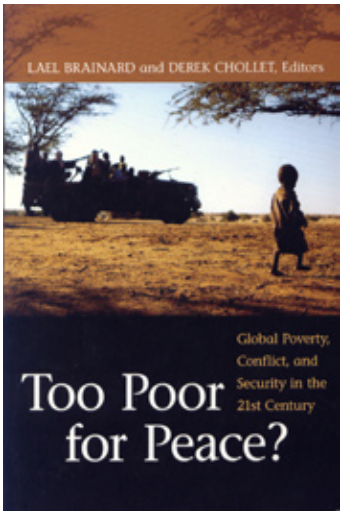

Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century

Edited by Lael Brainard and Derek Chollet
Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2007. 175 pages.

Reviewed by STEWART PATRICK

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Five years ago, the World Bank published *Breaking the Conflict Trap*, a groundbreaking book identifying intrastate war as a critical barrier to poverty eradication in a large cohort of developing countries (Collier et al., 2003). *Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century* picks up where Paul Collier and his colleagues left off, this time focusing on the impact of poverty on violent conflict. The book's broad thesis is that alleviating poverty in the 21st century is not only a moral but also a security imperative.

"Extreme poverty literally kills," write editors Lael Brainard and Derek Chollet (p. 3). This claim is true both directly—through hunger, malnutrition, and disease—and indirectly, by leaving poor countries vulnerable to domestic upheaval and war and by generating transnational threats that endanger regional and international security. At the same time, the poverty-insecurity nexus constitutes a "tangled web," with overlapping threads of intervening variables and strands of reverse causality. Poverty and violence reinforce one another, but their specific relationship is mediated by context-specific drivers ranging from resource scarcity to weak institutions to malignant political leadership to demographic trends. Like spiders' webs, each country is unique; there is no single route to prosperity (or penury), no single pathway to peace (or war).

Drawn from an August 2006 conference sponsored by the Aspen Institute, "The Tangled Web: The Poverty-Insecurity Nexus," this slim volume is divided into two parts. The first chapters usefully distill recent findings (including some published elsewhere by the same authors) on specific links between poverty and conflict. The later chapters review, more unevenly, the practical dilemmas confronting external actors seeking to engage poor, conflict-prone states. Throughout, the authors use refreshingly clear, jargon-free prose aimed at an educated policy audience.

Among the most interesting—if controversial—chapters is Susan Rice's examination of the negative implications of developing-country poverty for global (as opposed to human) security. (Full disclosure: Rice and I are frequent collaborators.) She makes an impassioned case that poverty breeds insecurity by undermining the capacity of states to deliver four sets of critical goods: basic physical security, legitimate governance, economic growth, and social welfare. Beyond bringing misery to their inhabitants, such poverty-induced capacity gaps produce negative "spillovers" for regional and global security, in the form of cross-border terrorism, crime, disease, and environmental degradation. She contends that in an age of global threats—from terrorists in Mali to Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—the United States cannot afford to be indifferent to poverty that weakens state capacity.

Rice's chapter raises as many questions as it answers. The world is full of weak states, of course, and not all generate negative spillovers, much less those of the same type or magnitude, which suggests that intervening mechanisms and situational variables are involved. Are states that suffer from particular types of weakness more susceptible to particular types of threats? And does a state's vulnerability depend on whether its weak performance is a function of the political will of its governing regime, a low level of state capacity, or some combination of the two? Rice is more persuasive in showing the linkage between weak states and transnational spillovers than in demonstrating how poverty is linked to state weakness. Although she qualifies her argument by noting that "though poverty underlies state weakness" the latter is "also a consequence of other capacity deficits," her use of the bloodless term "capacity" gives too short shrift to the role of human agency (and particularly the role of corrupt, misgoverning elites) in generating poor state performance (p. 34).

The role of intervening variables is front and center in Colin Kahl's chapter addressing the links between demography, environment, and civil strife in the developing world, based on his similarly titled book (Kahl, 2006). In recent years, the environmental security literature has been dominated by two diametrically opposed perspectives. The "neo-Malthusian" view attributes civil strife to deprivation brought about by population growth, environmental degradation, and natural resource scarcity. The alternative "resource abundance" thesis contends that an embarrassment of resource riches fuels violence, whether by creating a tempting "honey pot" for factions to fight over or by subsidizing institutional pathologies (the well-known "resource curse"). Kahl considers this dichotomy a false one, noting that scarcity and abundance can occur simultaneously at different levels of analysis. For instance, abundance in one resource can create scarcity in another; different sorts of resources present different risks for developing countries; and the pathologies of scarcity and abundance can occur and interact with one another in the same country over time. Kahl's distinctive contribution is to recognize that resource "scarcity" is not only a natural but also a social phenomenon, reflecting political and economic competition, and that the relationship between demographic and environmental pressures and conflict is mediated by (among other factors) the strength of the state, the nature and quality of its governing institutions, and the identity, solidarity, and power of societal groups.

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According to Berkeley economist Edward Miguel, "the poverty-violence link is arguably the most robust finding in the growing research literature investigating the causes of civil wars" (p. 51). But is poverty breeding violence, or vice versa? To answer this question, Miguel and two colleagues employ an intriguing natural experiment: They analyze the impact of drought—a purely exogenous economic shock that increases poverty—on state propensity for conflict in Africa. Their findings are startling: "The size of the estimated impact of lagged economic growth on conflict is huge," Miguel writes, with a one percent decline in GDP "increasing the likelihood of civil conflict by more than two percentage points" (pp. 54-56). In contrast, they find little correlation between violent conflict and variables like political repression, democratic freedom, ethnic fragmentation, colonial history, or population density. In sum, "economic factors trump all others in causing African civil conflicts" (p. 55). Miguel suggests that this robust finding has clear policy implications: Very little foreign aid, he observes, addresses

the immediate triggers of civil conflict. Donors could change this by directing a significant proportion of external assistance toward helping countries cope with the sharp income fluctuations created by exogenous shocks, such as poor weather or collapsing commodity prices. By extending such insurance, the international community could help remove support for rebel movements.

The past decade and a half has seen a surge in policy attention to the possible security implications of demographic change—some of it thoughtful (e.g., Cincotta et al., 2003; Urdal & Brunborg, 2005), some of it sensationalized (e.g., Kaplan, 1994). Henrik Urdal's chapter provides a judicious assessment of the potential risks and rewards of "youth bulges" in developing countries. He finds a robust correlation between a country's youth cohort and its propensity for low-intensity conflict. "For each percentage point increase of youth in the adult population," he writes, "the risk of conflict increases by more than four percent" (p. 96). And yet large youth cohorts have the potential to be a blessing rather than a curse, particularly if they precede significantly smaller cohorts. As fertility rates continue to decline (sometimes dramatically) in the coming years, much of the developing world stands to gain a "demographic dividend," in the form of increased economic growth and lower vulnerability to violence.

The second portion of the book is devoted to several policy challenges confronting external actors in violence-prone poor countries. These chapters address working with youth in war-torn countries (Marc Somers); bolstering responsible political leadership where corruption is the norm (Robert Rotberg); operating as private actors in insecure environments (Jane Nelson); and promoting democracy as well as security and basic needs (Jennifer Windsor). Somers observes that young people—and particularly young males—are typically demonized as a national liability, rather than as a potential asset in building a more peaceful future. Ironically, he notes, "it often seems that nations do not know what to do with their own young people while armed groups keep discovering new ways to make use of them" (p. 102). Somers calls for carefully targeted programs that harness the energy and vision of youth and provide young men, in particular, with the opportunity to gain both employment and dignity.

Rotberg looks at the other end of the status hierarchy, highlighting the critical role of leadership in overcoming poverty in Africa. Throwing a bucket of cold water on those who still attribute poverty in developing countries primarily to a lack of foreign aid, he argues that the divergent trajectories of African countries can be explained overwhelmingly by their quality of governance, and specifically the personal leadership qualities of heads of state or government. He pointedly juxtaposes the authoritarian Robert Mugabe, the former independence hero who has managed to drive once-prosperous Zimbabwe into the ground, with visionary leaders like South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Botswana's Festus Mogae, and Senegal's Abdolaye Wade. Rotberg documents a rising demand for good governance in Africa, but what of the supply? Here the answers are less clear. Rotberg claims that sub-Saharan Africa appears to lack "a practical ethic of public service," but he offers few ideas on how outside actors might work with internal reformers to help instill such an ethos.

The book's one shortcoming might be the modesty of its aims and claims. The editors could have been bolder in seeking to break new conceptual ground, to offer more definitive conclusions on the basis of current research, and to address the policy implications of the book's overall findings. Like many conference volumes, it lacks an overarching theoretical framework or conceptual model to lend coherence to its disparate chapters and to explain how the various drivers and intervening variables can and do fit together. The introduction, for instance, includes no trend lines or maps of current levels of poverty or conflict, leaving the reader to wonder if the situation is as dire as described—and which states, precisely, are entwined in the "nexus." And although the editors review some prominent

debates, they generally abstain from evaluating purported causal linkages or proposing steps to cut them. The absence of a conclusion reinforces the depressing sense that the filaments of "the tangled web" will remain tightly knotted.

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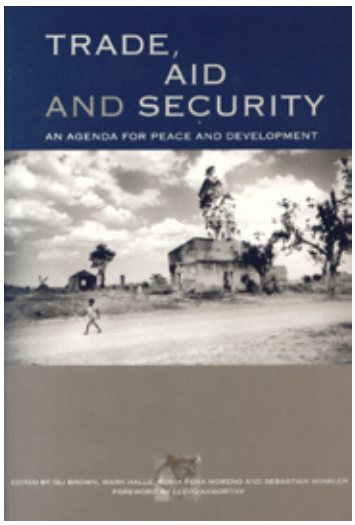
Trade, Aid and Security: An Agenda for Peace and Development

Edited by Oli Brown, Mark Halle, Sonia Pena Moreno, and Sebastian Winkler
London & Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2007. 204 pages.



Reviewed by JOHN W. SEWELL

John W. Sewell is a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, former president of the Overseas Development Council, and author of numerous articles and analyses of globalization, development, and U.S. national interests, including "A Memo to the Next President: Promoting American Interests Through Smarter, More Strategic Global Policies," co-authored by former ECSP Program Assistant Karin Bencala.

Trade, Aid and Security: An Agenda for Peace and Development undertakes the challenging task of assessing the interrelationships between trade and aid, as well as the complex causes of conflict within the poorest countries. Emerging from a four-year research collaboration between the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), this edited volume collects six papers by specialists in trade, aid, conflict, and sustainability. The editors' goal is "to see these objectives—trade, aid, and security—as interlocking components of the overriding objectives of peace and development."

Trade, Aid and Security is, in many ways, a pioneering volume. Starting from the premise that both aid and trade policies have sometimes exacerbated tensions and violent conflict within the poorest countries, it also argues that aid and trade policies can be tools to help prevent existing tensions or conflicts from turning violent. The chapters on designing conflict-sensitive trade policy, building markets for conflict-free goods, promoting conflict-sensitive business in conflicted areas, and managing resources (both natural and aid) are particularly strong. These analyses synthesize a great deal of information and research not normally considered by trade or aid specialists.

My definition of an "interesting" book is one that not only provides new information but also stimulates my own thinking about the broader ramifications of its analyses. The authors in this