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Revisiting an Elusive Concept: A Review of the Debate on Spoilers in Peace Processes[1]

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In a seminal article, Stedman (*International Security*, 22, 1997, 5) suggested that the greatest source of risk to civil war peace processes comes from so-called spoilers, leaders, and groups that perceive peace as threatening and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it. The spoiler concept has since gained significant ground and widespread legitimacy both in the academic literature and in critical policy circles. In the footsteps of this development, however, we suggest that the spoiler concept has been stretched beyond its original meaning and given raise to a number of ambiguities concerning its definition and empirical applicability. This lack of clarity in regard to some of the key aspects of the spoiler concept does not only risk undermining the usefulness of the concept itself, but also risks hampering the accumulation of valuable research on this pertinent topic. This article presents a reflection on a burgeoning research field and aims to contribute to the same by attempting to offer greater conceptual clarity in regard to a number of issues that are the core of the spoiler debate and by presenting a conceptual framework for analyzing spoilers in future research.

From ongoing peace efforts around the world—in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel and Palestine, Nepal, the Philippines, or Sudan—we receive almost daily accounts of broken peace talks, interrupted disarmament efforts, violent incidents, and political assassinations that speak to the importance of better understanding the patterns and processes of peacemaking in civil wars. In a seminal article, Stedman (1997) suggested that the greatest source of risk to peace processes comes from so-called spoilers: leaders and groups that perceive peace as threatening and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it. Although Stedman was not the first to identify the problem or the first to address it, the article was a novel attempt to develop a typology for categorizing different actor types based on their motives and means of spoiling, and discuss the policy implications of various third-party strategies for managing such actors in internationally supervised peace processes. Since then, the concept of spoilers has been frequently referred to and gained widespread usage and legitimacy

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both in the academic literature on civil war termination and in critical policy circles.

Although more than a decade has passed since Stedman's pioneering study, it is only in recent years that we have seen the emergence and growth of a much-needed and promising academic discussion concerning the usefulness and limitations of the spoiler concept. These research efforts have significantly advanced our understanding of the phenomena itself and have contributed to a constructive and dynamic debate. In the footsteps of this development, however, we suggest that the spoiler concept has been stretched too far beyond its original meaning and given raise to a number of unnecessary ambiguities concerning its definition and empirical applicability. This lack of clarity with regard to some of the key aspects of the spoiler concept does not only risk undermining the usefulness of the concept itself but also risks hampering the accumulation of valuable research findings on this pertinent topic. It also has important ramifications for policymaking, as different theoretical approaches carry with them different implications for how spoilers best ought to be identified, prevented, and managed in contemporary peace processes.

In this article, we revisit the spoiler concept and provide a review of the debate on spoilers in peace processes. The review is not meant to be exhaustive and cover all literature available on the topic, but rather aims to identify the main issues of contention in this burgeoning research field. Based on the insights from this review, we offer some suggestions for greater conceptual clarity with regard to a number of key issues, which are central to the development of some basic theoretical scope conditions of the spoiler concept. Following our analysis, we also present a conceptual framework for the study of spoilers in peace processes, which may serve as a guideline for the progress of future research on this topic.

This article is divided into four main parts. First, we review the spoiler definition and present some ideas on the scope and width of its usage. In particular, we note the disagreement in the literature concerning which actors ought to be included in an analysis of spoilers; whether both non-violent and violent spoiler behavior should be in focus; and the need to distinguish between actions and outcome in our research, that is, whether we attempt to explain spoiler behavior or its effect on peace processes. Second, we discuss some of the key explanations for why spoilers emerge, where much of the debate has centered on whether incentive, capability, or opportunity is the most important determinant of spoiler behavior, and the relative weight that should be put on intraparty and interparty dynamics in our analyses. Third, we review how the literature has approached the issue of managing spoilers. In particular, we address the difference between measures intended for the prevention of potential spoilers and strategies for managing already manifest spoiler threats. Finally, we suggest ways of moving forward in the debate by summarizing our conclusions in the presentation of a conceptual framework.

Parties, Actions, and Outcomes: Defining Spoilers

Who are spoilers, which means do they use, and what do they spoil? According to Stedman's (1997:5) original definition, spoilers are ''leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it.'' Such spoilers may be found either on the inside or on the outside of the forum of peace negotiations, and the opposition to peace may be primarily located among the leadership of the organization or among its followers. Critically, however, spoilers can only exist when there is an existing or potentially emerging peace to spoil, that is, when either a peace agreement has been signed or at least two parties

have publicly committed themselves to a peaceful settlement. Spoilers succeed when peace is derailed and fail when the peace accord holds (1997:6–8). Subsequent studies have often built on this definition, yet sometimes made critical revisions to it in terms of adding, removing, or reinterpreting some of its key components.

When it comes to the definition of spoilers, there are three issues in particular that we would like to call attention to, as they have critical implications for our understanding of the spoiler concept and its applicability. First, there is disagreement in the literature when it comes to the question of *which parties* should be taken into consideration when analyzing spoilers to a peace process, in particular whether the focus should rest solely on the former warring parties to the conflict—signatories to the peace agreement as well as non-signatories—or whether the activities of a much broader range of actors with a stake in the peace process and its outcome should also be taken into account. Second, research is divided when it comes to which *type of spoiler behavior* ought to be in focus. While some focus only on violent spoiler behavior, others suggest that spoilers may use both violent and non-violent means. Third, there are differences when it comes to *the outcome of interest* in each study, or in other words, the dependent variable under scrutiny. While some studies primarily focus on explaining why some actors resort to spoiling, others seek to explain the consequences of such activities on the outcome of the peace process. Although both research questions are clearly relevant and needed, and plurality on this issue is both necessary and important for a constructive research agenda, the distinction between the two dependent variables, and the causal linkage between them, is too often left unexplained or unclear.

The Parties of Interest: The Warring Parties or Beyond?

In Stedman's (1997) original work, it was implicit that the spoiler concept was to be limited to an analysis of the key warring actors to the armed conflict, or factions within these groups. This approach to the topic has subsequently come to dominate the field, especially in empirically oriented peace research (Zahar 2006a, 2008; Findley 2007; Greenhill and Major 2007; Nilsson 2008; Pearlman 2009). The rationale for such an approach is relatively straightforward; these actors have both a clear stake in the armed conflict and its outcome, and have at least at some point been willing and able to use violence to pursue their interests, and could thus potentially do so again. Within this strand of literature, however, the more precise empirical focus may vary considerably. Some focus their attention primarily or exclusively on the activities of the nonstate armed actors engaged in civil wars—be they called rebel groups, insurgents, or militias—or factions within these groups or splinters breaking off from them. In a few cases, the analysis is even limited to one particular such nonstate actor deemed capable of stalling the peace process, for example, Hamas in the conflict between Israel and Palestine (Gunning 2004). Other scholars emphasize the need for a more comprehensive analysis by also including so-called official spoilers on the government side—decision makers, paramilitaries, and the army—and their means and motives for disrupting the peace process (for example, Conversi 2006; Höglund and Zartman 2006).

Another approach to identifying the relevant actors of concern has mainly gained ground within the field of critical studies. Authors coming from this scholarly tradition deliberately employ a much more wide-ranging definition in terms of which actors ought to be included in a spoiler analysis, suggesting that the traditional approach to the subject is too limited to capture the complex reality of contemporary peace processes. Newman and Richmond (2006b), for example, suggest that in addition to the warring parties, other groups with an

interest in undermining or stalling a particular peace process, such as diaspora groups, foreign patrons, or even multinational corporations, which operate either independently or indirectly through the warring parties, are equally relevant to take into consideration. In fact, they argue, a study of spoilers and spoiling behavior should take into account ''the activities of any actors that are opposed to peaceful settlement for whatever reason'' (Newman and Richmond 2006b:102; see also Newman and Richmond 2006a).

Research on spoilers within the field of critical studies has pointed out another key aspect of concern when it comes to identifying which actors ought to be included in an analysis of spoilers in peace processes. One of the most serious, and potentially even counterproductive, limitations with the spoiler concept concerns its powerful normative underpinnings. It has even been suggested that the concept derives its definition, and gains its meaning, only in relation to the core assumptions of the so-called liberal peacebuilding paradigm (Heaven 2010). Consequently, actors that behave according to the expectations of this normative framework will be considered to raise fair and legitimate demands, whereas those that disagree will per definition be viewed as spoilers, which in turn determines how the key peace custodians respond to various actors in the peace process (Newman and Richmond 2006b:103; see also Dansie 2009; Goodhand and Walton 2009). In addition, as noted by Newman and Richmond (2006b:104–105), such normative paradigms are constantly being reconstructed. For example, they argue, the 9/11 events and the subsequent ''war on terrorism'' probably had a considerable impact on our understandings of spoilers and spoiling, especially for nonstate actors, who now are likely to be labeled terrorists rather than spoilers, with all the implications that follow (see also Gunning 2004:24; Zahar 2010:268).

Another issue in the debate that has a bearing on the discussion of which actors should be considered in our analyses, is whether it is useful or even possible to identify (and label) parties as spoilers before they have actually engaged in spoiler behavior or not. Stedman's (1997) typology has been criticized for failing to provide policymakers with sufficient knowledge of how to prevent the emergence of latent and potential spoilers in any given peace process, as it cannot identify or profile actors that have yet to manifest themselves as spoilers. In other words, Stedman's theoretical framework can only recognize spoilers after they have already engaged in potentially damaging spoiler behavior. According to Greenhill and Major (2007:10), this constitutes a serious limitation to his model, as it does not account for the fact that there are actors that would oppose a peace settlement if they only had the capabilities to do so, and following future shifts in relative power ''dogs that did not originally bark may later emerge, threatening potentially painful bites.'' Hence, in their view, potential spoilers are equally important to manifest spoilers in this respect, and any useful analysis of spoilers in peace processes ought to take this into consideration. This is a point of key importance to the debate, and the study by Greenhill and Major represents an important step forward in this regard (on potential spoilers, see also Findley 2007).

The ability to identify potential spoilers is likely to be of particular relevance when considering which actors should be included in a peace settlement. Blaydes and De Maio (2010:22), for example, in their important study of spoilers in three conflicts in North-Central Africa argue that peacemakers, in addition to including as many as possible of the warring parties into the peace negotiation process, should also strive to identify and include the broadest possible range of actors and interests in society, in order to prevent previously excluded parties to emerge as spoilers to the peace settlement further down the road. They consequently view a peace process as exclusive if it leaves out ''one or more of the major parties or *potential* parties to a conflict and, in doing so, prevents them from bringing their grievances to the negotiating table'' (2010:8; italics in original).

The debate above leaves us with some critical insights. We believe that it is generally analytically beneficial to make a clearer distinction between whether we concern ourselves with potential or manifest spoilers (or both) in our analyses. As both approaches to the topic are clearly relevant and important, depending on our purpose of study, it seems unnecessary that this conceptual issue should cause any disagreement in the debate. With regard to potential spoilers, we argue that it is reasonable to limit our focus to the former warring parties during the civil war, both state-related actors and nonstate actors, splinter factions from these groups, and new armed groups that may have emerged. However, we believe that it is rarely very useful to rely on a much wider definition of actors, as there are clear trade-offs involved. If almost any actor may be viewed as a potential spoiler, it becomes difficult to see the added value of using the concept. Certainly, there are many other actors—such as third-party actors, neighboring governments (that are not immediate secondary parties), diaspora groups, criminal gangs, civil society organizations, or perhaps even multinational corporations—whose behavior and activities may impact negatively on the prospects of achieving peace in a particular country. But, we contend, to label all these actors as spoilers would stretch the concept too far beyond its original meaning and thus risk undermining the very concept itself (Sartori 1984).

Consider the case of the 1999 Lomé peace agreement in Sierra Leone. There are several actors who could reasonably be labeled spoilers against that agreement, including the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the West Side Boys, and the Liberian President Charles Taylor, who was instrumental in fueling the conflict as a key secondary party to the conflict. There are also a myriad of other individuals, groups, and associations, however, who in various ways may be argued to have had an interest in the continuation of armed conflict, or provided an obstacle to the peace process, such as the many diamond mining companies and black market traders operating out of the resource-rich Kono district. However, to label all these actors as spoilers on equal footing with the warring parties to the peace process would distort more than it would clarify. This does not mean that we do not consider them empirically relevant and important for an analysis of the post-agreement period in Sierra Leone, but only that we suggest it more fruitful to reserve the more specific term spoilers to a more limited group of actors.

Lastly, the debate has served to highlight the normative dimension of the spoiler concept. This critique against Stedman's framework is a valid concern, as the concept does indeed build on strong normative assumptions about the rightfulness and legitimacy of the current (internationally supervised) peace process, against whose established benchmarks every actor's opinions and behavior is being judged. From a practical policy perspective, we believe this is particularly problematic and may potentially even be counterproductive for the peace efforts, especially in light of the widespread and frequent usage of the spoiler concept in international policy circles. From an analytical perspective, however, we suggest that as long as this inherent normative bias is recognized and discussed, the spoiler concept can still prove meaningful as a descriptive device. In fact, we believe that the normative aspect of the concept only serves to further emphasize the need for greater conceptual clarity and the development of more unambiguous theoretical scope conditions.

The Actions of the Spoilers: Violent or Non-Violent Behavior?

One of the most problematic aspects of Stedman's definition of spoilers that has caused ambiguity in the debate relates to the means that actors make use of in their attempts to undermine peace. As noted, Stedman (1997:5) originally defines spoilers as actors that ''use violence.'' However, he also suggests that

spoilers can make use of both violent and non-violent strategies, something he refers to as ''strategies of violence'' and ''strategies of stealth,'' respectively (Stedman 1997:8). Indeed, his selected case studies exemplify the wide range of means, both violent and non-violent, that different spoiler types employ for the purpose of undermining the peace settlement at stake. Interestingly, in Stedman's subsequent work, he has revised his definition, now suggesting that spoilers are actors who are ''*willing* to use violence'' to undermine peace (Stedman 2008:147; emphasis added).

This inconsistency with regard to Stedman's definition has had critical implications for how other scholars and policymakers have interpreted and utilized the spoiler concept. Much of the subsequent literature on spoilers has focused exclusively on actors that use violence for the purpose of undermining peace efforts (for example, Ayres 2006; Johnston 2010; Blaydes and De Maio 2010). These studies link up with a more extensive research field that examines how violence influences peace processes more generally and in these discussions occasionally make reference to the spoiler concept (for example, Darby and Mac Ginty 2000; Darby 2001, 2006; Sisk 2006; Höglund 2008). Following in the footsteps of the so-called war on terrorism, we have also witnessed the emergence of a growing research field concerned with the study of terrorist violence that occurs in the context of an armed conflict or an ongoing peace process (for example, Kydd and Walter 2002; Bueno de Mesquita 2005; Kydd and Walter 2006; Boyle 2009; Braithwaite et al. 2010). These studies also make frequent use of the spoiler concept and partly overlap with the mainstream debate on spoilers, as they seek to understand both why some nonstate actors engage in violent conflict behavior and the conditions under which these attacks may influence the success or failure of a peace process. However, most of these studies are much too narrow in their scope to be relevant for the mainstream debate on spoilers in peace processes, as they are only concerned with violent conflict behavior (mostly against civilians), tend to focus only on nonstate actors, and primarily, although not exclusively, on organizations that are standing outside of the formal peace process.

Other scholars have explicitly argued that actors may use both violent and non-violent tactics in their efforts to spoil a peace settlement. In Pearlman's (2009:79) very definition of spoilers, she suggests that spoilers ''use violence or other means'' to undermine peace negotiations. Newman and Richmond (2006b:102), likewise, argue that spoilers use ''a variety of means'' to achieve their goals. Zahar (2008) stresses the need to recognize that parties that want to undermine a peace process have several different strategies at their disposal of which violence is merely one. The typical spoiler in fact, she argues, acts either by systematically refusing to negotiate at all or, alternatively, by entering into agreements only to later renege on its promises. For example, when parties drag their feet in regard to a disarmament and demobilization process, this should be labeled as an act of spoiling. Findley (2007:10) similarly emphasizes the fact that groups over time sometimes use non-violent strategies, such as a refusal to demobilize, in combination with violent strategies in order to influence peace processes.

Zahar (2006a), in particular, makes a critical contribution to the debate by explicitly developing Stedman's original differentiation between inside and outside spoilers and linking it to the range of means and methods—and the associated benefits, costs, and risks—available to different actors based on their position to the peace process. Violence, she argues, is but one of several different strategies that inside and outside parties may make use of both when they seek to undermine a peace agreement and when they seek inclusion or want to renegotiate the terms of the agreement (2006a:36–39). Hence, not all parties who want to, or can, use violence choose to actually do so. The decision is

generally constrained both by considerations about capability, the resources available to this end, and opportunity, the constraints on violence posed by, for example, the presence and commitment of peacekeepers and by the commitments of the actors to the peace process (2006a:41). This argument is a more developed and elaborated version of Stedman's original typology, where he suggests that inside spoilers are more likely to use strategies of stealth, whereas outside spoilers use violence (1997:8). Critically however, Stedman, like Zahar, argues that the motives for spoiling may vary considerably for both inside and outside actors depending on their interests and goals; some parties resort to spoiling as a strategic bargaining method to improve their benefits of the peace deal, whereas others want to derail the entire process (1997:8–9).

As noted above, many scholars have come to equate spoiling with violence. This is in spite of the fact that Stedman (1997) perceived of spoiling as a more broadly defined phenomenon, where different tactics of both violent and non-violent character could be employed by the parties to influence the direction as well as the outcome of a peace process. One possible source of confusion stems directly from Stedman's frequently quoted definition of spoilers, which he has subsequently revised. Another reason is probably that violence is often perceived of as the gravest and most serious threat to a peace process, with the potentially most damaging consequences. Several other studies in the field, however, have pointed to the importance of also paying attention to various non-violent means of spoiling. We too believe that the emphasis on both violent and non-violent means and methods is central to the very concept of spoiling and constitutes one of its most important contributions to the debate which clearly sets it apart from the other parallel research strands on violence and terrorism in peace processes. More research, however, ought to be devoted to the non-violent aspects of spoiling behavior, particularly by parties on the inside of the peace process, a phenomena we know only little about in spite of its widespread occurrence. For example, prior to the breakdown of the peace process in May 2000, when the RUF in Sierra Leone became engaged in violent spoiling behavior on a large scale, the group had engaged in non-violent spoiling for months by refusing to participate in the disarmament and demobilization process and by establishing road blocks that prevented peacekeepers from deploying in areas under their control, thereby stalling the peace process from moving forward (IRIN 28 February 2000; Söderberg Kovacs 2007). This also illustrates the need to better understand the relationship between various violent and non-violent methods, and under what conditions different parties resort to one tactic rather than the other, as well as the consequences of such choices.

The Explanandum: Spoiler Actions or Spoiled Peace Processes?

The discussion above is closely interrelated to another critical issue in the debate on spoilers, which we believe deserves to be highlighted. While some research focuses primarily on explaining *spoiler actions* and why they occur, other studies seek to explain the effect of such activities on the *outcome of peace processes*, primarily why some succeed and others fail. While both research questions are essential and highly relevant to the spoiler debate, the distinction between the two and the theoretical and empirical linkages between them are too often left vague or unexplained.

To Stedman (1997:6), the key purpose of his typology was to develop better strategies for managing spoilers in peace processes. The aim of his article was thus not primarily to explain why some actors engage in spoiling activities, but to find suitable ways of handling such actors once they had manifest themselves. Implicit in his writings is the notion that when spoilers succeed, peace is derailed, whereas successful spoiler management helps third parties keeping the

peace on track. Empirically, this may frequently be the case, yet at the same time, it is an assumption that is essentially left unexplained. Many subsequent writers on the topic, particularly those who are concerned with explaining the emergence of violent spoiler behavior, unintentionally tend to do the same. Blaydes and De Maio (2010), for example, focus on explaining the emergence of insurgent violence in the conflicts in Mali, the Western Sahara, and Sudan, indicating that such violence is directly linked to the outcome of the peace process. However, they do not explicitly spell out the theoretical linkage between the presence or absence of spoiler violence and the success versus failure of a peace process and it remains unclear whether spoiler violence should be considered an explanatory variable for failed peace processes or an indicator of the same, or perhaps both (2010:7). Johnston (2010), similarly, in his study of spoiler violence in Sudan, focuses on explaining the emergence of spoiler violence, but indirectly draws conclusions regarding the success and failure of the peace process. He presumes that when actors have engaged in spoiler violence, this serves to undermine peace and stability as well as the future prospects of peacebuilding in that country. Empirically, he may very well be correct, yet it remains unclear exactly how. Both these studies make excellent contributions to the spoiler debate and have developed our knowledge of the conditions under which parties resort to violent spoiling tactics. However, in both cases, the relationship between the spoiler violence that is at the focus of their attention and the overall outcome in question is not made clear. Along similar lines, Pearlman (2009), in her study of Palestinian intraparty politics, sets out to explore why some groups engage in ''negotiating'' versus ''spoiling'' and posits that groups can act either as peacemakers or as peacebreakers. However, these terms appear to primarily pertain to certain behavioral traits, although the concepts as such allude to the outcome of actions, and it remains unclear how the negotiating and spoiling relates to the overall success or failure of the peace process in question. Hence, with some notable exceptions (Findley 2007:24), few studies so far have made a clear distinction between these two separate steps in the process.

Greenhill and Major also critique Stedman's spoiler model for its definitional ambiguities in this respect, but argue on the contrary that outcomes rather than actions should define spoiler behavior; ''a group does not 'become' a spoiler when it acts in ways that are contrary to the peace process—which is dictated by group behavior—but rather when the outcome of their action spoils the process—which depends equally on the group in question and the other parties to the peace agreement'' (2007:10). While bringing home the important point that spoiler attempts may not necessarily succeed in spoiling the process, especially if third parties can co-opt or suppress the spoiler in question, they also conclude that spoiler behavior is nothing else than the continuation of warfare by groups that retain ''the capacity to unilaterally achieve a better deal than the one on the table'' (2007:12). In doing so, they fail to consider one of the key points with Stedman's conceptual framework, namely that actors do not engage in spoiling not only because they can, but also because they want to. Importantly, they want different things. Some may not want to derail the peace process at all, but may instead seek to influence the process in their favor, for example, by getting a seat at the negotiation table. As noted previously, spoilers have different aims and may use violence either for the purpose of undermining the peace accord or for seeking to be included in the same (Zahar 2006a:38). Similarly, Newman and Richmond (2006b:108) propose that spoiler behavior might not always be aimed at destroying the peace process. In fact, they argue, most groups that seek to spoil a peace process do so because they see the peace process as ''undermining their rights, privileges, or access to resources, whether physical, strategic, or political.'' It is therefore important to note the difference between the use of spoiling to shape a negotiation process, and spoiling to destroy it.

A related question of relevance concerns *when* during a peace process it is meaningful to talk about spoilers at all. Stedman originally argued that spoilers can only exist when there is a peace to spoil, either in the form of a signed peace agreement or when ''at least two warring parties have committed themselves publicly to a pact'' (1997:7). In subsequent works, he appears to have narrowed his position on this issue even further by underlining that ''in the absence of an agreement, the concept of spoiler should not apply'' (2002:13). Many subsequent studies on spoilers, however, have adopted a somewhat wider approach, including peace negotiations without such explicit commitments or the context of a peace process more generally (Aggestam 2006; Höglund and Zartman 2006; Menkhaus 2006; Greenhill and Major 2007; Shedd 2008; Blaydes and De Maio 2010). Newman and Richmond (2006b:102) place themselves somewhere in the middle, suggesting that the concept should apply to situations ''where some form of peace process is underway and where at least one of the parties to the conflict is either engaged in, or committed to, a peace process.''

Based on the debate above, we suggest that it is generally fruitful to analytically separate the actions—spoiler behavior—from the effect such activities may have on the outcome in question—notably the success or failure of a peace process. This distinction has not always been clear in previous research, nor has the causal linkage between actions and outcomes always been sufficiently spelled out and explored. One possible reason may stem from the fact that the great majority of studies on spoilers have focused on explaining violent spoiler behavior, and in these studies, it is sometimes a little unclear whether the violence should be seen as the cause of the breakdown of the peace process, an indicator of the same, or its consequence. Hence, although both research questions—why spoilers emerge and why spoiling sometimes succeeds in derailing the peace efforts—are highly relevant and equally important, we believe our accumulation of research on spoilers in peace processes would benefit from greater conceptual clarity with regard to this issue. In addition, policymaking in this area is likely to benefit from a more developed understanding of the various causal mechanisms involved in these processes.

The discussion has also highlighted that there are several other outcomes or effects of spoiler activities that are empirically possible and relevant in addition to the relatively simplified dichotomy of successful versus failed peace processes. So far these have not yet been sufficiently explored theoretically and ought to deserve more attention in future research. In line with Stedman (1997) and others, we agree that parties differ from each other in terms of their motives for spoiling. Actors sometimes engage in spoiling—violent or non-violent—to achieve goals that fall short of the complete breakdown of the peace process, for getting access to the negotiation table and the prospects of the peace dividends. Spoiling is thus part of the bargaining process, yet all parties have different goals in mind, make different calculations of costs and risks of various methods of achieving those goals, and not all attempt to maximize their own potential gains.

We also call attention to Stedman's (1997, 2008) emphasis that the concept of spoilers preferably should be used in connection with an existing peace agreement or when actors have publicly committed to a pact, and not peace processes more generally. We believe that a more narrow approach is analytically more useful, as it focuses on the specific challenges that arise when all, or a few, actors have committed themselves to peace. In our view, such an approach also has a greater potential to alleviate some of the normative implications that are associated with the term spoilers, as it ties the concept closer to the activities of the actors that are attempting to spoil a particular peace agreement, and make it easier to avoid a more subjective labeling of spoilers as intrinsically bad actors under any circumstances. While such a view still rests on a normative foundation by considering a peace agreement as something inherently desirable, the label of

spoiler is equally applicable to any armed actor—whether it is the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa or the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia—who engages in behavior that risks undermining a specific peace accord.

Explaining the Emergence of Spoilers

One of the issues that has generated the most controversy in the spoiler debate concerns the key question why we see the emergence of spoilers in a given peace process. Two issues in particular have divided the research community. First, are the causes of spoiling to be found primarily in the different types of actors involved, that is, in their type of leadership, political aims, and ideologies, or in the strategic environment in which these actors operate, in other words, in the kind of relative capabilities and opportunities that the peace process present these parties with? Second, and tied to the question above, is each actor's decision either to spoil or to comply with the peace process primarily caused by intraparty or interparty considerations?

Explanans: Actor Type or Structural Environment?

In his original spoiler article, Stedman (1997) presents a typology of various spoilers and suggests a range of strategies that third parties involved in internationally supervised peace processes should make use of to manage different kinds of spoilers and keep the peace on track. In his opinion, a correct diagnosis of spoiler type is necessary for successful spoiler management. Central to Stedman's argumentation is the notion that parties differ in their pursuit of power and in their commitment to reach those goals. His typology is essentially based on the different characters and motives of the former warring parties, suggesting that some spoilers have limited aims, whereas others pursue total power. In addition, some make their decisions based on a calculation of the risks and costs involved, whereas others hold unalterable preferences (1997:11). In later works, Stedman has re-emphasized this point, suggesting that it is only through leadership change that a total spoiler may change, given that the locus of the spoiler problem is at the leadership level within the group (2002:14).

Subsequent studies have pointed out a number of weaknesses and limitations with his typology and its underlying assumptions. One chief concern has been the strong reliance that it places on explanatory factors that are endogenous to the parties no matter the contextual circumstances of the peace process, making it difficult to predict spoiler activities before they have occurred (Zahar 2008). In addition, it fails to adequately explain why groups frequently change their behavior, from compliance to spoiling and vice versa, within a given peace process or even with respect to a specific peace accord (Darby 2001; Zahar 2008). In contrast to Stedman, Greenhill and Major (2007:8) place emphasis on the structural environment of the peace process, arguing that the key determinants for why some groups are more likely than others to engage in spoiler behavior are the relative power balance of the parties and the prevailing opportunity structures. According to their line of reasoning, all actors are potential spoilers in the making, who given the necessary capacity and the opportunity would attempt to spoil the process if they believed that this would further their interests. In their view, it is therefore not useful to talk about different spoiler types, as the opportunity structures of the parties change over time, and that each actor continuously calculates the expected utility—the risks and costs—of spoiling. Consequently, ''every real or potential spoiler will be as greedy as he thinks he can afford to be'' (Greenhill and Major 2007:11). Hence, they propose that peacemakers, rather than concentrating their efforts on identifying and diagnosing the various spoiler types they are facing, should concentrate their efforts on influencing the

structural conditions of the peace process in such a way as to prevent the emergence of spoilers (see also Findley 2007:218).

Zahar (2008:159–163), likewise, argues that Stedman's typology fails to account for the fact that the parties' tactics and objectives are likely to change in the course of a peace process in reaction to considerations of costs and benefits. Importantly, she also recognizes that these are likely to be different for each group depending on whether it is on the inside or outside of the peace process. Building on this notion, Zahar presents us with a more differentiated and nuanced picture of the costs associated with spoiling, suggesting that they are of essentially two different types: costs associated with the resumption of fighting, such as international audience costs and military costs, and costs associated with the loss of peace dividends, such as the loss of political influence, power, and access to resources (2008:163–166). In another piece, Zahar (2006a) develops her theoretical framework by specifying the particular factors that make up the structural conditions that shape each spoiler's assessment of its capabilities and opportunities. In terms of capabilities—or the available resources for spoiling—she highlights two factors in particular, access to valuable tradable commodities and foreign patrons. In terms of opportunity—or the barriers that prevent violence or make it a costly option for the party to pursue—she underlines the importance of the presence and commitment of an international peacekeeping force and a party's loyalty and vested interest in the peace process (Zahar 2006a:41–46; see also Zahar 2006b).

Blaydes and De Maio (2010) point to the importance of another structural factor, which they argue is central in explaining why some peace processes are more likely to see spoiler violence than others. They suggest that when the peace negotiations in question are highly exclusive in nature, they are more likely to see violent attacks from excluded parties who fear to lose out from the prospects of peace dividends. Critically, however, Blaydes and De Maio (2010:9) argue that this structural condition is only likely to be a partial explanation for the occurrence of spoiler violence, pointing also to the relevance of the nature of the rebel organization in question. More precisely, in those instances where ''rebel groups themselves are inclusive and characterized by internally democratic institutions, this reduces the incentives for spoiler violence'' (2010:23). Their theoretical argument thus falls back on an explanation that is based on both the characteristics of the group and the structural conditions of the peace process.

Johnston (2007, 2010) proposes an alternative structural explanation for the emergence of spoiler violence by nonstate actors, which instead focuses on the strategies of the government party to an armed conflict. He argues that governments sometimes have strategic incentives to make use of a divide-and-rule strategy during a peace process, attempting to induce certain groups or factions (often the so-called moderates) to strike a separate and limited peace deal, which leaves the remaining groups or factions divided and weak. By doing so, governments can both minimize the risk of having to make substantial and costly political concessions at the negotiation table with a united opposition and minimize the financial and military costs associated with a counterinsurgency operation. In addition, in posing as a partial peacemaker, they can avoid potentially damaging critique from the international community while retaining both the political upper hand and the possibility to defeat or marginalize the non-signatory factions, who are now considered spoilers.

Notably, Stedman has in subsequent writings acknowledged some of these suggestions for refinements of his original thesis, agreeing that the structural conditions of the peace process—which may work as incentives or disincentives for spoiling—should be given more prominence. In particular, he calls attention to two such factors that he suggests are important, namely easy access to lootable goods and support from neighboring countries. In such circumstances, spoilers

are both more likely to emerge and more likely to pose a greater threat to peace, Stedman argues (2002:14; 2008:153).

The insights produced by the discussion on the emergence of spoilers have been critical for our understanding of how the structural conditions of the peace process shape the behavior of the key actors toward the peace process, beyond their goals, ideologies, or leadership qualities. In our opinion, however, Greenhill and Major (2007), key proponents of the structural argument, both underestimate powerful internal differences between various armed groups and simplify the range of strategic considerations that actors take into account beyond their relative power resources at hand and the risks and costs associated with spoiling in that particular peace process. For example, on the basis of structure alone, we cannot explain why resourceful and strong parties sometimes do sign and stick to peace agreements even when they could probably gain more by spoiling. In the view of Greenhill and Major (2007:9, footnote 7), all parties adjust their goals in relation to their relative power position and are therefore, by definition, revisionists. We take issue with this point, as we believe that groups do differ in this respect. Some parties seek limited and specific political goals and are not primarily interested in maximizing their power. There are several examples of strong rebel groups that have entered into peace agreement that do not satisfy all their goals, yet they have preferred an imperfect peace over continued armed conflict. The Farabundo Marti Liberación National (FMLN) in El Salvador is a case in point, the ANC in South Africa another. In addition, we have witnessed a number of governments that enter into peace agreements with significantly weaker rebel groups or factions. For example, in 2000 the government in Burundi signed a peace accord with the former warring factions the National Liberation Front (Frolina), the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (Palipehutu), and the National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD) that excluded the two stronger rebel groups. The reason for them to do so may be either related to some characteristic of the government, its leadership, goals, or interests, or due to strategic incentives to opt for peace.

Hence, like some other writers in the field, we too believe that both the character of the group itself and the structural environment of the peace process are likely to be of importance for the emergence of spoilers. A more complex model that takes into consideration intent, capability, and opportunity, and specifies the contextual meaning of such terms depending on both position (inside or outside) and type (government or nonstate actor), is therefore likely to provide for a more powerful explanation for the emergence of spoiler activities.

Locus of the Explanans: Interparty Dynamics or Intraparty Dynamics?

Stedman (1997:11–12) originally suggested that the locus of the spoiler problem may be either with the leadership of the group or among a group of hardliners within the party who do not have the support of its leaders or even the majority of the group's followers. This argument implies that parties in civil war peace processes are not homogenous actors, but consist of a merger of different individuals, factions, and groups with different interests and goals, and that the internal political dynamics of these parties is likely to have an impact on the group's decision to either spoil or remain committed to a particular peace agreement.

Most subsequent writers within the mainstream literature on spoilers have, however, primarily concerned themselves with the relationship between the different parties to the peace process for the purpose of explaining spoiler behavior, although some do also refer to the importance of intraparty dynamics (for example, Zahar 2006a,b, 2008; Findley 2007; Greenhill and Major 2007). Perhaps a contributing reason for the relatively limited attention paid to the

intraparty dimension of spoiling in current research is the predominant focus on structure-oriented explanations in opposition to Stedman's actor-oriented framework, as discussed previously.

Having said that, there are a few studies in the research field that in different ways do bring attention to the intraparty dynamics of the warring parties and how it may influence spoiler behavior. For example, Pearlman (2009), based on a study of Palestinian politics with regard to the peace process with Israel, suggests that parties do not only act as peacemakers or spoilers to achieve their objectives vis-à-vis their opponent—those on the other side of the negotiating table—but also toward their internal constituencies. According to her, each group's decision to either participate in negotiations or spoil the same is not only driven by concerns regarding the actual content of a proposed peace settlement, but also by concerns regarding the internal power balance within their community. This is particularly likely to be the case for nonstate actors that are made up of a whole range of different groups, organizations, or factions competing for power and lack an institutionalized system of legitimate representation. Leaders of dominant groups are more likely to opt for negotiations as it holds the potential for external recognition, material resources, and increased relative power over competing groups, while leaders of subordinated groups are less likely to benefit from the peace dividends and therefore more likely to act as a spoiler (2009:79–84). Atlas and Licklider (1999), to use an example from the somewhat broader research field on the durability of peace after civil wars, also point to the relevance of intraparty factors in their study of four negotiated settlements, arguing that armed violence often recurs due to a ''*breakdown in relations among former allies, not former foes*'' (1999:36, italics in original). This, they argue, is because not all factions within a party will benefit equally from the peace deal, and in the post-war order these tensions will continue to mount until the former allies engage in violence, or those in favor of the deal change their policy (1999:37).

It should be noted, however, that unlike Stedman (1997), many studies in the field that do concern themselves with the relevance of intraparty politics are not primarily referring to the internal dynamics within one armed group as such, but rather to the internal politics of that ''side'' in the armed conflict, exemplified by situations where there are multiple actors present in a single community united around a particular conflict identity, such as in the case of Palestine, Lebanon, or South Africa. While this perspective is clearly relevant and important, there is also another aspect of intraparty politics, which concerns the dynamics between different individuals and factions within a single group. In the more general research debate on violence and peace processes, however, there are numerous studies that do address this aspect of intraparty dynamics and the effects on the behavior of the parties to the peace process (for example, Stedman 1991; Ohlson 1998; Darby and Mac Ginty 2000; Hartzell and Hoddie 2007; Höglund 2008). Although these studies only occasionally make reference to the spoiler concept, there are clear overlaps in terms of subject matter, and findings from this field ought to be directly relevant to the spoiler debate.

Hence, to sum up, while some of the existing works in the field, particularly those within the somewhat larger research field on violence in peace processes more generally, do address the issue of intraparty dynamics, there are altogether few studies in the mainstream debate on spoilers in peace processes that have explicitly built on and attempted to develop Stedman's notion that intraparty dynamics are likely to be an equally relevant explanatory factor for the emergence of spoiler violence as the interparty dynamics at work. This is in spite of the fact that there are a plentitude of empirical examples that speak to the relevance of paying closer attention to these factors. For example, there is no doubt that the growing rift, and ensuing split, between rebel leader Foday Sankoh and

his second in command, Sam Bockarie, in the RUF in Sierra Leone had a significant impact on the behavior of the party following their signing of the peace accord in Lomé in July 1999 (Söderberg Kovacs 2007). Similarly, the intraparty divisions within the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliations and Democracy (LURD) in Liberia following the signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Accord could possibly have undermined the peace process, had it not been for the proactive approach of the concerned third-party actors involved. The mounting divergence of opinion with the leadership of the Khmer Rouge following the group's participation in the 1991 Paris peace agreement in Cambodia is another illustrative example of a situation where the intraparty dynamics within a single party played an important role for that group's eventual decision to attempt to spoil the agreement (Söderberg Kovacs 2007).

All these examples serve to underline the need for more research on these issues within the framework of the spoiler concept. Like most other social phenomena, a particular group's decision to engage in spoiler activities is likely to be caused by a multitude of different factors at work, located at different level of analysis (Levy 2001). We should therefore not only look at these factors in isolation, but also ask questions pertaining to the relationship between the intraparty dynamics at work and the relationship between the different parties to the peace process, in order to arrive at a more comprehensive explanation for why some groups engage in spoiling behavior while others do not.

Spoiler Management

The fundamental purpose of Stedman's (1997) study was to arrive at a set of spoiler management strategies that international peace custodians could make use of in order to prevent spoilers from undermining negotiated peace agreements. The success of such strategies, however, is contingent on a correct diagnostic of the spoiler in question, Stedman argued, underlining the need for a prior understanding of different spoiler types. Only in light of such knowledge, we can arrive at a set of appropriate strategies for mixing different spoiler types with different third-party measures. While Stedman's spoiler typology has generated a rich literature on how to define spoilers and why spoilers emerge, his discussion of management strategies has received much less direct attention in the ensuing debate. Yet indirectly, by proposing other approaches to the phenomena of both identifying and explaining spoiler emergence, subsequent studies have also arrived at rather different recommendations for how policymakers should address spoiler problems in contemporary peace processes. In particular, the debate has generated a discussion on the usefulness of profiling different spoiler types versus seeking to change the decision-making calculus of any active or potential spoiler by attempting to manipulate the strategic environment of the peace process.

Third-Party Strategies: Spoiler Prevention or Spoiler Management?

According to Stedman (1997), international third parties engaged in peace processes have generally pursued three different strategies for managing spoilers. The first strategy, ''inducement,'' implies a strategy that meets the spoiler's demands and gives it what it wants, be it security, recognition, or other benefits. The second strategy, ''socialization,'' implies a strategy that seeks to change the behavior of the spoiler by making it adhere to a set of established norms. For this purpose, third parties make use of sticks and carrots to reward and punish the spoiler and actively seek to persuade and convince the group to keep within the normative framework. The third strategy, ''coercion,'' implies the use of threat or force to deter or alter spoiler behavior or reduce the capacity of the

spoiler to destroy the peace process. Such coercive approaches range from coercive diplomacy to the use of force to defeat the spoiler. The two most common versions are, according to Stedman, the so-called departing train strategy, stating that the peace process will move on regardless of whether the spoiler decides to be on board or not, and the withdrawal strategy, threatening with international withdrawal from the peace process (1997:12–14). Which strategy that is the most appropriate in each case depends on the type of spoiler. According to Stedman (1997:14–16), total spoilers require a coercive strategy. Two approaches in particular are likely to be successful, the use of force to defeat the spoiler or the departing train strategy. A limited spoiler, on the other hand, can be induced into the process if its demands are deemed acceptable to the other parties. When they are not, another strategy such as socialization or the use of force is necessary. The greedy spoiler, for its part, requires a long-term strategy of socialization and the establishment of clear limits to acceptable demands and behavior. The use of coercive sticks may be necessary to back up the strategy (1997:14–16).

In stark opposition, Greenhill and Major (2007) argue that peacemakers should not concern themselves with the ''perils of profiling'' different spoiler types, an approach they deem ''at best overstated and at worst may even be counterproductive'' (2007:39). Third parties should rather attempt ''changing the decision calculus of active or potential spoilers by identifying (dis) incentives that can be put in place to discourage or forestall their emergence and the steps that can be taken to change the potential payoffs associated with cooperation versus confrontation'' (2007:8). Primarily, in their view, spoiler management is a matter of power and leverage, whether the strategy is to co-opt or coerce the spoilers into compliance. Third parties should in fact refrain from intervening at all in situations where the relative power balance between a spoiler and the outside party is in favor of the former, or when one party to the conflict is considerably stronger than the other(s). Unlike Stedman (1997), who proposes that the use of force is only occasionally an advisable or effective strategy against spoilers, Greenhill and Major (2007:39) argue that the goal should always be to construct ''a coalition of forces that can punish/defeat spoilers who try to use violence.''

This view is generally echoed in the vast literature that deals with third-party strategies in peace processes more broadly, and where occasionally the issue of spoiler management in relation to peacekeeping operations is explicitly addressed. According to Doyle and Sambanis (2006:28–29), the establishment of peace is contingent on the ''elimination, management, or control of 'spoilers' or war entrepreneurs.'' If spoilers are present, peacekeepers need to exercise some degree of enforcement in order to keep the peace on track. They need to be able to distinguish between ''moderates'' (limited spoilers and greedy opportunists) and ''extremists'' (total spoilers) who are unwaveringly opposed to the peace settlement under all circumstances. Effective third-party strategies must ''combine consent from those willing to coordinate and cooperate with coercive carrots and sticks directed at those who are not'' (2006:58). Importantly, in order to mange spoilers effectively, peacekeepers should avoid being viewed as weak or inconsistent and should already early in the peace process seek to raise the costs for actors who refuse to cooperate through the selective use of force (2006:58–59; see also Fortna 2008). Werner and Yuen (2005) appear to be one of few studies in this field of research that explicitly acknowledge the potential drawbacks associated with the use of force against spoilers, suggesting that it may also run the risk of radicalizing the moderates.

Zahar (2006b), while generally supporting the premise that strategic environment matters more than actor types, and that one key task for third parties is the manipulation of the strategic incentives that influence the parties' cost–benefit analyses, arrives at somewhat different conclusions. Because parties on the inside of the peace process are less likely to attempt to spoil the peace process if they

have a genuine and vested interest in its continuation beyond its immediate gains, third parties should attempt to ''steer peace in such a way as to consolidate insider loyalty to the process'' (2006b:41). However, she notes, most contemporary peace efforts are characterized by a short-term perspective that only focuses on the parties' compliance to the letter of the peace agreement or, at best, the establishment of institution-building processes that may serve as a common forum for conflict resolution—such as power-sharing or elections—with important implications for the type of loyalty that the parties are likely to develop toward the peace process. In order to encourage the development of ''genuine'' rather than ''instrumental'' or ''process-based loyalty,'' third parties should instead emphasize the need for encouraging a more meaningful long-term relationship between antagonists, through an approach that ''refuses to eschew the difficult issues of truth, reconciliation, justice, and accountability'' (Zahar 2006b:47; see also Zahar 2010).

Contrary to Greenhill and Major (2007), Zahar (2006b:44) also stresses that the current trend of militarized peace processes and the tendency among international policymakers to show resolve in order to steer peace implementation in their desired direction raise difficult questions about local versus international ownership in peace processes. Newman and Richmond (2006a), similarly, argue that peace processes, to the highest extent possible, should be ''non-zero-sum, consensual, locally owned, and internationally and regionally supported'' (2006a:15–16). They also emphasize that spoiling should be viewed an integral, indeed normal, part of a peace process, suggesting that policymakers need to carefully consider the difference between spoiling—non-violent as well as violent—intended for the purpose of shaping or influencing the peace process and spoiling intended for destroying the same (2006a:18).

Just like Zahar (2006b, 2010), however, Newman and Richmond (2006a) focus primarily on how third parties can prevent spoilers from emerging in the first place and do not give any specific or concrete advice as to how manifest spoilers ought to be managed once they have occurred. The policy advice emanating from Blaydes and De Maio (2010), and Shedd (2008) suggests much along the same lines, that peacemakers should strive to create inclusive peace processes in order to reduce the incentives for spoiler violence in the first place. Pearlman (2009:106), for her part, also emphasizes the need for external peacemakers to take important steps to reconcile internal rifts and tensions within the negotiating parties in order to avoid the emergence of spoilers against the peace process. Findley (2007) is one of few studies in the mainstream spoiler debate that have explicitly examined the emergence and effect of spoilers and the role played by third parties in managing such spoilers in various stages of the peace process. He finds that third parties generally succeed in bringing the parties to the negotiation table and successfully implement the agreement, but are less effective in managing spoilers during the negotiations. But he does not go into depth in discussing which specific strategies third parties ought to make use of for the purpose of managing different spoilers under different circumstances.

In conclusion, one key issue of contention in the debate on spoiler management has concerned the relative usefulness of identifying and profiling spoiler types versus trying to affect the structural conditions of the peace process in such a way as to create disincentives for spoiler behavior. While this debate partly does reflect genuine differences of opinion in regard to what tasks local and international peacemakers ought to prioritize in order to keep the peace on track, we also believe that the discussion is indicative of a lack of clarity with regard to distinguishing between the need to prevent potential spoilers from emerging in the first place and the need to address and manage already manifest spoilers. In our view, both measures are equally important and do not need not to be mutually exclusive. In reality, most third parties frequently make use of both preventive

measures and engage in management strategies. To illustrate, in Liberia, following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2003, the United Nations (UN) and other concerned third-party actors engaged in preventive measures by, for example, sending a clear message to the warring factions that violations of the accord would not be tolerated. Likewise, when intraparty divisions within the rebel group LURD surfaced, they used diplomacy to prevent these frictions from jeopardizing the process. However, when violent riots later broke out with the potential to wreck the entire agreement—although it was unclear at the time exactly who was behind the violence—the UN sought to manage the violence through the use of military force and the display of both power and resolve (IRIN 6 September 2003; United Nations Security Council 2004; Nilsson and Söderberg Kovacs 2005).

However, for analytical purposes, it may be useful to try to distinguish between the two, and examine their various potential for success separately. In particular, much more research is needed in terms of identifying various strategies for managing already manifest spoilers under different circumstances, a topic that has advanced surprisingly little since Stedman's (1997) original article. Moreover, the debate has revealed a tendency in the literature, perhaps paralleled with a trend in practice, to equate spoiler prevention with the display of power, leverage, and a general readiness to use force by the concerned peace custodians, especially in intentional peacekeeping operations. Along the lines of Stedman (1997) and Zahar (2006b), we believe that the threat and use of force is only occasionally a viable strategy for both preventing and managing spoilers. In some circumstances, a more viable strategy might be to consolidate the support of the signatories to the peace deal or ensure that the process enjoys widespread legitimacy among the population concerned. For example, in the peace process in Mali, efforts were made to include a wider spectra of society by arranging intercommunity meetings, which served to enhance ownership of the peace process (McKeon 2005:572; Blaydes and De Maio 2010). Regardless, there is clearly a need for more empirically grounded research on the effectiveness of various third-party strategies for both spoiler prevention and spoiler management.

Moving Forward in the Spoiler Debate

This article revisits a burgeoning research field, and aims to contribute to the same by offering greater conceptual clarity in regard to a number of issues that remain at the core of the spoiler debate. This is a topic that is not only of academic interest but also of great political and practical relevance as the potential threat that spoilers pose to a peace process is an issue that policymakers continue to struggle with on an almost daily basis in various conflict countries around the world. As the spoiler concept has gained significant ground both in the academic literature and in the international policymaking community over the last decade, there can be no doubt as to the relevance of addressing this topic as a separate field of research and putting it under close scrutiny. The most pertinent question concerns the very usefulness of the spoiler concept itself. As noted, it is a concept with strong normative underpinnings and beset with definitional ambiguities. This begs the question whether the use of the concept distorts more than it clarifies? Would we perhaps be better off not using it at all?

In our opinion, there are at least two good reasons against such a conclusion. First, precisely because the concept is so commonly used and referred to in academia as well as in critical policy circles, we believe that it is better to engage in the debate and contribute to it by bringing attention to its shortcomings and limitations and attempting to address them, than to ignore the debate altogether. Second, the field of peace and conflict research is practically littered with semantic minefields, considering, for example, the frequent use of the

terms ''rebel group,'' ''failed state,'' or even ''peace.'' We suggest that as long as each term is clearly defined and its normative implications are made aware, such concepts can still prove analytically useful. In the case of the spoiler concept, we believe that the normative bias associated with the concept only serves to further emphasize the need for greater conceptual clarity and the development of more unambiguous theoretical scope conditions. In addition, the concept of spoiler very aptly captures a specific empirical phenomenon that prior to Stedman's pioneering study had not been adequately paid attention to and understood. His typology and conceptual framework has subsequently been the cause of a lively debate, which has significantly advanced our understanding of the topic and improved our analytical tools for studying it. However, the debate has also revealed some disagreements regarding the very definition of what spoilers are, what they do, why they emerge, and how they should be addressed within the framework of a peace process.

The purpose of this article has been to highlight some of the critical issues of contention. Based on our analysis of the debate, we offer below some suggestions toward the development of a conceptual framework for the study of spoilers in peace processes which may hopefully serve to bring together some of the key contributions from the debate so far while simultaneously offering a way forward (see Figure 1). For this purpose, we suggest that spoilers are key individuals and parties to the armed conflict who use violence or other means to shape or destroy the peace process and in doing so jeopardize the peace efforts. Such groups can be found on the inside or the outside of the peace process and be either nonstate actors or state-related actors. In line with Stedman, we believe that it is critical to view spoilers and spoiling behavior in relation to a specific peace agreement or a publicly committed pact. Building on our review of previous research, we have identified five issues in particular, which we deem are in need of further clarification so as to improve our understanding of the spoiler concept and its empirical applicability in future research.

First, we believe that it is analytically useful to distinguish between *potential spoilers* and *manifest spoilers*. In terms of identifying potential spoilers to a peace process, we suggest that most attention should be paid to the former warring parties—with close scrutiny to the intraparty dynamics of such actors—as well as any splinter groups or new armed groups that may have emerged. These groups may be signatories or non-signatories to the peace agreement and hence either on the inside or on the outside of the official peace forum. We do not, however, believe that it is fruitful to extend the definition of spoilers to a wider range of actors, including the potentially negative effects on the peace process as a result of any activities on behalf of third parties, diaspora groups, or multinational corporations. If almost any actor at any time or under any circumstances can be considered a spoiler, it risks undermining the added value of using the concept. We also risk ending up with a debate that is too disparate to be able to accumulate any meaningful research results. With regard to manifest spoilers, we identify

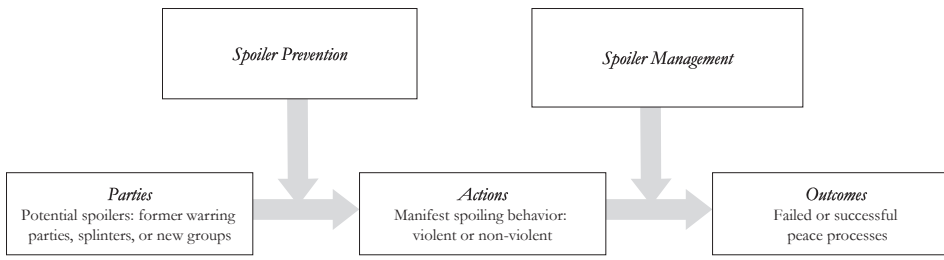

Fig 1. Conceptual Framework on Spoilers

those as the key individuals and parties who have already used violence or other means that risk undermining the peace efforts. Thus, in our view, it is the empirically observable actions of the relevant parties that should determine whether they are to be considered manifest spoilers or not, not their private intentions or motivations alone. This does not by any means suggest that this is a simple task to do in reality, when faced with a multitude of different signals, impressions, and opinions. This is just to suggest that there are analytical benefits to be made by clearly distinguishing between the notion of potential and manifest spoilers, an issue that appears to have caused some unnecessary polemic in the debate.

Second, and related to this issue, we think that one of the key merits of the spoiler concept is the acknowledgment that both *violent* and *non-violent* behavior by the parties can have a potentially destructive effect on the outcome of a peace process. Although it makes sense that previous research has focused more closely on incidents of violence given the obvious and immediate threat that it constitutes to a fragile peace agreement, it is also important to examine non-violent spoiler actions, as both types of behavior may serve to undermine or jeopardize the peace, albeit in diverse ways and through different causal mechanisms. Yet, this review of the research field on spoilers has clearly showed that we need to learn more about various kinds of non-violent spoiler behavior and the many shapes and forms that such activities may take, not least by inside parties to the peace process.

Third, we suggest the need to distinguish between *actions* and *outcomes* in our research, that is, whether we attempt to explain spoiler behavior or its many and diverse effects on peace processes or other conceivable outcomes. While some studies primarily focus on explaining the emergence of spoilers and why some parties resort to violence to undermine the peace efforts, violent spoiling behavior should not be equated with failed peace processes. The many causal pathways, and the various causal mechanisms that link them together, ought to be made much more transparent in our analyses. Along the lines of some previous authors on the topic, we also want to bring attention to the fact that there exist many empirically relevant outcomes besides the dichotomy of successful versus failed peace processes. For example, actors sometimes strive to obtain other goals than to wreck the entire peace agreement, such as their inclusion into the peace process and the possibility to share the prospects of peace dividends. Future research should preferably analyze how spoiling affects a much wider range of conceivable outcomes within the framework of an ongoing peace process.

Finally, we think it is useful to distinguish between the *prevention* of spoilers and the *management* of spoilers. This review of the debate has shown that previous spoiler literature has not always made a clear enough distinction between third-party strategies aiming to prevent potential spoilers from emerging, and the management of manifest spoilers that already has engaged in spoiling behavior. Not only has this generated unnecessary polemic in the ensuing debate, we believe it may also have contributed to the lack of balance in the literature, where much more attention has been paid to the issue of spoiler prevention at the expense of spoiler management. While Stedman's (1997) article primarily focused on the latter, subsequent literature has mostly been preoccupied with suggesting various ways third-party actors may prevent parties from acting as spoilers in the first place. While both tasks are clearly relevant and important, we call attention to the need for more research on third-party strategies for managing different kinds of spoilers who use various tactics for different purposes. In particular, one key task for future research should be the development of viable strategies for spoiler management beyond the resort to force and other violent tactics.

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