

Seminar Series Session 01 - Meeting Minutes

Topic: Understanding order, stability, and security in fragile areas

Moderator: Cpt Sebastian Rinelli

Guests: Dr Alice Hills and Dr James Worrall

Audience: Open to the public. Practitioners, academics, and advanced students.

Date: 26 Nov 2020, 15:00 UTC+1

Duration: 90 min - 120 min

Content and guiding questions:

- Definitions and conceptualisations of order, stability, security.
- How are order, stability, and security linked with each other?
- What do they look like in fragile areas? A Somalian Case Study.

- How do orthodox ideas about order and security shape our understanding?
- How can we analyse and explain patterns of order, stability, and security in (post)-conflict areas?
- How can this view transform our understanding and produce better analysis?

Dr James Worrall Presentation:

How do we understand and conceptualise the notion of order, and how is it linked to ideas of stability and security in fragile areas?

Orthodoxy:

Strong liberal orthodoxy is underpinned by

- liberalism and notion of democracies that are a key for developing and maintaining order and help to engage in legitimate forms of governance
- how economic reforms (neoliberalism) more broadly can bring prosperity (which is an ordering tool in itself)

- ➔ assumption: the richer people are, the less likely they are to engage in violence and all forms of disorder

- a whole constellation of language and actors which discuss humanitarianism, human rights, and the notion of developments

The biggest problem with liberal orthodoxy: an inherent contradiction

- ➔ brings stability by default but at the same time requires intervention, state-building etc. which are highly disruptive to existing forms of order
- ➔ when order is disrupted, it brings chaos which may cause violence

Security development nexus: assumption = you cannot have one without the other

→ by buying into the security-development nexus, the notion of order gets neglected; this assumption still warrants empirical evidence

'Fragility'

- highly localised determination of political life is not synonymous with disorder

→ highly localised forms of order can bring significant forms of stability

Huntington (Political Order in Changing Societies, 1968): "The primary problem of politics is the lag in the development of political institutions behind social and economic change"

→ in other words: the political order of a society is always at odds with and lagging to some extent the wider social, cultural, and economic order of that society

= the key difficulty we face when imposing an external form of political order on top of that society

→ we do not understand the social and cultural order of the society and the way it links with political order

→ we, therefore, need a more holistic understanding of order to shape it and to have influence over it

Basic definitions

Security: is a matter of perception

→ it is not truly measurable; it exists only in measurement against something else

- it is psychological, it is rather the absence of something rather than the presence of something
- we rarely think about security in enough depths to connect it with order and how order can create forms of security
- there can be forms of insecurity existing in highly ordered circumstances

Stability: is about longer-term patterned, predictable forms of how order transitions

- a stable situation is one where stresses do not produce largely irreversible changes

→ stability is not a synonym with order -> order can be much more fluid and can underpin forms of stability

Development:

- biggest problem: lots of development politics (historically and today) are an attempt to make societies in which we are intervening much more like us
- ➔ undermines and reshapes order in ways that are unpredictable and where we do not have the knowledge about an existing order

Power: a social relationship which permit people to carry out what they would like to do even against resistance

- ➔ various forms: can be violent, can be the power to set norms, agendas etc.
- ➔ need to broaden things out from the pure focus of violence

What is order?

- order implies agreement amongst groups of people (small or large); on a societal level implies a set of basic rules
- emerges from the limitations of violence -> violence has its limits (the more you use violence, the less effective it becomes)
- the threat of violence is more powerful than its' use
- trying to shape order is more effective and cheaper than using violence
- order is in many ways the water in which fishes swim -> social world that shapes people from the moment in which they are born
- order is immutable and structural, but also an evolving concept (can be quite rapid, especially in a conflict situation)

Hobbes and Weber

- their theories on the state shape how we go about interventions -> macro-oriented and much less bottom-up while trying to understand the entirety of society
- societies are composed of multiple forms of order overlapping -> it makes much more sense studying it bottom-up with a more localised approach

The problem of order arises fundamentally from perceived contention between the opposing nature of individual desires and collective interests

- ➔ Western view structures in many ways we think about order
- ➔ we need to understand order in a much broader sense than purely a political form of order

Migdal:

- society is a mélange of social organisations = groups themselves have social control and form rules within their groups

- the state itself seeks to have an ordering structure in shaping rules and negotiations between different groups in societies
- ➔ state leader's dilemma: the state will face multiple other forms of strongmen
- ➔ need to develop strategies of survival by pulling people away from strongmen into support of the state

States seek to reshape order in its very nature but never really have the skills to do so in very fragile countries

- ➔ constant interaction reshaping/rebalancing order and power structures amongst actors of various kinds

Migdal's core argument: the state is a key factor in this ordering process; it interacts during conflicts with an entire constellation of social forces in different areas of society to bring broader structure

- ➔ therefore, neglects broader structural factors and engagements between individuals and the way which individuals choose to uphold/undermine order daily

Wider Order

- we need to move away from a focus on political order as a separate analytical category
- we must bring in social, cultural etc. forms of order to understand structural order in society and which aspects of order are more amenable and likely to change than others
- combining forms of order brings a more holistic understanding of order in society

Order is a negotiation, and it is negotiated at multiple different levels:

- direct negotiations: between the state and others (see Migdal)
- indirect negotiations: how do people shape their environments in more organic and evolutionary ways

Framework for Understanding Order

- understand local social orders, identify conflict lines along with social identities and history, assess how to access security and economic opportunities is both driving conflict and providing order locally
- elite-centric and instrumentalist, but very powerful tool to go deeper into networks, structures, and norms

Summary

- order is more important than security

- security is an outcome of order, a tool to help order consolidate, a means to get to forms of order, but there are forms of order existing in insecure environments
- order gives clear tools to understand what is happening and act in different ways
- order as a concept remains 'open-ended' 'multi-layered and difficult to pin down (Hills, 2009, p.11)

➔ is diminishing if we think about order as a way of thought

- knowledge about order is about gathering information to convert it into an understanding that is helping to shape order
- everyone is in the same game of trying to generate information to transform it into knowledge which then enables them to act to reshape order in their own interest

Discussion

How do these orthodox ideas of order and security shape our understanding and distort the analysis of what is happening on the ground?

Dr Worrall

- liberal orthodoxy is the starting point = we need to consider that it is an assumption that comes from our own understanding of order, which we take for granted
- when going overseas, it is difficult for us to question order because we don't fully understand how our own perceptions have permeated every other aspect of thought
- like a culture shock: new culture is measured against stances of own society which is a conscious and unconscious process
- when trying to understand a completely new version of order, some deal with this complexity by disqualifying it as disordered
- missions are short term = no possibility to get over culture shock before starting to understand, and people don't have analytical tools and processes to approach this order

What does it mean for analysts from a practical perspective? What do they need to understand when analysing the links between local populations, armed actors, economy, wider setting of norms and laws?

Dr Worrall

- there must be some ability to take the idea of order and develop it into a conceptual framework enabling to map and place actors
- but should not be too actor centric but instead, consider that norms and structures within societies are more deeply embedded
- we need to give people tools to start identifying how order functions in their societies and then in other societies -> toolkit is needed, but ultimately, it is about creating a way of thinking

- order is not theory but an approach, how I engage with societies -> structure and framework in my head to engage with all kinds of intellectual questions consistently
- need for paradigm-shifting people's minds to simply think about order, recognise that order is always there and always changing

Dr Worrall, you wrote that what is important to explore are not only rebel uses of violence and extraction of resources, but also the use of their mechanisms, key among them the legitimacy. What do you mean by that?

Dr Worrall

- rebels can have different kinds of legitimacy but can also seek to shape legitimacy in society by engaging with society in different ways
- some seek to severely disrupt local orders, but disrupting too much can make it very expensive -> some orders need to be upheld (behaving religiously, societal norms)
- there is a significant overlap between wanting to shape order and upholding order
- being legitimate is a useful tool because it gives you the power to reshape order in a longer-term
- rebels draw on multiple resources aside from violence and often craft their interpretations on top of existing order -> hybrid forms of order

As a practitioner and knowing the NATO approach of analysing the operating environment, PMESII is used to make sense of the operating environment -> rebel groups are often assigned to the military domain -> creating a sort of disconnected picture. Which category should rebel groups be assigned to?

Dr Worrall

- rebel groups are ultimately social movements: have political goals/systems/party (participate in the electoral process), they act as social actors providing goods services, filling gaps where states cannot act or don't want to operate, develop infrastructure = they cross all those domains
- they cannot be simply understood as military; it is needed to approach rebels in much more holistic way to understand different goals they have which are not simply military

Question on the spatial dimension -> we talked about local order, but it seems that they vary a lot on regional, local etc. levels. Should we think about mapping/ delineating different forms of order? Anyways in which we might do that?

Dr Worrall

- we don't need a simple map but also overlays of maps including local history, a culture of place etc. to understand how social orders might be slightly different
- example: Hezbollah -> spatial patterns and different layers of control
 - areas with a very deep form of control vs coastal areas where the local economy functions on tourism, drawing Christians to the coast

- Hezbollah has to come to an accommodation with its constituents who own bars, beaches etc. -> adaptation to a local form of order
- there are multiple different forms of order overlapping in one place (multilayers)

You mentioned a toolkit we need to have at hand -> what kind of additional tools do you recommend taking with me before I get deployed?

Dr Worrall

- read the key literature, which is eye-opening -> once you read these, you cannot see the world in the way you saw it before -> enables you to see what the kinds of tools are you need to assess the area
- think about who the key actors/ people with real influence are -> are they visible, is it based on titles or is it based on contacts, relationships etc.
- it just requires us not to think in terms of bureaucratized society but in terms of a network society -> that basic shifts enable us to think about specific tools and dynamics

You were mentioning fault lines in your presentation?

Dr Worrall

- there are significant tensions and cleavages in many societies -> traditionally we tend to fall into the orientalist trap of thinking of fault lines being ethnic groups and simplifying along social lines (Iraq effect -> distinction between Sunni, Shia and Kurd)
- fault lines are far more complex, they are not only about ethnicity but also intergroup dynamics
- fault lines exist everywhere and are based not only on history, personality differences, but they are also about different visions of how order looks like and in whose interest, order should be shaped
- if you can identify fault lines at different levels where key individuals or institutions are overlapping in terms of their authority, that can give us pinch points at which of those fault lines overlapping causes disruption of forms of order
- we need to find those fault lines and work out ways of diffusing them by discouraging people from acting upon tensions -> key nodes and networks in which we can apply forms of pressure to change order in the way we want to see it
- order can partly be created through intimidation, coercion etc. but is also about setting an agenda, modelling behaviour, creating a norm -> if society agrees on something being a good or bad thing, change can come about fast
- that needs to happen bottom-up, but there can also be top-down elements -> example of smoking in restaurants (state came on board after society already decided)
- we wish to bring fundamental change in reordering, but we do not have the tools or resources
- it is about recalibrating expectations and working out where the best leverage points can be to get some movement on the change we would like to see -> accept that this change is going to be slow, partial etc.

- we are just one other actor in a rather complex domain and are seen as very temporary actors -> this does not give us a lot of influence
- you must generate knowledge of local orders to work out how to apply your limited resources
- we are driven by numbers far too much and are not thinking about social order anywhere near enough because we can't put numbers on it