
Part III

Business and conflict

Editors' remarks

The connection between business and conflict is as old as the caveman's first purpose-made axe. Its ambiguities, too, have always been with us—as illustrated by the owner of a dynamite company who endowed the Nobel Peace Prize.

In modern conditions, the interweaving of private sector activities with the entire conflict cycle has become more complex than ever. Companies can have decisive influence for good or ill through their actions both in a pre-conflict setting and during post-conflict reconstruction. In active conflict they may provide not just arms, but integrated services and support for the combatants (including private armed forces), financing, and other 'conflict commodities', both legitimate and illicit. The range of possible political, legal and moral evaluations of business's role is equally wide. At one extreme, as discussed in Said Adejumbi's chapter in Part VI of this volume, business can be seen by some victims or parties in a conflict as an enemy, an aggressor, or even a war criminal. In other cases companies are wooed as potential saviours, bringers of wealth and employment, or facilitators of reform and renewal. What is increasingly clear is that business cannot escape the share of responsibility which its major share of influence in conflict processes brings. Private actors must be just as answerable as official ones in key aspects, such as respect for international humanitarian law and the avoidance of war crimes.

Christine Batruch's chapter about an oil company's experiences in Sudan suggests that business's best hope of behaving properly in a conflict environment is not to isolate itself, but to engage and understand better the parties and the processes at work. Dialogue with the locals and with international actors should reduce the risks both of becoming the 'bad guy', and of being unfairly seen as such. Businesses can also anticipate and prepare for such challenges through the private sector's own networks and development of 'codes of conduct', and through processes of mutual learning with qualified non-governmental and official organizations. Gilles Carbonnier's chapter is full of pointers to good practice in this regard.

It is important—as argued in John Maresca's introductory chapter—not to cast business in the role of actual or potential villain. Trends such as the predominance of internal over external conflicts, the ubiquity of transnational terrorism, and also climate change and disease seem bound to increase the proportion of business work that will have to be carried on in hazardous, often conflict-prone environments in future. In a world running out of resources, business will need to be motivated—and supported as necessary—to continue exploring even the most rugged frontiers. Moreover, as argued in Andrew Bone's chapter on 'conflict diamonds', business can offer useful models for the *process* of international cooperation against new security hazards, including those linked with conflict.

Conflict will always offer profits to a limited sector of business for a limited time. It will always be the enemy of business as a whole, as well as of security. The strength of the case for public-private sector partnership was recognized in this domain long before 11 September 2001, and the often quite mature models of cooperation described in this part of the volume deserve particular attention as a result.