Title of Workshop: Pragmatic Approaches to Peacebuilding

Outline of topic:
The politics of international peace building is currently undergoing changes with regards to both its conduct and theory. On the backdrop of the bankruptcy of orthodox liberal peace approaches to fragile states and conflict settings, policy makers and academics from different fields, have started to move towards a more pragmatic position with regards to the means and ends of peacebuilding. This workshop explores this new area of pragmatic approaches and International Practice Theory.

Pragmatic approaches consciously seek to go beyond the Liberal Peace paradigm. Pragmatic approaches do not assume that international interveners necessarily have the knowledge or the power to set out predefined policy goals or lead the processes of attaining them. Where Liberal Peace approaches tended to set up a discursive divide between international interveners and local groups and organisations, based on superior attributes of power, resources, knowledge and values, pragmatic approaches seek to build upon existing 'everyday' capacities, institutions and practices on the ground. Pragmatism, in brief, has the connotation of an anti-foundationalist approach that derives theory from practice and is grounded in actual experiences, rather than in the abstractions of normative frameworks. Rather than emphasising external resources and knowledge, these approaches start from existing capacities and understandings and seek to build upon them, to reach solutions to context-specific challenges.

This workshop seeks to explore pragmatic approaches, based upon both field research and conceptual and methodological argumentation, in order to discuss the advantages and possibilities as well as the drawbacks or limits to Pragmatic Peace and International Practice Theory.

Relation to existing research:
Over the last decade the Liberal Peace paradigm has been at the centre of peacebuilding discussion and debate (see, for example, Paris and Sisk, 2009; Newman et al, 2009; Campbell et al, 2011; Tadjbakhsh, 2011; Richmond, 2009; Paris, 2010; Heathershaw, 2008). This paradigm of internationalising or exporting liberal norms, institutions and practices has been undermined by the dichotomies established between international and local actors and the essentialising frameworks of understanding which suggest that local actors need to accept or adapt to international norms. Much work has gone into analysing the problems, limits and unintended consequences of these approaches which seek to impose external frameworks of understanding and the problems and contradictions of the Liberal Peace is well established, and has been engaged with from a number of new institutionalist, post-colonial, Foucauldian and critical positions (see references mentioned above).

Where there has been a lack of research emphasis is upon the alternative policy approaches beyond Liberal peace, which are only now coming to the centre of attention. In this regard, some accounts seem to reflect a normative impulse to ‘recognize’ local context. As Michael Mazarr argues in the Jan-Feb 2014 issue of Foreign Affairs: “…the path from state weakness to strength (...) is an organic, grass-roots process that must respect the unique social, cultural, economic, political, and religious contexts of each country.
And although it can be encouraged and even modestly shaped by outside contributions and pressure, it cannot be imposed”.

Other accounts place more emphasis on functional objectives. Notions of ‘best fit’ and ‘good enough governance’, for example, point towards a focus on ‘what works’ rather than on ‘what ought to be’ (Albrecht and Kyed, 2010). This also matches the general decreasing appetite for large-scale interventions. The US Department of Defense (2012) Strategic Guidance document, for example, reflected the judgment that “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations” and announced an intention to pursue “innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches” to achieving objectives. Interlacing with the more normative stream of thought, it was moreover proclaimed that “One of the benefits of this change, ironically, will be to allow local institutional development to proceed more organically and authentically, in its own ways and at its own pace”.

These pragmatic approaches, increasingly shaping policy-understandings, eschew large-scale predefined policy approaches and liberal claims to universalism, and seek to build upon contextual practices, understandings and institutions. This workshop thereby seeks to engage with pragmatic approaches to peace, asking how intervention works and is legitimised in the context of building upon contextual practices and institutions rather than seeking to overcome and redirect them; what agendas and values underpin this emerging shift; what conceptual and theoretical lenses may help us study this ‘practice turn’ and; whether the contradictions of the Liberal Peace approach are overcome in these ways:

• Is this just a rolling back or retreat from intervention and international responsibility? Do pragmatic approaches increase the remit of interventionist policy under the cover of ‘local ownership’?
• On the flipside, can pragmatism help foreground (and move away from?) the extent to which we demand a reproduction of our own normative categories as the sole guarantors of reason, well-being and justice? And thereby redress inequitable power-relations?
• Or, more modestly, do these approaches simply cover the most effective way of reaching solutions to contextual challenges?
• Will pragmatic approaches reign according to the contextual specifics of diverse everyday settings? Or could and should new principles and norms be developed to reflect shifts beyond liberal peace?
• How do pragmatic understandings relate to and go beyond other (more theoretically concerned) approaches to the dilemmas of Liberal Peace such as hybridity or complexity?
• How do pragmatic approaches relate to the wider emerging field of International Practice Theory in International Relations?
• How do pragmatic approaches relate to resilience-based understandings and resilience thinking?

Type of Papers required: Draft papers of around 5,000 words with the intention of working up the material into papers for an international peer-review journal special issue, we are considering a number of possible options, including *Security Dialogue*, *Peacebuilding* and *Resilience*. 
**Funding:**
The ECPR standing group Critical Peace and Conflict Studies have offered to support the workshop and to look into funding possibilities.

**Biographical notes:**
David Chandler is Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, London, UK. He is the founding editor of the Taylor & Francis journals *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* and *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses*. He has written widely on the liberal peace and its limits and is currently researching the links between philosophical pragmatism and complexity approaches.


**References:**
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