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The Strategic Ambiguity of the United Nations Approach to Preventing Violent Extremism

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Abstract

The use of international peacebuilding as a delivery vehicle for preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives is a recent and pivotal development in United Nations (UN) counter-terrorism strategy. However, existing research has not considered the contradictions that emerge when international organizations transition to new peacebuilding approaches such as PVE. Further, it remains unclear whether and how intervening organizations overcome these contradictions. Based upon 47 interviews with UN, government, and NGO officials in Kyrgyzstan and New York this article critically analyses the shift to PVE as an underlying strategic approach to UN peacebuilding and the mismatch between external expectations and local priorities. Interview narratives feature ambiguity in conceptions of foundational PVE concepts and in how interveners reference a menu of drivers for violent extremism according to project requirements. This article argues that ambiguity is strategically tolerated and employed, whereby not clarifying the terms of engagement with (sub-)national counterparts supports external agendas and achieves a basic unity of purpose by permitting counterparts increased managerial latitude to satisfy self-interests.

Keywords

United Nations, peacebuilding, preventing violent extremism, extremism, ambiguity, Kyrgyzstan

Introduction

The UN's strategy in the Central Asian nation of Kyrgyzstan exemplifies a recent transformation in the UN's peacebuilding approach across the globe. In an apparent about-face, the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) in Kyrgyzstan has initiated a new \$20.1m USD suite of multi-agency peacebuilding projects in 2018 that leaves behind the UN's former focus on preventing the recurrence of interethnic violence in the country¹ and adopts "preventing violent extremism" (PVE) as an underlying strategic approach moving forward. This new suite of UN PBF projects purports to support the Kyrgyz government in curbing violent extremism by building the resilience of targeted local communities to radicalization, reforming justice and security institutions, and building the capacity of penitentiary, probation, police and forensic services.² The UN system justifies this shift towards PVE as counteracting a "burgeoning phenomenon of radicalization and participation of [Kyrgyzstan's] citizens in violent extremism"³ such as the alleged recruitment of Kyrgyz nationals to carry out attacks on the Ataturk international airport and a nightclub in Istanbul (Turkey) during 2016-17, China's Embassy in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in 2016, a metro carriage in St. Petersburg (Russia) in 2017, and Sweden, where suspects were arrested before a planned attack in 2018.⁴ Further, the Kyrgyz government claims that 803 citizens have travelled as foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq, continue to return, and pose a serious challenge to social cohesion and stability in local communities across Kyrgyzstan.⁵

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The UN's turn to PVE as a strategic peacebuilding approach reflects evolving UN priorities more broadly as outlined in the Secretary-General's 2016 *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* (PVE)⁶, and is exemplified by UN programming in Kyrgyzstan and in at least 46 other countries (by 2017).⁷ In addition to the UN's expanding attention to PVE, similar shifts in intervention approaches are occurring within other international organisations. As an example, the European Union (EU) doubled its investments in PVE and counter-terrorism between 2015 (€138m) and 2017 (€274m) to target over 40 countries.⁸ Further, UN and EU PVE projects often coexist with analogous initiatives supported by the UK Conflict Stability and Security Fund, United States Department of State, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and an array of international and local NGOs.⁹

The expanding use of international peacebuilding as a delivery vehicle for PVE is a pivotal development inside the UN's counter-terrorism strategy. However, existing research has not considered how this strategic transition plays out at the country level. Given the newness of this, it is unsurprising that there is a distinct gap in the literature base in relation to whether and why the PVE turn looks different at the country level than originally conceived at the strategic level within UN Headquarters. In response, this article adopts two lines of inquiry that extend beyond the bounds of the UN system and implicate other international organizations that are also transitioning to a PVE approach: 1) What explains the contradictions that emerge when international organizations (including the UN) transition to new peacebuilding approaches such as PVE? 2) How do these organizations overcome these contradictions and rectify mismatches between external expectations and local priorities? These questions address a blind spot in scholarly attention to PVE so far – the broader implications of contradictions within the UN's PVE approach for the success of PVE initiatives. These lines of inquiry are pursued in conversation with peacebuilding leaders connected to UN PVE projects at multiple levels – who identify the defining features of a PVE approach to peacebuilding¹⁰ and analyse the strategic nature of the implementation of the PVE turn in UN peacebuilding.

These lines of inquiry are original and important in the context of existing research literature and methods of UN research. A review of the literature revealed that, to date, there have not been any empirical studies analysing how the UN has transitioned to a PVE approach at the country-level. Indeed, there has not been any substantive scholarly research that allows those with a clearest view of country-level transition processes - UN officials and their government counterparts themselves – to directly shape emerging theory on UN PVE peacebuilding. Methodologically, this research pushes out from all too common top-down perspectives and features insider perspectives at multiple levels to more fully illuminate how and why external PVE agendas are accepted, revised or rejected as they drop down from Headquarters to local communities.

This article proceeds by contextualizing the UN's pivot towards PVE in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere and situates this pivot in the existing international peacebuilding research literature. Next, the methodological framework used in this research is detailed and justified, including core research questions and the methods of gathering and analysing data from 47 UN, government, and NGO officials in Kyrgyzstan and at UN headquarters in New York. Then, research findings are presented, with the final discussion section interpreting these findings with the construction of a grounded theory of UN PVE strategy.

The United Nations and PVE in Kyrgyzstan

The social and political transition of Kyrgyzstan after the dissolution of the Soviet Union is signposted by two major civil uprisings.¹¹ The 2005 Tulip Revolution removed the country's first president and a rebellion in April 2010 deposed his successor - Kurmanbek

Bakiyev. Following Bakiyev's removal the Kyrgyz transitional government struggled to stabilize Kyrgyz society and politics and inter-ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 killed 400-500 people, displaced hundreds of thousands internally and externally, and resulted in major damage to property.¹² Southern Kyrgyzstan borders Uzbekistan, and is home to a significant Uzbek population - Kyrgyzstan's largest ethnic minority.¹³ These clashes were provoked by perceived social and economic inequalities, political exclusion of ethnic minorities, and divisive competitions for power by local leaders in southern regions and cities.¹⁴ Deep ethnic and regional divisions have lingered since the June 2010 events and southern Kyrgyz society is still characterized by social segregation and mistrust for local and central governments, justice structures and law enforcement.

As a constituent component to a broader international response to the June 2010 events, the UN system, through its Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), implemented a suite of projects during 2010-17 that worked to prevent a relapse into violent conflict by reforming the police, the justice system, national and local governance structures in order to reconstruct its citizens' trust, support local dispute resolution and persuade youth, civil society, religious leaders and national media outlets to improve ethnic relations.¹⁵ However, as PBF projects were implemented three social trends became increasingly visible. First, the years after 2010 did not heal disaffected Uzbek populations. Uzbeks continue to feel disenfranchised and believe that the national government has unfairly sided with the ethnic Kyrgyz majority.¹⁶ Second, prolific online propaganda reveals that several groups with ideologies labelled as "extremist" by the Kyrgyz government are active in Kyrgyzstan, with some actively recruiting foreign fighters to travel to Syria and Iraq and carry out terrorist attacks.¹⁷ Third, it is commonly perceived in Kyrgyzstan that both Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations are becoming more conservative in religious beliefs and practices.¹⁸ In response to these trends, the general public and government officials have embraced a narrative of heightened threats for violent extremism and terrorism in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz government authorities claim that 803 citizens of Kyrgyzstan have travelled as foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIS and other armed groups. Some of these fighters continue to return home – in turn providing significant challenges for Kyrgyz authorities.¹⁹ Furthermore, there are numerous examples of international terrorist attacks committed by citizens of Kyrgyzstan or by individuals who have spent significant time in the country. In most cases, perpetrators are allegedly from the minority Uzbek population. But it is important to note here that the actual relationship between Islamic piety and extremist violence is deeply contested. For example, Heathershaw and Montgomery²⁰ argue that it is, in fact, security analysts who have constructed and perpetuated an international security discourse of Muslim radicalization that erroneously links 'extremist' violence to non-violent forms of political Islam and to public expressions of piety.

In response, the UN system has decided to re-direct its PBF-funded peacebuilding programme in Kyrgyzstan and adopt PVE as its strategic peacebuilding approach inside its broader "sustaining peace" initiative in the country.²¹ As part of a growing divergence with traditional UN peacebuilding approaches,²² UN peacebuilding projects in Kyrgyzstan are now distinctly focused on building community resilience to radicalization and extremist ideologies, including those exploiting religion. UN PVE programming is equipping state authorities to align their PVE policy actions with international human rights standards and building the capacity of law enforcement and the judiciary accordingly, as well as including women in the national security architecture. UN projects are also supporting the reform of Kyrgyzstan's forensic services, the prison system and prisoner rehabilitation services.

External Agendas and the UN's Peacebuilding Pivot to PVE

In order to complete the lines of inquiry set out above, it is necessary to explore the UN's peacebuilding pivot to PVE in relation to the growing critique of Western and UN interventionism in conflict zones.²³ Of interest here is the critique's assertion that international peacebuilding interventions are substantially driven by external agendas.²⁴ This critique argues that international peacebuilding in conflict zones is often legitimated by claiming the universality and superiority of liberal economic, political and social norms, whereby external interveners assert foreign agendas in local societies.²⁵ This agenda-driven dissemination of rules and norms has, predictably, not been a hands-off affair but has been enabled by Western-led "humanitarian wars" in places such as Kosovo, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Mali.²⁶ These humanitarian wars have laid the foundation for more closely integrating the priorities of peacebuilding and counter-terrorism in regions like Central Asia, the Sahel and across the globe.²⁷

But UN peacebuilding priorities are also closely aligned with member state agendas in conflict zones. As is becoming clear here, this alignment is contradictory. The UN peacebuilding architecture is directed by member state mandates through financial contributions and, thus, the system listens closely to the requests of wealthier states – primarily industrialized liberal democracies, but also aspirants such as China and Russia, who are able to commit more resources and are interested in UN strategies in regions such as Central Asia.²⁸ Conversely, the UN system is a critical friend to member states – exerting normative influence in governance reform, economic reform, development policy, and standardizing human rights. This positionality is evidently contradictory since the UN system rhetorically promotes the separation of politics and project initiatives while, at the same time, pivoting towards politicized counter-terrorism and PVE approaches that align the UN system more fully to the political agendas of member states.²⁹

UN alignment with member state political agendas, especially state interests in clearing "terrorist" and "extremist" threats, and concomitant cooperation with military interventions to this end,³⁰ has served to politicize and securitize UN external peacebuilding intervention in conflict zones. The deepening politicization of the UN's approach at multiple levels allows the UN system to maintain its sway in global governance to both regulate the behaviours of conflict populations and transform local politics, society and economics therein.³¹ An exploration of the politicization of peacebuilding leads directly to an even deeper critique – that the UN system has permitted the securitization of its peacebuilding work inside counter-terrorism and PVE initiatives as they serve the security agenda of intervening member states.³² In this way, the PVE approach to peacebuilding allows international interveners to project local radicalization and related conflict as international security concerns in order to justify deeper forms of external influence in conflict zones.³³

The securitization of peacebuilding has required the continuous fine-tuning of intervention approaches to gain access to conflict-affected populations and legitimate intervention. For example, liberal peacebuilders have and continue to invoke the human security discourse, Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine³⁴ and resilience building³⁵ to counteract accusations of neo-colonialism. However, scholars have problematized human security, R2P and resilience-building and pointed out that each are utilized for far more than alleviating local insecurity in conflict zones and legitimate deeper forms of intervention while supporting external agendas.³⁶ This article considers if the emerging PVE approach can also be viewed as but the latest iteration to better enable interveners to bolster their influence and security.

However, the satisfaction of external agendas requires support from member state governments, and strategic compromises are made to ensure that national governments support foreign agendas as they look after their own. Compromises create difficult dilemmas

for the UN – especially when cooperating with undemocratic state counterparts. UN-state cooperation is typically initiated by invitations from states and is, thus, conditional on continued state support. Consequently, member states can significantly shape UN PVE initiatives and can insist upon forms of intervention that are dissonant with UN human rights norms. For example, states may insist upon labelling their armed and unarmed political opponents “violent extremists” or “terrorists” to repress legitimate resistance and critique of their governance. Ucko clarifies this tendency: “By characterizing dissenting domestic groups as violent extremists, these states could present as PVE, and thereby legitimize, any measure taken to stem such groups’ recruitment, messaging or outreach.”³⁷ Thus, UN PVE measures may, indirectly and ironically, motivate radicalization towards violent extremism³⁸ as state authorities enact exclusionary policies and suppress segments of their constituency.³⁹ Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon affirmed this correlation to the UN General Assembly in 2016: “Poisonous ideologies do not emerge from thin air. Oppression, corruption and injustice are greenhouses for resentment. Extremists are adept at cultivating alienation.”⁴⁰

The UN’s expanding attention to violent extremism has enjoyed uncommon levels of support from within the UN member-state community - resulting in an extensive hydra-headed corpus of UN entities and programs that work on counter-terrorism and, concomitantly, PVE. The UN’s tentacular counter-terrorism architecture features Security Council subsidiary organs including the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and its Executive Directorate (CTED), and General Assembly organs including its Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), all of which are governed by the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS).⁴¹ In 2017 the Secretary General created the Office of Counter-Terrorism (OCT) to oversee all but the Security Council’s work in this area.⁴²

However, the UN counter-terrorism architecture is waking up to an important contradiction – member states supported by UN counter-terrorism initiatives have sometimes rolled back human rights of regular citizens as part of counter-terrorism initiatives. In fact, regressions in human rights are often cancelling out any gains in security through counter-terrorist ventures. This contradiction of UN counter-terrorism has motivated a reaction against hard-power kinetic counter-terrorism measures - the paradigmatic turn to PVE inside UN peacebuilding measures. This strategic turn required the UN to relabel and reorient its peacebuilding initiatives to feature preventative action targeting the drivers of radicalization leading to extremism and terrorism. For example, the UN’s Peacebuilding Fund has embraced PVE-specific programming in several of its country engagements including Kyrgyzstan and across the Sahel. The UN’s pivot to PVE dovetails with the UN’s “sustaining peace” agenda and its focus on prevention⁴³ since PVE favours preventative over reactionary responses – suggesting that improved governance and protecting human rights will reduce the odds of extremist violence.⁴⁴

The embrace of PVE is strategic at the highest levels in the UN system as evident in the UN’s *Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*⁴⁵ and the Secretary-General’s 2016 *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE)*.⁴⁶ The *Plan of Action* explicitly and comprehensively adopts a preventative stance to extremist violence and terrorism as it prioritizes systematic action to confront undergirding issues that are driving individuals and groups to commit extremist violence.⁴⁷ The *Plan of Action* comprehensively shapes UN strategy across the globe by injecting ongoing security, political, humanitarian, and development initiatives with the logic of PVE and, in doing so, connects a wide range of social, political and economic challenges to the issue of extremist violence.⁴⁸

UN PVE initiatives have provoked the formation of numerous governmental and non-governmental national, regional and international networks and consortiums to adopt the underlying logic of PVE and revise their work accordingly – often reinforced through donor funding. At the state level, numerous countries including Kyrgyzstan have responded to the

Plan of Action and created a national strategy for PVE and drafted new laws and policies. Non-state activity is even more energetic - in the small country of Kyrgyzstan alone over 30 PVE projects operate outside of the UN system⁴⁹ – often implemented by international organizations together with local NGOs.⁵⁰

Research Design and Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative grounded theory research approach and relies upon the insights of those working in or closely with the UN system at the global level at UN Headquarters in New York and the national and sub-national levels in Bishkek and Osh, Kyrgyzstan. The primary case study for this research, Kyrgyzstan, is a convenient location to investigate UN peacebuilding trends since the country's relatively small land area and population allows a wide range of respondents to make informed comments on the overall country engagement. UN officials in New York complement Kyrgyzstan respondents by adding a global perspective to compare Kyrgyzstan to other country engagements. Data was gathered during 2017-18, a period of transition for the UN engagement in Kyrgyzstan where the UN's Peacebuilding Fund decisively shifted its underlying peacebuilding strategy to PVE as part of its overarching "sustaining peace" approach. Thus, the timing of data gathering allowed insights into a portion of the UN project cycle that is rarely observed at the field level by academic researchers – the transitional period during which new peacebuilding projects are debated, negotiated, and agreed upon. This period featured the tension and uncertainty of transition, and memories of difficult debates regarding the PVE approach were fresh in the minds of respondents.

As mentioned earlier, this research explores the transition to and defining features of a PVE approach to peacebuilding and analyses the strategic nature of the implementation of PVE in UN peacebuilding. To empirically explore these core concerns, interview questioning focused on the strategic shift towards a PVE approach to projects at multiple levels and the most important contextual factors and stakeholders that determine if these projects effectively influence government counterparts and local populations.

Data Gathering

Data was gathered through face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews with 47 key informants (24 women, 23 men) – 19 interviews within the UN system, seven interviews with Kyrgyz government counterpart institutions and six interviews with civil society implementing partners in Kyrgyzstan. Forty-two respondents worked in Bishkek and Osh and five respondents were senior peacebuilding, counter-terrorism, and PVE officials at UN Headquarters in New York. Access to respondents at multiple levels in Kyrgyzstan and New York was facilitated by the author's multi-year work as a research consultant guiding baseline and endline assessments of peacebuilding projects across Kyrgyzstan.

Interview sampling was purposive and aimed at significant variation to capture a rich cross section of opinions and was guided by key inclusion criteria including the type of organization, position in the organization, location, experience with PVE, and gender. Sampling was also theoretical – some respondents were selected according to gaps in the interview narratives to flesh out the argument presented in this article. Most interviews were audio recorded with the remaining documented in detailed notes. In addition to interviews, a "learning history" process of reflection in the form of a collaborative workshop⁵¹ was held in Bishkek during which 16 UN and NGO representatives validated initial interpretations of interview data and provided further insights from their personal and institutional experiences. Interview and learning history data were supplemented by secondary documentary sources including research reports and project evaluations.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis was instructed by a constructivist approach to grounded theory that featured strongly the voices of respondents in the presentation of findings and allowed respondents to describe for themselves their understanding of morphing UN peacebuilding. A process of ‘focused coding’ the interview narratives and notes established core explanatory categories.⁵² More selective open coding then populated core categories. In the presentation of findings, categories with the highest number of references in the coded data are featured while less salient categories nuanced major categories.

Research findings are discussed through the construction of a grounded theory that structures emerging insights regarding the UN’s PVE peacebuilding approach.⁵³ Theory generation is grounded in the experiences and perceptions of practitioners who are designing and implementing PVE programming and provide insights not available through official communication or in published documents.⁵⁴ This grounded theory links these insights with existing theory and official viewpoints and reveals the broader implications of this research for PVE approaches across the globe.⁵⁵ A grounded theory approach has also influenced how the argument in this article is assembled – the theoretical background was constructed after data analysis was completed so that theory responded to the findings.

Findings

The findings of this research are presented in two parts, beginning with the conceptual and definitional ambiguity of the PVE turn and followed by the ambiguity of legitimizing a menu of drivers of violent extremism to justify UN PVE projects.

Conceptual and Definitional Ambiguity

UN, government, and non-governmental PVE officials perceive the peacebuilding pivot to PVE as replete with conceptual and definitional ambiguity. A strong majority of respondents, at multiple levels, highlighted variability inside project development processes in how key themes in the PVE turn are understood and believed UN agencies and their government counterparts were unprepared to engage with this disunity. Two examples emerged from the interview narratives that highlighted dissonance between UN respondents and their government counterparts. First, the term “radicalization” is conceived of in dissonant ways, especially regarding the significance granted to religion and religious issues when conceptualizing Islamic radicalization. To summarize, UN respondents often restricted their interview discourses to either omit references to Islamic radicalization or approached the topic discreetly while their government counterparts regularly and openly expressed a concern that conservative Islamic religiosity in Kyrgyzstan was associated with radicalization towards violence. A senior UN project manager stated, “For example, [anonymized UN agency] will not accept the term “religious radicalisation”, never ever, because they think this is the stigmatization of particular group or a particular religion”, while another UN official in Bishkek contrasted the government, “When we talk about radicalisation with the government, they clearly understand this as a religious issue, so they always put religious nuance into the context.” This ambiguity is played out inside government policy – another UN official explained how government policy revisions fixated on religious issues while their UN sponsors were consistently more hesitant to conceive of radicalization in this manner.

Disagreement over whether radicalization in Kyrgyzstan is fundamentally a religious phenomenon occurs inside the UN system as well. A senior UN official commented, “...sometimes I use this terminology and then [anonymized UN agency] rejects it saying, ‘Don’t use religious extremism’, it stigmatizes extremism [with] religion.” Her comments expose continuing uncertainty within the UN system about how to engage with religious actors and themes. For example, a UN senior advisor in Kyrgyzstan described controversy

over whether the UN should fund religious schooling – paying moderate Imams to counter extremist messages. A UN official in New York concurred, “Religion - and Islam particularly - it is a much more taboo subject.”

A second case of definitional ambiguity concerns the target of UN and government PVE attention – is it “extremism” or “violent extremism”? Numerous UN, government and NGO respondents shared that the term “violent extremism” is rejected by government project partners as a tautology, who insist that extremism is inherently violent and cannot be divided into violent and non-violent types. A UN security official in Kyrgyzstan explained that Kyrgyz legislation does not use the term “violent extremism”:

... the representatives of the government explained that the word “extremism” itself includes the understanding of violence, in general. And [Kyrgyz] legislation says that if the person is extremist it already means that it is not good - violence is part of the word “extremism.”

In other words, holding extremist beliefs, on its own, has violent connotations and, according to some respondents, indicates the active recruitment of others to radical ideologies and the violence they promote. Conditioning extremism with “violent” was widely viewed as externally directed and illegitimate in the local context. Thus, keeping in mind the government’s fixation on religious radicalization, holding extreme religious beliefs, by itself, justifies surveillance and arrest. A UN project leader from Osh shared about religious scholars who were unfairly accused of links to ISIS and jailed without due process for possessing an “extremist” leaflet. He described the disarray of forensics processes whereby linguists and religious experts are commissioned but unprepared to determine the “extremity” of religious literature, complicated by the fact that literature is sometimes written in an unfamiliar language such as Arabic.

To contrast, UN respondents were more likely to frame their engagement with extremism in terms of human rights and were much more tentative in judging beliefs held in confidence by Kyrgyz citizens as inherently violent.⁵⁶ Many of these respondents argued that a person shown to be “extremist” based upon their choice of beliefs should not be coerced to change or incarcerated. Part of the dissonance stems from issues of translation - an NGO project leader argued that key terminology did not translate well between English and Russian, the working language in Kyrgyzstan. He explained that the Russian translation for “radical” is “...inherently violent...radicals are already thinking about violent actions.”

The above two examples of ambiguity are not without consequences since both international and national government interveners shape their responses to extremist beliefs and violence accordingly, and possibly at odds with each other. For example, the UN and its government counterparts are not agreeing on whether intervention in local communities should be coercing the viewpoints of citizens in areas that are outside the “norm”. Are citizens free to hold the beliefs they choose? Can citizens expect to be free of surveillance and police pressure if their “extremist” beliefs do not result in violent action?

Ambiguity Regarding the Drivers of Violent Extremism

A second cluster of results contribute to a deeper understanding of how PVE practitioners and government officials theorize the UN’s peacebuilding pivot to PVE. Respondents were noticeably ambiguous about the drivers of violent extremism they deemed relevant for their interventions.⁵⁷ At the heart of the argument in this section is the observation that interveners have, for whatever reason, preserved a menu of drivers that is referenced to justify their PVE project designs. As per the theoretical background above, it is important to consider how this menu of drivers interacts with external agendas and the self-interests of national government actors. Two salient drivers in the interview narratives are featured here – the correlations of violent extremism with either ethnic discord or

conservative Islamic religiosity. The goal here is not to assess the validity of these two proposed drivers but to explore how their promotion as constituent components to an ambiguous menu of drivers affords political opportunity and supports external agendas and self-interests.

First, respondents grappled with whether the political, economic, and social marginalization of minority Uzbek populations in southern Kyrgyzstan are motivating violent extremism. The way government and non-government respondents engaged with this perceived driver diverged significantly - most non-government respondents actively discussed the correlation between ethnic discord and radicalization while most government respondents refused. A UN senior official noted government reluctance: "Frankly speaking, I believe that there is State unwillingness to recognize how much the violent extremism is driven by ethnic unresolved issues." Conversely, she argued that disenfranchised populations may be more vulnerable to extremist organizations and the radical ideas they proffer.

Here the perception of minority and ethnic rights is very limited. It is not a coincidence that the majority of foreign fighters or people radicalized are of a certain ethnic minority. I think there is a connection.

Other respondents explained how discordant minority politics leads to extremist violence and foreign fighting. Structural disparities are paramount in their explanations. One UN project officer linked minority discord to unresolved issues after the 2010 ethnic violence and postulated that foreign fighter recruiters now exploited this discord:

... [ethnic discord] can be linked to dissatisfaction or frustration of people that they don't see the justice in the country, they see corruption in the country, they don't believe that the government provides any assistance to them, and then they come with own rhetorics about building the faith society, where people will live with accordance of the Quran.

Similarly, other respondents blamed ongoing discrimination of ethnic minorities, social inequality, disparities in justice services, minority exclusion from the police and military, and inferior government service provision in minority areas. Further, respondents also linked ethnic disparity to other drivers for violent extremism. A UN official from Osh noted the influence of radical groups on Uzbek economic migrants in Russia. Many citizens of Kyrgyzstan who fought with ISIS in Syria and Iraq first travelled as migrant workers to Russia. Once there, migrants are sometimes stigmatized, drawn into recruitment networks and, without the support of their family and social networks, convinced to join militant groups.⁵⁸

A second proposed driver deserves attention - the correlation between conservative religiosity and violent extremism.⁵⁹ Once again perspectives of UN respondents were out of sync with their government counterparts. Bishkek-based UN respondents were generally careful to explain that "radical" religious beliefs do not, in most cases, result in violence. One UN project official argued that radicalization should be delinked from religion. Contrarily, government respondents consistently referred to how conservative religion was a driver for violent extremism and insecurity. For example, several government respondents raised the issue of religious education and whether the State should certify the content and methods of religious schooling to counteract fears that foreign-trained religious teachers are promoting doctrines that do not align with the religious traditions of Kyrgyzstan.

Respondents in New York argued that disagreement regarding the correlation between religion and violent extremism occurs at the highest levels in the UN system, and is reflected in the development of the UN's PVE *Plan of Action*.⁶⁰ Similarly, Ucko observes that the *Plan* did not provide clear-cut definitions for violent extremism but rather pointed to examples of groups that self-identify as Islamic including Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and the Islamic State.⁶¹ Numerous Muslim countries including members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

felt unfairly singled out by this and pushed the UN system to detach Islam from the development of PVE policy⁶² – the results of which continue to be interpreted in varying ways in contexts like Kyrgyzstan.

Respondents also linked conservative Islamic religiosity to other drivers of violent extremism on their menu of explanations as to what drives violent extremism. Conservative religiosity is linked to the phenomenon of political marginalization and resistance. The political marginalization of minority groups was regularly referenced by respondents, as was the 2017 UNDP report *Journey to Extremism in Africa* that evidenced how political grievances propelled individuals in Africa toward the tipping point of joining militant groups.⁶³ Further, several respondents argued that targeting religiosity may mask the suppression of political resistance whereby governments suppress legitimate political protest in the name of thwarting religious extremism.

Discussion – Toward a Grounded Theory of Strategic Ambiguity

The research findings presented above respond to this article's first line of inquiry and contribute to a better understanding of the important contradictions that emerge inside the peacebuilding pivot towards PVE. Interview narratives with peacebuilding practitioners reveal that contradictions inside the PVE turn are directly related to the turn's inherent ambiguity. These practitioners described ambiguity in two areas – essential concepts and terminology are differentially understood and interpreted; and practitioners refer to an entire menu of drivers for violent extremism that are each, in themselves, contested and open to competing interpretations. The remaining step is to resolve this article's second line of inquiry – how are the contradictions of ambiguity rectified as external expectations for PVE clash with local priorities? In response, this section argues that ambiguity is strategically tolerated and employed to facilitate the UN's peacebuilding pivot towards PVE. This argument is presented as a grounded theory of strategic ambiguity in UN PVE strategy that serves as an analytical framework for understanding ambiguity in relation to external intervention agendas. This grounded theory is developed by integrating the findings of this research with existing research and theory in other sectors of external intervention in conflict zones.

Before moving further, it is important to differentiate between ambiguity and uncertainty.⁶⁴ Uncertainty reveals limits to information and can be reduced with superior and more information.⁶⁵ Conversely, ambiguity implies a special case of uncertainty where multiple legitimate ways to frame, or interpret, a problem exist simultaneously.⁶⁶ Thus, the concept of ambiguity underlines the importance of interpretation in determining the actions of intervening organizations and their leaders.⁶⁷ Inside the PVE programme in Kyrgyzstan, both external interveners and their state counterparts frame the problem of extremism according to their respective values and agendas. The resulting divergence of frames is important since each frame points to contrasting solutions.⁶⁸ For example, the UN system has formulated a PVE strategy in its *Plan of Action* and has operationalized this *Plan* through peacebuilding approaches in countries like Kyrgyzstan. However, these institutional approaches remain open to interpretation at multiple levels and differentially acted upon across the system.⁶⁹

This section argues that the ambiguity identified by respondents is not needing a fix but is, in fact, strategic and allergic to clarification. Ambiguity has often been conceived of as begging correction.⁷⁰ However, if conceived of as strategic in nature, peacebuilding interveners will, in fact, continue to eschew efforts to clarify terminology, avoid rallying around a unified set of interests, and insist upon significant managerial latitude at the local level. External hierarchical influence over subordinate stakeholders is enacted through a tension between external desires to control counterparts and their desire for stakeholder input and collaboration.⁷¹ Coercing stakeholders to cooperate through hard power projection is

inadvisable since it precludes local ownership.⁷² Thus, external organizations resort to more subtle methods to creatively manage stakeholder subordinates. But the subtle and strategic use of ambiguity is unlikely to be explicitly justified in institutional policy documents, making it difficult to pin down.

Even though not acknowledged in the official reports and communication of international peacebuilding institutions including the UN, there is precedent for the suggestion that ambiguity is strategically employed by external organizations to influence associated stakeholder groups.⁷³ Barnett et al. argue that peacebuilding is a fundamentally ambiguous practice. Even though committed according to the UN's *Agenda for Peace* plan of post-conflict peacebuilding, the diverse constituency of peacebuilding actors typical in most conflict zones conceive of and operationalize their core mandates in a highly diverse manner.⁷⁴ This diversity of approaches suggests that the term "peacebuilding" serves as a political symbol, employed to facilitate collective action by a diversiform intervention community.⁷⁵ As a more specific example, Best's study of the economic and policy interventions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over several decades reveals far more than the persistence of unintended ambiguity in relation to policy interventions but, rather, the IMF's strategic use of ambiguous regulations and guidelines to further its goals.⁷⁶ Similarly, the employment of strategic ambiguity serves the UN's pivot to PVE agendas in Kyrgyzstan as explicated in the grounded theory developed in the remainder of this section.

Navigating Complexity and Building Operational Support

Strategic ambiguity allows international organizations to better navigate the dynamic social and political systems inside complex conflict zones.⁷⁷ Peacebuilding inside complex operational environments cannot rely upon generalized rules that guarantee specific local reactions to external intervention and, thus, it is often difficult to predict what peacebuilding intervention is actually aiming at. Thus, strategic peacebuilding inside complex environments can benefit from loosely defined intervention objectives to legitimize elastic approaches on the journey towards unknowable endpoints.⁷⁸ For example, ambiguity allows the UN to bolster its legitimacy even when adopting new peacebuilding approaches midstream in response to evolving social trends in Kyrgyzstan.

The peacebuilding pivot to PVE in Kyrgyzstan has benefited from the UN's employment of strategic ambiguity to build consensus and operational support for its agendas from a diversity of partners. Strategic ambiguity permits the UN's implementing partners to interpret and re-cast UN directives according to self-interests and hasten their support. Ambiguous communication to national counterparts promotes unified diversity as it gathers dissonant groups with competing policy interests and facilitates agreement on abstractions while minimizing the restrictions of precise interpretations.⁷⁹ In this research, unity in diversity is aided by legitimating and utilizing an unofficial menu of drivers for violent extremism, as a sort of sectoral folk wisdom, that affords intervention actors the managerial latitude to conveniently select target drivers that do not disturb their institutional mandates when securing donor funding and external support. This convenience helps explain why some discredited drivers such as poverty and low levels of education are so difficult to leave behind. As another example, exploiting ambiguous concepts such as "radicalization" and "extremism" plays on basic fears in local society and motivates support across varied ideological perspectives. UN ambiguity permits it to not question the Kyrgyz government and majority society about the constructed nature of the threat of Islamic extremism – potentially making the UN complicit in deepened government control over minority populations who are choosing to be pious. Conversely, precision in international objectives and communication may spark tension since clarity can threaten and drive away local counterparts. This selective

suspension of clarity is evident in the UN's willingness to work closely with government counterparts despite competing conceptions of foundational PVE terminology in Kyrgyzstan.

Fulfilling External Agendas and Partner Self-interests

The strategic use of ambiguity bolsters international influence with national counterparts when new policies and approaches to intervention are introduced, as with the UN's pivot to PVE.⁸⁰ International organizations reduce the inherent disadvantages of being outsiders by ensuring their external agendas are supported by influential national counterparts. But ensuring national level support is by no means certain. The external agendas of the UN's largest donors that have motivated the PVE turn include defeating ISIS, stymieing international terrorism and curbing migration to Europe do not have immediate and dire applicability to countries like Kyrgyzstan. Thus, UN external control is conditioned upon making sure PVE initiatives also satisfy member state agendas such as suppressing both extremist group influence and political resistance in Kyrgyzstan.

Davenport and Leitch argue that external strategic management is realized through "circuits of power" between external organizations and their counterparts, whereby powerful organizations grant managerial latitude to stakeholders using strategic ambiguity to both increase its own power and, at the same time, empower these stakeholders.⁸¹ The Kyrgyz government benefits from the UN's willingness to maintain an environment where the government can interpret key terminology and drivers in a self-serving manner. For example, the UN's disinclination to engage with conservative religiosity amongst minority populations contrasts with government certainty that it is a foremost concern. These dissonant perspectives fit together awkwardly but have, nevertheless, each survived inside the PVE pivot in Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz state is interested in deeper forms of governance over the rapidly morphing religious identity of ethnic minority citizens towards conservative forms of Islam while the Soviet-inspired secularism preferred by many elites and urbanites dwindles in influence. PVE initiatives may afford the national government opportunities to intervene in response to this religious shift.

As another example, the ambiguity of the PVE approach allows the government to monitor and repress diversiform political resistance. The Kyrgyz government is mindful that the Kyrgyz population and its civil society have the potential to rapidly mobilize - protests have ousted presidents on two occasions already. According to some respondents, this history of mobilization rings in the ears of current authorities, who may be interested in avoiding the same fate by strategically suppressing political and civil resistance in the name of PVE. As a final example of the local allowances of PVE, the convenience of being able to select from a menu of explanations as to what drives violent extremism allows governments to downplay incriminating drivers such as the radicalizing effects of ethnic marginalization – enabling it to expand its control over political challengers even as it evades accountability to international organizations for human rights abuses therein.

Reducing Local Resistance

Strategically employed ambiguity shields the UN system from backlash against the inherent contradictions of the PVE approach to peacebuilding. As an example, the UN system's rhetorical ambivalence to religion and religious actors, as indicated in the *Plan of Action's* avoidance of references to Islam, illustrates the convenience of ambiguity. As mentioned earlier, Muslim-majority member states have reacted to perceptions that UN PVE is targeting Islam, and the UN system has worked hard to convince member states and other stakeholders that it is unbiased and not targeting any particular religion or creed.⁸² But it is certainly no secret that most UN PVE programming occurs in Muslim-majority countries anyways. Operating with minimal restraint despite this contradiction between official rhetoric

and practice is facilitated by strategic ambiguity – shielding the UN system from accountability and even close scrutiny in local contexts by securing the backing of national elites through elastic objectives.⁸³ In addition, the UN is able to, when under pressure and facing potential resistance, rely upon ambiguous communication to local populations to ensure a sort of deniability in regard to its engagement with sensitive areas such as religious political movements.⁸⁴

Conclusion

This article has surveyed the contradictions that emerge when international organizations such as the UN transition to a PVE approach to peacebuilding. The primary conclusion of this research is that respondents who hold insider knowledge about the development of UN PVE projects characterized the UN's pivot to PVE as an ambiguous affair. An original contribution of this research is detailing how this ambiguity is evident in the way UN respondents and their government counterparts conceive of both “radicalization” and “extremism” and in the way interveners have perpetuated a list of explanations for radicalization that are referenced and cherry-picked according to project and institutional requirements.

Identifying the contradictions of ambiguity is significant in two ways. First, this research contributes to the scholarly and theoretical understanding of evolving UN peacebuilding practice beyond what is revealed in official UN strategy and policy documents. More specifically, through the construction of a grounded theory of the UN's PVE approach, this article argues that the contradictions of ambiguity are overcome, perhaps ironically, by embracing the operational benefits of ambiguity. The ambiguity of PVE strategy is strategically tolerated and employed, whereby international actors bolster their influence by not clarifying the terms of engagement with national counterparts or with local populations and secure the necessary unity of purpose across multiple levels and actors to effectively implement the PVE turn. This grounded theory links into and adds to existing critical intervention literature by evidencing how the strategic use of ambiguity enhances external influence over peacebuilding interventions in complex environments through building operational support and allowing elite partner stakeholders the benefits of increased managerial latitude to satisfy their own self-interests.

The recognition of the way ambiguous peacebuilding approaches can serve external and elite agendas points to a second area of significance. The lines of inquiry in this research critically inform the policies and practices of stakeholders at multiple levels by contributing to the current knowledge base that shapes PVE decision-making. Specifically, this research features the insight that despite rhetorical support in intervention policy for the idea of localized ownership and control,⁸⁵ there exists a top-down strategic and operational bias in PVE implementation that promotes external agendas and, similarly, provides elite/national level stakeholders opportunities within PVE to pursue their own agendas – including the management of discordant local politics. In other words, the peacebuilding pivot to PVE may not break with typical self-interested modes of intervention but, rather, allows external interveners and their elite counterparts to craft even deeper forms of influence in conflict zones in service to self-interested agendas. Recognizing the elite-bias of the pivot towards a PVE approach is consequential for local populations and their civil societies in conflict zones and is, potentially, transformational. The empirical illumination herein of the biased top-down dynamics of the PVE approach might induce conflict over clarity as lower level stakeholders insist upon reducing ambiguity through inclusive reflection upon the drivers of extremism in local contexts and increasingly open communication and deeper forms of accountability between international interveners and their elite-level counterparts and the local populations they serve. Overall, this significance is not restricted to the Kyrgyzstan case

– senior UN respondents in New York affirmed that the UN’s PVE approach in Kyrgyzstan reflects other cases around the globe.

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Notes

¹ During 2013-16 the UN Peacebuilding Fund supported a \$15.1m USD Peacebuilding Priority Plan that aimed to ensure peace and reconciliation through revised policy and legal frameworks, build the capacity of local self-governing bodies to resolve conflict and support social cohesion, and provide multicultural and multilingual education. See: See: Chuck Thiessen, "United Nations Peacebuilding Impact in Kyrgyzstan: A Final Report on the Baseline and Endline Survey for the Kyrgyzstan Peacebuilding Priority Plan," (Bishkek: UNDP Kyrgyzstan, 2017). Chuck Thiessen, "Measuring Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan: Baseline Survey for the Kyrgyzstan Peacebuilding Priority Plan," (Bishkek: UNDP Kyrgyzstan, 2015).

² Projects are being implemented by six UN agencies - UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN OHCHR, UNODC and UN Women. See project documents published by the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in 2017: "Women and Girls as Drivers for Peace and Prevention of Radicalization"; "Communities resilient to violent ideologies"; "Support to the prevention of radicalization to violence in prisons and probation settings in the Kyrgyz Republic"; and "Inclusive governance and Justice system for Preventing Violent Extremism" available at: <http://kg.one.un.org/content/unct/kyrgyzstan/en/home/we/unpbf/current-projects.html>.

³ United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, "Peacebuilding Priority Plan," (New York: United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2017). http://kg.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/kyrgyzstan/docs/General/UNPBF%20in%20Kyrgyzstan_PVE%20PPP_2017-2020%20SIGNED.pdf.

⁴ Ibid. Suspects in Sweden were arrested after purchasing large amounts of chemicals and other equipment that would indicate preparations for a bomb attack. In addition, Boston marathon bombing (2013) suspects Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev have allegedly spent significant time in Kyrgyzstan. The Washington Post, "Boston Bombing Suspects: What the Kyrgyzstan Connection Means," (April 19, 2013). https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/04/19/boston-bombing-suspects-what-the-kyrgyzstan-connection-means/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9181f01e3205.

⁵ Statistics provided by the Ministry of Interior of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2016, as reported in: United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, "Peacebuilding Priority Plan." However, it needs to be noted that the reported numbers and nationalities of travelling fighters and attackers varies widely across sources. See: Edward Lemon, Vera Mironova and William Tobey, "Jihadists from Ex-Soviet Central Asia: Where are they? Why did they radicalize? What next?" (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2018).

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⁶ United Nations General Assembly, "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General," (New York: United Nations, 2016).

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⁷ Eric Rosand, "Order from Chaos: How International Development Institutions Are Becoming Hubs for Addressing Violent Extremism," (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2017). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/10/19/how-international-development-institutions-are-becoming-hubs-for-addressing-violent-extremism/>; United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, "Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism," (New York: United Nations). https://www.un.org/counter-terrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counter-terrorism.ctitf/files/UNOCT_PVEReferenceGuide_FINAL.pdf.

⁸ Andrew Glazzard and Alastair Reed, "Global Evaluation of the European Union Engagement on Counter-Terrorism," (Counter-Terrorism Monitoring, Reporting and Support Mechanism (CTMORSE), European Union, 2018), 11. <http://ct-morse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/eu-ct-evaluation-v7-final.pdf>. Further, this report evidences that during 2015-17 a rapidly growing proportion of EU funding was directed towards PVE as opposed to counter-terrorism.

⁹ For example, in Kyrgyzstan, international NGOs that conduct PVE projects include DVV International, Helvetas, International Alert, Saferworld and Search for Common Ground.

¹⁰ UNDP differentiates between types of PVE measures using a layered framework including PVE-specific, PVE-relevant, and PVE-conducive initiatives. Unless stated otherwise, "PVE peacebuilding" in this article refers primarily to PVE-specific initiatives. UNDP, "Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment," (New York: United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Africa, 2017). <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/en>.

¹¹ Saferworld, "Radicalisation and Extremism in Kyrgyzstan: Perceptions, Dynamics and Prevention," (London: Saferworld, February 25, 2016).

<https://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/radicalisation-and-extremism-in-kyrgyzstan.pdf>.

¹² Nick Megoran, Elmira Satybaldieva, David Lewis, and John Heathershaw, "Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Projects in Southern Kyrgyzstan " (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)/Open Society Foundations, 2014).

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¹⁴ Megoran, Satybaldieva, Lewis, and Heathershaw, "Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Projects in Southern Kyrgyzstan ".

¹⁵ Thiessen, "United Nations Peacebuilding Impact in Kyrgyzstan."; Thiessen, "Measuring Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan."

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⁵⁴ Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998).

⁵⁵ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 65.

⁵⁶ Compare with: Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko. "Understanding Political Radicalization: The Two-Pyramids Model." *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 205-16. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000062>.

⁵⁷ By following the lead of respondents with the language of "drivers" this research enters contested territory. The language of "drivers" is increasingly being challenged as an inaccurate discourse and conceptual framework for understanding radicalization.

⁵⁸ Abdujalil Abdurasulov, "Why Uzbek Migrants Are Being Radicalised," (BBC News - Asia, 2017). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41834729>.

⁵⁹ Respondents were primarily referring to Islamic religiosity. However, one NGO respondent did report cases of radicalized Orthodox Christian teachings for youth in southern Kyrgyzstan.

⁶⁰ United Nations General Assembly, "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism."

⁶¹ Ucko, "Preventing Violent Extremism through the United Nations," 261. However, the *Plan* did include a citation to Anders Breivik, the Norwegian far-right violent extremist.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ UNDP, "Journey to Extremism in Africa," 5.

⁶⁴ Michael Lipson. "Performance under Ambiguity: International Organization Performance in UN Peacekeeping." *The Review of International Organizations* 5, no. 3 (2010): 249-84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-010-9090-5>. 253

⁶⁵ Jacqueline Best. "Ambiguity and Uncertainty in International Organizations: A History of Debating Imf Conditionality." *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2012): 674-88. 677

⁶⁶ M. Brugnach and H. Ingram. "Ambiguity: The Challenge of Knowing and Deciding Together." *Environmental Science & Policy* 15, no. 1 (2012): 60-71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2011.10.005>. 61

⁶⁷ Best, "Ambiguity and Uncertainty in International Organizations," 677.

⁶⁸ Brugnach and Ingram, "Ambiguity: The Challenge of Knowing and Deciding Together," 61.

⁶⁹ Best, "Ambiguity and Uncertainty in International Organizations."

⁷⁰ Kenneth Bush and Colleen Duggan. "How Can Research Contribute to Peacebuilding?". *Peacebuilding* 2, no. 3 (2014): 303-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2014.887617>. 308; Sonja Grimm. "The European Union's Ambiguous Concept of 'State Fragility'." *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2014): 252-67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2014.878130>.

⁷¹ Sally Davenport and Shirley Leitch. "Circuits of Power in Practice: Strategic Ambiguity as Delegation of Authority." *Organization Studies* 26, no. 11 (2005): 1603-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840605054627>. 2

⁷² Chuck Thiessen, *Local Ownership of Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Shouldering Responsibility for Sustainable Peace and Development* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2014).

⁷³ Compare with: Jacqueline Best. "Bureaucratic Ambiguity." *Economy and Society* 41, no. 1 (2012): 84-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2011.637333>. ; Best, "Ambiguity and Uncertainty in International Organizations."; Davenport and Leitch, "Circuits of Power in Practice."; Eric Eisenberg. "Ambiguity as Strategy in Organizational Communication." *Communication Monographs* 51, no. 3 (1984): 227-42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758409390197>.

⁷⁴ United Nations, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping (UN Doc a/47/277-S/2000/809)* (New York: United Nations, 1992); Michael Barnett, Hunjoon Kim, Madalene O'Donnell, and Laura Sitea. "Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?". *Global Governance* 13 (2007): 35-58.

⁷⁵ Barnett, Kim, O'Donnell, and Sitea, "Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?," 43-44.

⁷⁶ Best, "Ambiguity and Uncertainty in International Organizations."

⁷⁷ For an explanation of complexity theory in relation to peacebuilding see: Cedric de Coning. "Adaptive Peacebuilding." *International Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2018): 301-17. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix251>. 305

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Davenport and Leitch, "Circuits of Power in Practice," 4.

⁸⁰ Compare with the case of ambiguous IMF interventions described by: Best, "Ambiguity and Uncertainty in International Organizations."

⁸¹ Davenport and Leitch, "Circuits of Power in Practice," 2. See also: Stewart R. Clegg, *Frameworks of Power* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1989), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446279267>.

⁸² Ucko, "Preventing Violent Extremism through the United Nations," 261.

⁸³ Davenport and Leitch, "Circuits of Power in Practice."

⁸⁴ Eric M. Eisenberg, H.L. Goodall, and Angela Trethewey, *Organizational Communication: Balancing Creativity and Constraint* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006).

⁸⁵ Thiessen, Local Ownership of Peacebuilding in Afghanistan; Sung Yong Lee and Alpaslan Özerdem, eds., *Local Ownership in International Peacebuilding: Key Theoretical and Practical Issues* (London: Routledge, 2015).