

Article

Normal Peace: A New Strategic Narrative of Intervention

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Abstract

International actors have used multiple discursive frameworks for justifying interventions, from human security to the responsibility to protect, and, most recently, resilience-building. We argue that the language of normalization, hidden behind these narratives of interventions, has also contributed to structure the intervention landscape, albeit in less obvious and overt ways than other competing narratives of intervention. This article disentangles the different practices of normalization in order to highlight their ramifications. It introduces the concept of *normal peace*—a new conceptual reference to understand interventions undertaken by the international community to *impose, restore or accept* normalcy in turbulent societies. The article argues that the optimization of interventions entails selective responses to govern risk and adapt to the transitional international order. The art of what is politically possible underlines the choice of optimal intervention, be that to impose an external order of normalcy, restore the previous order of normalcy, or accept the existing order of normalcy.

Keywords

international intervention; normal peace; normalization; peacebuilding; resilience

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1. Introduction

The narratives of normalcy and normalization have been present for some time in the social practices of peacebuilding and in broader International Relations (IR) debates, but there has been a lack of explicit effort to theorize their meaning(s) in practice. The notion of ‘normalization’ in the IR discipline has more often than not been used interchangeably with the notion of ‘peace’, and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations (Bull, 1977). In peace and conflict studies, normalcy is invoked interchangeably as a normative goal of peacebuilding, as an intermediary measurement of success towards sustainable peace, or as a processual mechanism facilitating other post-conflict processes (e.g. ‘reconcilia-

tion’ or ‘good governance’). For instance, the United Nations (UN) has used normalcy in parallel to the notions of peace, stability, and reconstruction (UN General Assembly and Security Council, 2005, p. 19). Certain UN policy documents explicitly treat normalcy as a passage to peace consolidation and recovery (UN Peacebuilding Support Office, 2012). In other instances, normalcy is invoked as a politics of care towards local subjects and an aspirational mechanism for generating local acceptance and validity for the external rulers (UN, 2008). Similarly, the European Union (EU) has started to invoke ‘normalization-building’ as a rationale for describing its conflict-resolution and crisis-management operations abroad. Javier Solana, the EU’s first High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, argued that ‘crisis