

Peacebuilding: peace-making à la française

What is peacebuilding?

- Definition of peacebuilding also known as peace-making:
According to Boutros Boutros Ghali (former Secretary-General of the United Nations) in 1992, the term designates every action carried out in order to define and support structures which aid in strengthening peace either by averting the resumption of hostilities or by avoiding the start of a violent conflict by dealing with the root causes, identified or supposed, and by creating a societal expectation of peaceful conflict resolution in order to achieve lasting peace and social stabilisation both politically and economically.

These initiatives must be mutual, guided and impelled by the population as much as by their rulers.

The French approach

- The French approach is profoundly characterised by top-down governance. The prime decision-makers and peace makers are the State and public institutions.
- French strategy is centred on the prevention of conflict and violence. This strategy falls within a global movement of “safeguarding” peace through development programmes. It tends to emphasise the prevention of conflict and violence rather than peace-making activities as such.
- It is a strategy that can prove completely counter-productive in dealing with underlying social and economic problems. This is the case when armament industry and defence lobbyists have plentiful resources and a strong presence in the decision-making processes while the peacebuilding world does not have the same power of lobbying – if any.

Participants in peacebuilding in France

- The French Development Agency (FDA) is the most important organisation for the French government’s national strategy. It is both a bank and the institution in charge of development policy.
- Studies and research into peacebuilding have shown that it is primordial to work with local actors on the ground who know the context or to support them in their peace-making efforts, so as to avoid humanitarian interventions that are tainted with neo-colonialism or are ineffective thanks to a one-size fits all model being applied regardless of the area.
- Yet only 4% of French development aid has been invested in bilateral agreements with organisations from civil society, which play a minor role in the implementation of this aid on the ground. According to the French government, this figure is set to increase.
- Among this 4% there are a number of NGOs working in peacebuilding which stand out at an international level and which have the resources and administrative capacity to manage large sums of money – Médecins du Monde, the Red Cross, Action against Hunger, Handicap International, ACTED etc. Peacebuilding in France is a profoundly institutionalised milieu.

How does the French state finance the peacebuilding sector on the national level?

- The FDA has established the “Paix et Résilience Minka” fund. This is a financing tool worth 250 million euros a year. The Minka fund is used to prevent conflicts but also in crisis settlement. Along with loans, subsidies, or funding NGOs, Minka is a full-blown FDA fund. It is the only one entirely earmarked for putting in place lasting peace and it targets four specific regions: the Sahel, Lake Chad, the Central African Republic, and the Middle East.
- For the rest of the world, the FDA’s other tools like loans or NGO funding, including calls for emergency projects and crisis settlement projects, need to be mobilised. Such projects account for lower funding than Minka as, since 2013, they have been awarded 83,5 million euros.

Where does French peacebuilding occur?

- There is a correlation between former French spheres of influence, notably thanks to colonisation, and the zones targeted by French peacebuilding. This can be explained by the strong historical, diplomatic and/or economic links with these regions. This also implies that France favours areas where its economic interests are the best represented.
- The Sahel, Lake Chad, and the Central African Republic are also French military intervention zones.
 - o Operation Barkhane has been conducted in the Sahel since 2014. This region currently represents France’s largest military involvement, even in the context of G5 Sahel which should have allowed France to withdraw. It was France which was the leading country in this disastrous military intervention.
 - o 22 current FDA projects are concentrated in the Sahel out of 170 ongoing projects throughout the world and 600 million euros worth of aid projects are focused just on Mali. These projects involve peace or other sectors such as education, the climate, infrastructures, and technologies, which are liable to guarantee a better local stability, the prerequisite for a lasting peace.
 - o However, the correlation between the localisation of FDA projects and French military interventions raises questions. Indeed, the FDA has requested censorship of an article which appeared in March 2019 in the journal *Afrique contemporaine* dealing with French military intervention in Mali, revealing major political interference and common interests between the government agency and the French army.

Flaws in French peacebuilding

- It has proved impossible for France to win its military operations in the Sahel since 2013, even by calling in the help of its military allies (G5 Sahel and the United Nations). French strategy in Mali, based on the 3 Ds (Diplomacy, Defence and Development) can be called into question.
- This strategy puts emphasis on the security aspect of peacebuilding, a short-term approach which benefits the defence industry but which does not deal in depth with the social, economic and political causes of conflict which allow a lasting peace to be ensured.
- Regional equilibrium has been destabilised, weakening people’s safety further without a viable alternative having been established locally. This has led to strong anti-French

feeling among Malians, which undermines the legitimacy of this military operation even further.

Peace can not be built through military intervention in a foreign country when the priorities and causes of that intervention are other than the safety and peace of the population.