Thinking Outside the Black Box
Conflicts do not just take place between states. There is a tendency in the international community to think of states as black boxes interacting with each other, but conflict also happened below the state level between populations or beyond the state level in international organizations that operate across states. These complicated conflict systems signal a need to think beyond the state, both above and below the state level and to acknowledge the full set of actors beyond the state, including civil society, armed militia groups, and international organizations. The focus needs to move beyond the state to encompass the entire conflict system.

Borderlands
Borderlands exist where people interact along borders and have identities connected to the border. Borders often present complicated dynamics that play a role in conflict situations. Some borders are indistinct and populations live on either side of a border. Other borders are openly disputed and conflict breaks out over the border itself. These situations exist when the exact locations of borders are unclear, either because they were never properly defined, as between Morocco and Algeria, or because the treaties drawing up borders have been “lost” as in the border between Ethiopia and Somalia or because the landmarks demarcating them, such as rivers, shift over time, as between Zambia and Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. In other cases, the border is known but the countries sharing the border
dislike it. These disputes can become theologized when they include holy spaces, as in Kosovo or Jerusalem.

Building peace beyond the state
Regional and interstate peace initiatives can play a key role in regional diplomacy. Regional policy should be adjusted for specific situations, capacities, and political realities. However, regional integration has helped to soften problematic borders. The EU has played an important role in the dialogue between Ireland and England. In the Basque region, Spain and France have put a stop to EU involvement for various political reasons. Regional interventions tend to favor harder initiatives such as border security and peacekeeping operations that put a lid on the problem but do not address its root causes. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the CNDP rebel group has operated both as a local rebel movement and as a proxy for neighboring Rwanda. Effective state level pressure removed Rwandan proxy support for the group but failed to address the reasons behind the CNDP’s activity. The international community needs to improve its conflict prevention and resolution skills to engage with the underlying issues of conflict.

Building peace below the state
When peace processes have been blocked at the state level, connections between communities across borders has played a significant role in peacebuilding where shared kinship and culture can result in horizontal peacebuilding. Supporting cross-border community network can tap into the insight of borderland communities. There is a Key need for states to invest in borderland areas and these kinds of efforts. Governments should strive to deal with the inequalities and issues where those living in the border are more connected to the border than to the state. This can be addressed in part by improving service delivery, governance, and human security.

Trade and borders
Trade across borders plays important role in conflict systems and can be a positive or a negative factor. Conflict through trade can build trust and break down stereotypes. People living in borderlands are likely to be more economically dependent on communities across the border than on their capital cities. Even in the Cashmere region disputed by India and Pakistan where the border is highly militarized but transportation and trade are allowed. There is the ability for this trade to connect separated communities. Trade across borders helps to build human connections than can be useful in conflict resolution. However peacebuilding through trade cannot be assumed. It must be purposefully created.

Illicit trade and trafficking, on the other hand, are increasingly recognized as a type of violence and a part of large conflict. New data has increased understanding of illicit trade and its role in complex conflict. Anything can be trafficked from diamonds and people to timber and oil. Illicit trade and trafficking are inherently connected to borderlands and border conflicts as they are defined by the illegal movement of people of objects from one state to another. Illicit trade is generally perpetrated by people with connections and contacts to make a profit through the existence of violence, leading to a cycle of profiteering and illicit trade fueling conflict.
The expanding definition of violence in trade also includes the unique problems of piracy. Piracy generally happens outside of borders. Much like cross border conflict, piracy goes on in a public space. No single country can resolve the issue by itself and their efforts tend to push the problem onto other countries or onto public space. There has, however, been a huge international commitment to respond to piracy. The international community spends $6-11 billion to fight piracy in the Gulf of Aden alone.

**Trickle Up**
Community efforts need louder voices to gain the attentions of state governments. Local efforts should join together in networks and coalitions to amplify their voices. Media can be used to reach the government and to generate solidarity. Evidence suggests that social and traditional media can provide a useful platform for local initiatives. Forging partnerships with international organizations and educational institutions can help to support peacebuilding and further amplify voices. For example, the University of Penang in Malaysia worked with Aceh refugees, providing them with a platform for their peacebuilding efforts.

Policy makers need to support cross border connections through financial resources and also by creating political space and promoting the importance of local analysis. Community efforts in the borderlands need platforms of influence.

**Institutional Strength and Conflict Migration**
The institutional strengths and weaknesses of a state play a significant role in how and whether conflict affects borders. Strong countries can protect their borders and deliver local services, governance, and justice, such that people living in borderlands are not as likely to engage in violence in neighboring countries. Strong countries tend to push violence out and move it into weaker neighboring states. For example, Operation Lightning Thunder moved the Lord’s Resistance Army out of Uganda and into its weaker neighbors. This plays an even larger role in narcotics trafficking as the illicit trade moves into countries that cannot push it out.

Conflict increases the movement of peoples. There are currently 42 million displaced persons out of which 15 million are refugees 75% of which have moved to countries bordering their own. These states are likely to be developing countries without the resources to accommodate refugee migration. Violence can follow refugees into neighboring countries. Refugees often migrate towards places to which they have a historical connection and can find hospice there. Sometimes this means that the same conflict driving refugees away is possible in the places they migrate to.

**The Economics of Border Conflict**
Trends in cross border violence go beyond just the violence. From an economic perspective, countries that are neighbors to states with civil wars are more likely to have civil ward themselves. Countries lose .7% of their GDP per neighboring country in conflict. Given that the average economic cost of a conflict within the state is 2.5% of GDP, a country with a few neighbors engaged in conflict could see the same economic costs as it would with internal conflict.
Lords Resistance Army (LRA) Case study: Throwing Stones at Bees

The LRA is a rebel movement that began in Uganda and has spread to an area more than 20 times where they originally operated. They are a nomadic group with no currently known political motives. The LRA has made a practice of abducting children from one country and using them in another country. Because children are used in the national army as well, children abducted into the LRA are often used to fight children in the national army.

Operation Lightning Thunder, a joint operation of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, and Sudan in 2008, was intended to destroy the militia group, but resulted in spreading them throughout Central Africa as they fled Uganda through porous borders as far north as Darfur. The LRA now works across three conflict systems, the Darfur conflict in Sudan and Chad, the Great Lakes regional conflict in the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi, and the small arms belt from Sudan to Somalia. They have created massive refugee and IDP problems throughout these regions. One town in Central African Republic (CAR) once had 7,000 residents, now has 15,000 refugees from DRC and IDPs from CAR. The LRA has become adept at operating across porous borders. However, the UN operates separate missions in Darfur and the DRC, neither of which has the mandate to engage with the LRA. Because of the multinational and multiregional operations of the LRA no single state can affectively deal with the rebel group and operations such as Operation Lightning Thunder only force the LRA out of one more stable country and into its less stable neighbors.

While the LRA is no longer very active in Uganda, they have increased their numbers through abducting children in northern Uganda. Communities consider returned children to be LRA militia and they are not welcomed back, even if they were only gone for a few weeks. This prevents rebels from returning to their communities even if they want to. These communities need peacebuilding to accept their children back. Without community attitude changes rebels will not leave the movement.

Civil society leaders have been responding to this need. Arch Bishops and religious community leaders are deeply involved in community healing projects. They understand the issues better than diplomats who may not be engaging directly with local communities and need to engage with community and religious leaders in policy development.

March 2009 Conciliation Resources developed a regional civil society task force to share the experiences of village and traditional leaders in community healing. They worked to convince LRA soldiers to come out of the rebel group and return to their homes. They asked rebels why they continued to fight when Joseph Koney is 1,000 miles away in Darfur and found that rebels remained in the bush out of fear of reprisals when they returned home. The task force was able to create an Amnesty Act to allow rebels to return without the fear of arrest and used radio broadcasts to communicate their message to soldiers. They were able to convince the majority of rebels in Uganda to leave the LRA and rejoin their families. The task force is now sharing these experiences from Uganda with others in regions affected by LRA. Their message is that these children are victims recruited by rebel group and forced to commit atrocities. They need their communities’ help, not punishment. Radio is an ideal media for spreading
their messages. Simple radio messages from communities work better than military action, but setting up radio stations is very expensive.

There is no evidence that military action has any success. “It is like throwing stones at bees. They will only get angry and come back to sting the community.”

**Recommendations**

Responses to conflict need to be regional. Violence is too easily pushed out of one country and into another, as happened in Uganda during Operation Lightning Thunder.

It is important that the root causes of conflict are addressed, even if rebels have moved into other countries.

Coordination between donor countries is important. Donor countries need to do more than just what is appreciated by central governments. They need to connect with local communities. The World Bank, European Union, United States, and United Nations have a working group on the LRA, but it has never spoken with communities directly affected by the violence. Engaging with local leaders is an important part of peacebuilding and all actors need to be recognized.

If and when military operations lead to civilian deaths they should not be used. The UN should focus on civilian protection.

Convincing rebels to return to their villages requires amnesty. When rebels are threatened with military or judicial action they are less likely to put down their arms. They already face fears that the LRA will kill defectors.

**Resources:**

Find the full PDF of the report here:

http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/cross-border-project/index.php