

Summary of Presentation by Scott Smith
at Seminar, “Inclusivity in Rebuilding States: Focusing on Inclusivity of Peace Negotiations and
Its Impact on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding” (6 June 2013)

Scott Smith (Deputy Director of the US Institute of Peace):

Mr. Smith stated that the Bonn process has largely failed if measured by what it intended to deliver. The question is whether this was because of its lack of inclusivity. If we take the definition of inclusivity from the SG report on post-conflict peacebuilding, he argues that Bonn was inclusive, though the common view now is that the reason Bonn was a failure was because the Taliban was excluded. Smith disagreed with this conclusion, saying that it was probable that there would not have been a peace agreement at all had the Taliban been included, at least not one as forward-looking as Bonn was.

Mr. Smith also stressed that there is the challenge of the practicality of inclusivity, rather than the theory. Bonn gives us several lessons. One is preparation time. Bonn started three months after 9/11, and there was thus very little time to get all the necessary players there. There was also pressure to complete Bonn quickly. It takes time to create an inclusive process, but there was a very short time to set up the Bonn conference. The designers of a peace process have to react to the situations they are presented with, not the ideal circumstances that theories are based on.

Bonn was also not conducted like a classic peace conference, but more like an emergency meeting. Some have offered the idea that Bonn should have begun even earlier, before the Taliban fell, in order to include them. Smith disagreed with this opinion as well, stating that it would never have been accepted by the U.S., which was at that point waging an effective military campaign against them.

Smith noted that there is a difference between peace agreements and peace processes, and both require different tools. If the circumstances at the time of an agreement don't allow for real inclusiveness, which was the case at Bonn, then the process can provide openings to increase inclusivity. The Bonn agreement included phases for including people in the political process, such as the Loya Jirga and constitutional Jirga and eventually the elections. He argued that the reason Bonn failed was not the noninclusion of the Taliban, but because of the actions taken by the government that was installed. He believed that it is no coincidence that attacks sharply increased in 2006, after the government was elected, and considered itself fully legitimate and sovereign. Today's opposition includes not only the original Taliban, but new adversaries who joined the insurgency because they were marginalized by the government or disgusted with its corruptness, and who had no place to go except the insurgency. The international community was thus caught in a trap of its own making—it couldn't repudiate the government because it had been legitimately elected, and it found it difficult to pressure the government because the government considered itself to be sovereign.

The multiplicity of actors and grievances represented by the “Taliban” mean that new peace process that engages only the Taliban leadership might fail to address the grievances of many other who are fighting against the government, Smith declared. He suggested that the principle of inclusivity is important as a general principle, but noted that there is sometimes a cost, especially when war crimes have been committed. Is including the Taliban and bestowing them with immunity an acceptable price to pay for peace? He agreed with Guéhenno that inclusivity is key and the political dynamics of the country need to be understood before making political judgments about the inclusion of specific parties, and those judgments are very difficult and hugely challenging.