Since the end of the Cold War international involvement in war and peace has involved a myriad of organisations. These peace operations have engaged in activities that attempt to assist states in the transition from war to peace, activities like the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants (DDR), the promotion and running of elections, providing monitoring and training in human rights, market liberalisation, reconstruction of infrastructure, and efforts to reconcile warring parties. These actions are collectively known as ‘peacebuilding’. This chapter is concerned with why peacebuilding has become a policy response to the non-violent management of conflict, and where economic development lies within this approach. The conceptualisation and theorisation of peacebuilding in this chapter helps explain the approach taken by the international community to the 2002 Sri Lankan peace process, and explains why it resulted in the bloody finale of 2009.

Defining peacebuilding

What is peace? This question is an important start in how we understand peacebuilding. During war, peace may come through the eradication of an adversary, a ‘victor’s peace’. Peace may only come for some through equal rights and security. Another common conceptualisation of peace seeks a more spiritual ideal, where individuals or groups are at ease with themselves and others. The dictionary defines peace as ‘an absence of war’, yet a state without war can still have oppression, discrimination, civil unrest and the threat of more widespread violence. Therefore the absence of war does not necessarily mean that there is peace. Johan Galtung provides a helpful differentiation of peace between
‘negative’ and ‘positive’ peace. He describes an absence of war or direct violence as ‘negative’ peace, whereas during ‘positive’ peace, the ‘structures’ and ‘culture’ that support oppression and increase the likelihood of violent behaviour are overcome.

The meaning of peace, and its attainment has been a consideration of philosophers from the classical period right up to the present day, from Plato to Foucault. These ‘structures’ and ‘cultures’, referred to by Galtung, have featured in the debates about the nature of peace. Oliver Richmond summarises these debates as having ‘spanned the extremes of war as natural, as pragmatic, or as evil, to peace as idealist and utopian, as engineered, to be attained through pacifism or pacifism, or as unattainable, through limited outcome’.

When we build peace, which peace do we seek? Whatever the means, the kind of peace that we would strive for is one beyond the mere absence of war, or ‘negative’ peace toward a ‘positive’ peace. In the same way, when trying to determine what peacebuilding is, the discussion invariably focuses on what kind of structures and relationships lend themselves to a peaceful society beyond the mere absence of war. The following discussion will look at the definitions of peacebuilding and try to determine the kind of peace that is being attempted in the peacebuilding experiment, it will look at the dominant theories that underpin peacebuilding as it evolved during the twentieth century up to the present.

In terms of a formal definition, peacebuilding, is more ‘described than defined’ and the only agreement on the subject is that it is not clearly defined. As Charles Call and Susan Cook note ‘Widely divergent notions of peacebuilding exist’. To add to the confusion the word appears in three forms, peacebuilding, peace building and peace-building, and despite the more recent addition of peace making and peace dividend to the Oxford English Dictionary, peacebuilding has yet to be included. Definitions of peacebuilding tend to go from the general to the specific; ranging from a normative approach to conflict resolution encompassing every possible endeavour that may bring about sustained peace, to more programme-driven definitions which identify achievable sets of objectives, believed to make peace more likely. Within these definitions of peacebuilding there are trends that emerge based on various theoretical propositions about peace itself. These include political theories emphasising the importance of institutions in providing an infrastructure for peace, economic theories with a more developmental approach and a belief in the importance of financial security for peace, and religious theories that are more people-centred, building on people’s capacity to reconcile and forgive. The broadest definitions