



After the Conflict

**a review of selected sources
on rebuilding war-torn societies**

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with the assistance of paula uimonen

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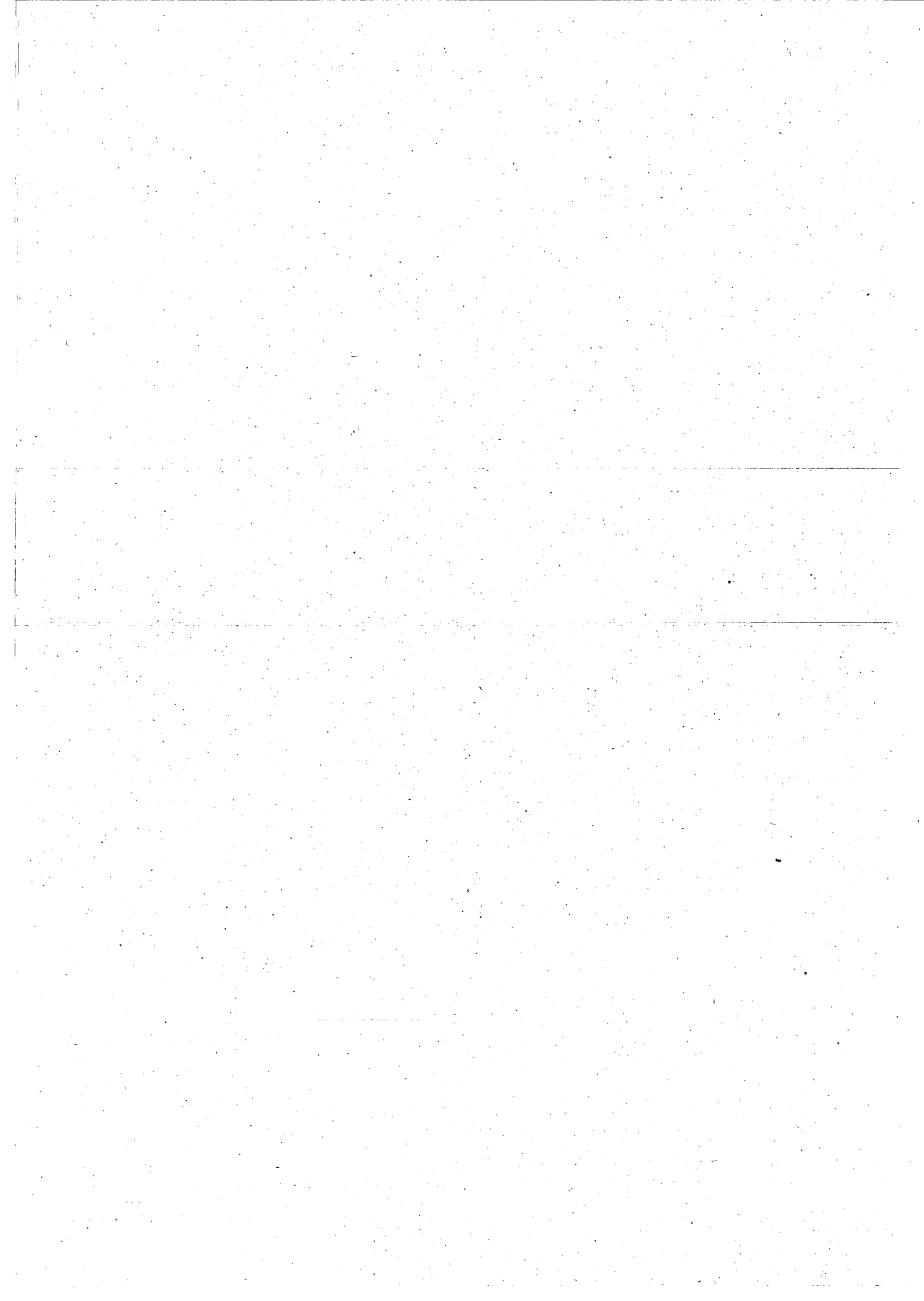
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Preface

The end of the Cold War has not opened, as expected, an era of peace and stability. It seems, on the contrary, to have opened a Pandora's box of conflicts and tensions that have since erupted in bloodshed and armed conflicts in many parts of the world. The international community has not shown itself ready, either to prevent the resurgence of conflicts, or to respond adequately to them. Established institutions and mechanisms for conflict resolution, emergency relief and rehabilitation assistance are neither adapted to the new types of conflicts nor to the scale of the problem.

International efforts over the past years have concentrated primarily on bringing an end to armed conflicts and providing emergency relief to their victims. Less attention has been given to the need for rebuilding shattered economies, societies and polities. Yet the consolidation of peace crucially depends on the forms and mechanisms of international assistance, as well as on the relation between the latter, and national and local efforts. Experience shows that the challenges following a cease-fire may well be more formidable than those preceding it. These challenges are of course multiple. They are first financial and material — the exploding costs of peace-keeping operations and humanitarian assistance have not only eaten into the funds available for rehabilitation and development assistance, but have stretched the financial capacity of the United Nations and of the international donor community to the extreme. More fundamentally, however, the challenge is political and conceptual and lies in the difficulty of integrating different forms of international response and assistance — military, political, relief, rehabilitation and development — within a coherent overall strategic framework, and in the difficulty of better aligning this external assistance with local efforts.

Pre-Cold War experience and theory has only a limited bearing on how to tackle these new challenges, since the nature of conflicts, their actors, their environment and the global context within which they take place, have rapidly, and in some aspects radically, changed over the past years. There is as yet little analytical understanding of the complex interactions between policies and actors in post-conflict situations. Underlying the confusion at policy and political levels there is a clear "theoretical deficit".

The War-torn Societies Project, a joint effort of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and of the Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies (PSIS) of the Geneva Graduate Institute of International Studies, was initiated to respond to this deficit and to assist both external and internal actors to respond better to the complex challenges of reconciliation, reconstruction and post-conflict rebuilding. The project is described in the following paper. The first task of the project was to take stock of existing

knowledge and experience in this field, and to identify the most important projects and studies that attempt to shed light on these issues or are of wider relevance to it.

The present essay represents the results of this inquiry. It responds not only to the growing awareness that well targeted research can and should contribute to improve ongoing efforts, but also to the pressing request of policy makers and practitioners for an identification of relevant "building blocks" of knowledge and expertise on which to ground their efforts to redefine policies. As such, this essay is meant to be an analytical and operational tool.

Work on the present study was initiated during the project's preparatory phase, in the summer of 1994. It was made possible by the propitious joining of forces with a project carried out under the auspices of the MacArthur Foundation by the author of this essay. An earlier version was presented in December 1994 to the Cartigny seminar, a meeting of bilateral and multilateral actors of assistance to war-torn societies, as well as representatives of such societies, which gave birth to the War-torn Societies Project. The original document has been enriched and updated with the help of the project's research unit, particularly Paula Uimonen.

Patricia Weiss Fagen, a historian specialized in Latin American studies, admirably combines academic rigour with practical experience. Following an initial academic career she worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Washington, D.C., and, more recently, as chief of mission in El Salvador. On joining the War-torn Societies Project, she was on sabbatical leave and carried out the above-mentioned study under a grant from the MacArthur Foundation.

Our thanks go first to the MacArthur Foundation, who agreed at an important moment to merge Ms. Weiss Fagen's project with the War-torn Societies Project. Our thanks go, beyond this, to the multilateral and bilateral assistance agencies and foundations who collectively support the War-torn Societies Project.

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Introduction

Contemporary wars rarely end with victory parades, nor are the soldiers who fight in them able simply to put down their weapons and return to homes and families. The wars that have prevailed in recent decades in Africa, Central America and in parts of Asia are civil conflicts that target civilians along with combatants, have turned communities against each other, and undermined civil authority. One can point to more than a dozen wars that have lasted over a decade and ended in fragile peace, sometimes still punctuated by sporadic conflict.

When the fighting ends, or has ended sufficiently so that people begin to return home, plant crops or enter the labor market, and plan for the future, rehabilitation can extend beyond the local level. Long-term reconstruction requires a context of safety and security. Often, as well, the post-conflict society has been (or needs to be) transformed from the pre-war model. Even after peace, rebuilding shattered economies and infrastructure is infinitely complicated by widespread distrust of political authority and the weakness of political and social institutions at all levels — the legacy of what economist Paul Collier has termed the loss of social capital.¹ Families and communities have dispersed, regional networks fragmented, and civil society disarticulated. Meanwhile, the physical means to resort to violence probably remain in place, formal demobilization exercises notwithstanding.

The **United Nations** and regional organizations have achieved positive results over the course of many years in mediating conflicts and negotiating agreements. In the post-Cold War world, the United Nations and other international organizations have taken on larger responsibilities beyond the traditional functions of consensus building among warring parties and monitoring cease-fires or border agreements. It is now usually the case that when international mediation results in an agreement between the warring parties, the United Nations and/or regional organizations assume a continuing role to help consolidate peace and lay the groundwork for recovery.

Analysts and critics from inside as well as outside of the United Nations family criticize

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