THE STRATEGIC BLIND SPOT

HOW NEGLECTING PEACEBUILDING UNDERMINES GLOBAL SECURITY

A Reflection Paper, commissioned by the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
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In an era of unprecedented polarisation, the peacebuilding field stands at a crossroads. Across the West, we are witnessing a paradox: while governments pour unprecedented resources into defense budgets in the name of "security," investments in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and diplomacy are shrinking. The imbalance is striking, where billions flow to hard security while the mechanisms that could prevent conflict at its roots are devoid of resources.

The reflection paper _The Strategic Blind Spot; How Neglecting Peacebuilding Undermines Global Security_ argues that the rise in militarisation, the erosion of democratic norms, and the shrinking of civic space are all part of a systemic shift toward increased militarisation: one that threatens the very foundations of peaceful coexistence in a world where the number of violent conflicts has never been this high. Framed within this context, this paper examines the global consequences of this drastic shift. How the democratic backslide in the West fuels insecurity worldwide, and how the sidelining of peacebuilding weakens both domestic and international resilience.

Through extensive interviews with experts working across defense, development, and civil society domains, a pattern is traced. Namely, as trust erodes and uncertainty rises, societies turn toward militarised responses. Responses that, paradoxically, deepen the very instability they seek to contain. The growing dominance of "hard security" has produced a distorted sense of proportionality in public spending and policymaking: military deterrence is seen as essential, while prevention is treated as optional.

The U.S administration's withdrawal from international cooperation and the EU's growing changeover as a prescriptive donor illustrate how fragile the peacebuilding ecosystem has become, trapped between political instrumentalisation and financial scarcity.

The paper speaks directly to the peacebuilding community in its broadest sense, including practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and advocates. It calls for a collective reframing of peacebuilding as a strategic pillar of security, not a soft alternative to it. It is argued that peacebuilders must equip themselves with new tools: analytical, communicative, and political, to make a more convincing case for sustained investment in prevention and dialogue. This includes understanding and anticipating the systemic dynamics behind budget cuts, building stronger alliances with defense institutions, and developing clear, evidence-based narratives that show peacebuilding's tangible benefits.

In the context of the multiple, overlapping crises confronting contemporary societies, **governments must adapt their security strategies** accordingly if they want to progress toward sustainable peace. **Peacebuilding actors must strengthen their capacity to engage proactively with policymakers** by translating their expertise into clear and actionable guidance.

Based on the analysis presented, five key recommendations were drafted:

1. **Institutionalise conflict prevention as a strategic investment**
Governments should systematically integrate evidence on the cost-effectiveness of conflict prevention into national and multilateral security decision-making. Demonstrating the long-term economic, political and social returns of preventive action is essential to ensure that peacebuilding informs policy choices rather than remaining a secondary concern.

2. **Reframe peacebuilding as a core component of integrated security policy**
Peacebuilding and prevention must be framed not as an idealistic activity, but as strategic security investments. This requires developing clear and compelling narratives that link peacebuilding to tangible benefits such as strengthened governance, restored public trust, social cohesion and reduced displacement or migration pressures. Without such framing, peacebuilding risks continued marginalisation within security debates dominated by short-term threat perceptions.

3. **Strengthen resilience against information warfare and polarisation**
Countering information warfare should be recognised as a central prevention challenge. Upstream analysis, critical thinking, media literacy, and systemic engagement are vital tools for protecting societies from manipulation, polarisation and democratic erosion. Governing institutions must acknowledge that Western societies are direct targets of deliberate influence strategies designed to weaken internal cohesions, both domestically and within defence alliances. The pivotal role of civil society organisations and think tanks in this context needs to be acknowledged.

4. **Protect and expand spaces for dialogue and inclusion**
Safeguarding spaces for dialogue domestically, internationally and online must be recognised as a core pillar of security policy. Investment in peacebuilding and prevention is indispensable to sustaining these spaces, rebuilding trust, reinforcing international norms and fostering mutual understanding across sectors and societies. Infrastructures (multilateral, national, local) in which dialogue is possible are among the most effective tools for preventive escalation and strengthening long-term resilience.

5. **Reinforce cooperation across all security actors**
Achieving durable peace requires structured cooperation between governing institutions, military actors and civil society. Such tripartite engagement enables the anticipation of emerging risks across physical, political, and digital domains and supports more coherent, evidence-based responses to complex crises. Peacebuilding actors' expertise must therefore be embedded within broader security ecosystems rather than operating in parallel or isolation.

Within this framework, peacebuilding is not an abstract aspiration nor an empty promise. It constitutes a cornerstone of collective survival. Enabling civil society experts, practitioners and academics to inform decision makers and engage constructively with defence institutions is pivotal for identifying, analysing and addressing the multifaceted nature of contemporary insecurity. By understanding the systemic nature of the contemporary crisis, governments will be able to address the dynamics creating insecurity and understand the need to invest in peacebuilding and conflict prevention to counter its cause and consequences on a national and international level.

Find and read the full paper here: The Strategic Blind Spot.