdevelopment and levels of insecurity. The higher the level of development, the lower is the likelihood of internal violent conflict and insecurity. Indeed, since the end of World War II, developed countries have overwhelmingly been spared the ravages of war and violent conflict. Meanwhile, since the early 1990s, 80 percent of the world’s poorest countries have suffered violent conflict. These facts clearly suggest a link between low levels of development and high risks of violent conflict.

However, when it comes to unpacking the relationship, the
results are far from clear. It is not easy to determine how developmental factors contribute to conflict. Conversely, it is not obvious to what extent conflict is the source of a country’s development problems rather than the consequence.\(^1\) The generality of the concept of a security-development nexus obscures the difficulties in determining the causal connections between the two phenomena and, even more important, in extracting appropriate policy guidelines as to what combination and sequence of policies are relevant in different contexts. Since the concerted call for integrated policies remains highly abstracted, it does not adequately reflect the causal lags, disconnects, blowbacks, tensions, and trade-offs involved in addressing multifaceted security and development challenges in diverse circumstances. Indeed, advocating in vague terms for policy integration between security and development not only fails to provide any practical guidance, it also potentially leads to ineffective and possibly counterproductive actions, widening the gap between rhetoric and reality. While it is important to affirm a concept of security that extends beyond the absence of war, the concrete challenge for policymakers is to understand the impact of such an extension and how to work toward its achievement while avoiding the contradictions that may arise.

To cut through the confusion left by the current discourse, this volume searches for the most critical connections between security and development as reflected both in societal outcomes and the various policies that might achieve those outcomes. One thing that is clear is that those who assert the security-development nexus want to see the achievement of both in the given countries of concern. Yet much academic and policy literature focuses separately on one or the other. By contrast, this volume seeks to understand how both security and development can be pursued complementarily and how developing societies can escape the conflict trap. Several international bodies have coined terms that seek to capture this dualism, among them structural stability, secure development, and structural prevention. Similarly, NGOs have used the term preventive peacebuilding to describe programs that alloy conflict prevention and development aims and components.\(^1\) However, few studies have looked at how the amalgamation of security and development captured by these hybrid terms actually comes into being on the ground. Going beyond the postulated vicious circle of conflict and poverty, this volume seeks to identify the critical factors and dynamics that can lead to a virtuous circle of security and development.

In particular, the volume is designed to address three interrelated questions, each of which probes for critical connections:
1. What are the critical causal interactions between conditions of security and development in societies?
2. What are the basic ingredients of environments of mutually-compatible security and development?
3. What kinds of policies are more likely to achieve these outcomes?

The answers to these questions go to the heart of international efforts to assist countries that face concurrent development and security challenges. Although there is no presumption that greater knowledge will necessarily prevent all forms of violent conflict or hold the key to lasting development, what it can do is contribute to averting counterproductive or harmful interventions based on simplistic formulas and faulty analysis. Gaining a better understanding of trends and pressures that can lead to conflict and thwart development and addressing them through appropriate policy responses is the best route toward achieving the twin goals of security and development in challenging environments. Yet the task is far from easy, as is evidenced by the shortcomings of numerous efforts to date.

The call for greater convergence between security and development policies emerged in response to the complex and interlocking humanitarian, human rights, security, and development crises that confronted international policymakers in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. Throughout the 1990s, a steady stream of policy documents by international institutions and bilateral and multilateral donors called for concerted international action to address these complex and multidimensional challenges. By the early 2000s, many UN documents and policy reports asserted the connections between security and development “to the point of monotony.” The UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change noted that “development and security are inextricably linked. A more secure world is only possible if poor countries are given a real chance to develop.” While focusing on Investing in Development, Jeffrey Sachs, director of the UN Millennium Project, noted that “many world leaders in recent years have rightly stressed the powerful relationship between poverty reduction and global security.” In his report In Larger Freedom, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan reiterated that “development, security and human rights go hand in hand.”

Interestingly, academic researchers initially had little to offer to the international policy debates and were slow in removing the blinders of their particular disciplines so as to better examine the linkages between security and development—two realms of study and practice
that had developed in separate tracks for much of the twentieth century. Indeed, much of the early post–Cold War academic literature was firmly grounded in conventional disciplinary perspectives. Security scholars had traditionally focused on interstate conflicts and approached their subject primarily from a statecentric perspective; development scholars, meanwhile, had been concerned primarily with the sources of economic growth and socioeconomic development to the neglect of societal conflicts. Researchers in both fields had to undergo significant retooling to address the intrastate conflicts that came to the forefront of international affairs in the immediate post–Cold War years. From Rwanda and Somalia to Haiti and East Timor, violent conflicts around the world were instrumental in expanding disciplinary boundaries and stimulating cross-disciplinary fertilization. However, despite a great deal of innovative research, the dominant approaches toward poor and unstable countries are still greatly informed by divergent disciplinary perspectives, which are, in turn, employed selectively to generate widely varying policy prescriptions. Indeed, policymakers frequently become frustrated while trying to make sense of competing interpretations of the complex and pressing problems in such societies. This may explain their frequent resort to ready-made policy formulas such as the security-development nexus, which has come to mean many things to many people.

**In This Volume**

This volume is our effort to advance beyond the legacy of fragmented disciplines dealing with security and development even as we challenge some of the current orthodoxy on the need for integrated security-development policies. It approaches the possible links between security and development empirically, namely by gathering evidence-based insights and applying them to societies that face concurrent security and development problems in the search for coherent approaches. Eschewing the equally unhelpful blanket claims that security and development are mutually dependent and that each is so unique as to defy generalization, it further aims to reveal critical connections between security and development through thematic and country case studies.

Thus, the next three chapters examine the body of existing general research on the interactions among conflict and three key factors in development: poverty, the environment, and demography. Unpacking the postulated nexus between development and security, these the-
matic chapters seek to identify the principal causal paths at work within and across key issue areas and their policy implications. The subsequent seven chapters are detailed case studies that both examine a wide spectrum of countries that have contended with security and development challenges and explore how a common set of variables might have determined respective levels of security and development.

The three thematic chapters disentangle the intertwined phenomena of security and development by pulling together the leading findings in the extant empirical research on the various effects violent conflict has on development and, reciprocally, the effects of low development and the structural vulnerability it causes societies with respect to conflict. In Chapter 2, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr investigates the strong mutual influences between poverty and insecurity and the various factors commonly advanced to explain the so-called poverty-conflict trap. Despite the analytical richness of this body of research, Fukuda-Parr argues against monocausal and unidirectional explanations. Indeed, the evidence points to multilayered and two-way relationships in that poor countries show a greater disposition to conflict and that poverty increases as an outcome of violent conflict. She makes a strong plea for the greater use of several theories and tools in explaining the divergent paths that societies often take in the quest for economic development, and she calls for increased emphasis on economic and other structural sources of conflict. Further, she turns a critical eye to the largely unexamined tendency of many current aid policies to neglect or even increase conflict risks—for instance, those that apply Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in all contexts regardless of their varied security environments. The author stresses that the policy challenge is not simply to accelerate development and reduce poverty but to realign the priorities and instruments of development cooperation to deliberately address the security risks created by the development process. Thus, she concludes that current aid policies entail serious contradictions that can only be redressed by reconceptualizing development.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on two major forces that affect all societies—environmental and demographic change—and show how they are especially threatening to the security and development of poor societies, thus requiring that we pay specific attention to how conservation and other policies are applied thereto. In Chapter 3, Richard Matthew surveys the links between the environment and security that have come under scrutiny since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. He traces various causal pathways that link specific environmental, social, and demographic factors and thus help shape
societies’ security and development. Environmental degradation can trigger or exacerbate violent conflict, contribute to vulnerability and inequity, and bolster infectious disease. Moreover, environmental policies can involve complex feedback loops that lead to unanticipated outcomes, such as worsening conflicts. Matthew adds, however, that societal adaptability and resilience fortunately defy any deterministic outcomes. Instead, environmental factors come into play in various indirect ways. Thus, the influence of environmental change and the responses thereto that generate violence and conflict are difficult to specify; further, conflicts often have histories that go beyond these structural determinants.

In Chapter 4, Richard Cincotta examines the mounting quantitative and qualitative evidence that certain demographic forces such as population growth and movement increase the risk of civil strife as well as reduce material welfare. Drawing upon strong statistical data, he shows that countries with very youthful age structures are most at risk of conflict, and that there is a tight correlation between youthful age structure and very rapid growth rates of urban population. Yet he also shows that demographic risk factors are not the direct causes of civil war or the so-called triggers that ignite political violence. For countries in the early phases of demographic transition, there are policy options that can have positive short-term implications for development. These can help to alter the age structure and slow urban growth and rates of other demographic risks, thereby reducing the likelihood of instability and civil strife in the medium and long term.

Chapters 5 through 11 concern the interplay between security and development at the level of particular countries. The country case studies on Yemen, Somalia, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan first examine the respective security and development levels each country has attained. They then address the factors that have contributed to each country’s particular trajectory and performance. The seven countries were selected from a larger group of relatively small, low- to medium-income developing countries that have experienced various forms and degrees of violence or armed conflict since 1989 and/or still face some risk of conflict or insecurity. Five of them have had civil wars, although only Somalia is still engaged in open warfare. The other four (Yemen, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, and Tajikistan) have already outlived what is often considered the high-risk period, namely the first five years since the end of their violent conflicts, without relapsing into war. However, they continue to face development challenges that can have security consequences.
Despite their differences, all seven countries have witnessed considerable turbulence over the last twenty years. Yemen was unified, had a short civil war, and then reunited; Somalia had a vicious civil war and collapsed as a state; Guinea-Bissau’s civil war and recurrent intra-elite clashes have brought it to the brink of state failure; Namibia gained its independence through a long armed struggle but has enjoyed relative security and development ever since; Guyana has had no war but has seen a steady rise in political and criminal violence in the midst of an ongoing political stalemate; and neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have both been grappling with instability and violence following their independence from the Soviet Union. The seven countries represent a wide spectrum in terms of their conflict histories and levels of insecurity and socioeconomic development. For the purposes of this study, the diversity of experiences among them is particularly instructive, since it allows a greater understanding of how security and development vary in different contexts and thus of how to identify appropriate strategies to affect change.

In view of the differences among the seven countries, the case-study authors have employed a common framework in order to foster a systematic analysis of the levels and sources of development and security conditions in each case. This framework has allowed the authors to first trace the evolution of postindependence security and development, then explore the extent to which a set of common variables helps to explain each country’s current status and future prospects. Yet they have also adapted the framework to fit the realities of each case so as to provide a country-specific analysis of the significance of said variables. Accordingly, each chapter provides a grounded characterization of the specific security and development conditions and their sources in each country. By employing this common framework, the case studies allow for a comparative analysis from which broader conclusions may be extracted.25

The sets of variables considered are drawn from the existing cross-country research and literature to cover the historical, geographic, sociocultural, economic, environmental, political, and international factors that are most likely to determine security and development outcomes.26 Although the conflict literature has provided the leading factors for examination, these often overlap with what the development literature presents as the factors most likely to be important. The following pages provide a brief review of the main sets of variables the authors examined in their cases. Their findings are summarized in the concluding chapter.
The authors initially consider the historical legacies that have shaped recent security and development prospects in their countries of study. Regarding the eruption of new conflicts after the imposed stability of the Cold War era, they explore the dominant view among academics that some war-torn countries have tended to experience repeated cycles of violent conflict following short periods of respite. They also draw attention to the structures and dynamics of intergroup relations in developing countries as well as to how imperial or colonial-era policies may have helped shape ethnic, racial, religious, and social divides.

Socioeconomic structural factors create widely felt problems that may become the bases for grievances and increase the chances that violent conflict will occur, even if they do not directly trigger its outbreak. Among more recent structural risk factors, poverty and inequality are consistently cited as root causes of conflict. As discussed extensively in Chapter 2, there is a strong statistical correlation between the incidence of poverty and conflict, although the causal mechanisms are still being understood. Among the socioeconomic causes of conflict, it is less the incidence of poverty per se than its distribution across ethnic, religious, and social groups that requires special attention.

Since the mid-1990s, the literature on civil wars and intrastate conflict has also been greatly enriched by economic analysis. Economists have not only studied factors such as poverty, inequality, and lack of economic growth as sources of conflict but also examined the political-economic drivers of conflict. The greed thesis emerged from econometric research by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, who found a correlation between dependence on natural resources (or primary commodity exports as a proportion of GDP) and higher risk of conflict. As a result, resource predation has been seen as providing rebels with the motivation and/or opportunity to wage war. Thus, private greed rather than social or political grievance has been posited as an important explanation for conflict.

Another promising area of recent research has focused on new or nontraditional security threats in relation to demographics, the environment, and health. As discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, this body of research has been instrumental in expanding the scope and parameters of the conventional security discourse by demonstrating the security implications in each of these areas, as well as in the intersections among them. Indeed, the country case studies demonstrate the cumulative impacts of changing health, population, and environmental trends on both human and national security.
In addition to such long-term trends, several variables more intimately associated with the outward expression of conflict are also examined in the chapters. These have to do with group ideologies, religious and cultural value systems, organizations, institutions, politics, and government policies that enable the structural conditions for violent action or, alternatively, peaceful forms of conflict or even cooperation. These factors are also deeply rooted but can be amenable more to change. In the immediate post–Cold War era, psychosocial factors gained considerable attention as multiethnic societies broke into conflict that led to the rapid dissolution of states in the Balkans, central Asia, and Africa. State failure and state weakness were catapulted onto the center stage of academic and policy interest with the events of September 11, 2001. Many analysts came to view state failure and state weakness as the sources of contemporary conflict and thus to focus primarily on the dynamics of state collapse. Others, by contrast, consider state fragility as a consequence of prolonged conflict—including the Cold War, which interrupted the process of state formation in many postcolonial countries.

Beyond state failure, researchers have cited the absence of democratic processes, specifying the lack of rule of law, violations of human rights, the repression of basic freedoms, and authoritarian rule as crucial sources of conflict and arguing that democracy is an important instrument for nonviolent conflict resolution. However, it is also recognized that although democracy can serve as an instrument for peaceful conflict management, the process of democratization itself can be conflict inducing. There is an ever-expanding body of literature on the roles played by elections, political parties, civil societies, the media, human and minority rights, constitution making, local administrations, interest groups, transparency and accountability mechanisms, and political mobilization in restraining or fueling conflict.

Another set of variables examined in the chapters concerns external influences on security and development. Geosocial factors have always been recognized as key explanatory factors for war. However, researchers are now going beyond geographic variables to explore the role of regional political dynamics in increasing risk of conflict. After 9/11 and the changes it caused in the international security environment, and despite the marked decline in interstate wars since the end of the Cold War, international relations experts and security specialists continue to view violent domestic conflicts in the context of global systemic factors, including the fluid regional and international balance of power at the end of the Cold War. More recently, the growing reach of globalization has brought about new
transnational threats such as terrorism and criminal networks, which can cause violence and undermine socioeconomic development. Finally, given the changing roles of donors and external actors in the post–Cold War era, the nature and extent of deliberate international diplomatic, development, and security interventions have attracted growing attention as important factors in influencing security and conflict outcomes. The postindependence time frame of the case studies precludes identifying the impact of more recent policy changes. Yet the chapters all consider the dynamic interplay between domestic and international forces and the likely impact of new policy directions.

As this quick survey highlights, the range of factors that can influence the interplay between security and development is not only very broad but also contextually shaped. This volume is designed to provide a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of those factors in order to contribute to the dual goal of promoting security and advancing development. The findings from the thematic chapters and country case studies are summarized and analyzed in the volume’s conclusion along with the policy implications they suggest. Meanwhile, three broad conclusions help to link the insights from the thematic and country case studies. First, structural development factors pose conflict risks in each of the seven countries—although there is no consistent pattern that can easily lend itself to uniform policy changes across different contexts. Second, at the country level, political uncertainty and instability emerge as causes rather than consequences of development failures and insecurity and so provide a key to their remedy. Therefore, countries actually need to find a development-politics-security nexus that is highly context specific. Finally, despite the current tendency to search for causes of conflict mainly at the country level, external factors—both regional and international—have far-reaching influence on a country’s development and security prospects and require solutions at the global as well as domestic level. These findings imply that the next generation of research, policy, and action to prevent conflict and redress chronic development problems need to be better grounded in hard realities. It is hoped that the chapters that follow are important steps in that direction.

Notes

10. UN, 2005 World Summit Outcome, UN Doc. A/RES/60/1, October 24, 2005.


17. Frances Stewart posits three types of connections between security and development: (1) security (or lack of conflict) as a necessary component within development and well being (security and development as synonymous); (2) the impact of insecurity (or conflict) on nonsecurity elements of development and economic growth (i.e., security as a cause of development); (3) the impact of development on security (i.e., development as a cause of security). For the full report, see Frances Stewart, “Development and Security,” CRISE Working Paper No. 3 (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2004).


25. This procedure seeks to follow the method of “structured, focused comparison” that is widely used in international relations and comparative politics for deriving grounded generalization from a small number of cases.


