



Report on Wilton Park Conference WPS06/2

PUTTING DECISIONS INTO PRACTICE: HOW WILL THE UN PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION FULFIL ITS MANDATE? Thursday 9 – Friday 10 February 2006

Summary

- Despite agreement on composition and reporting lines, there are still a wide range of views on what peacebuilding is, how the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) should function and under what circumstances it should support countries affected by conflict.
- One way in which the PBC can add value is by encouraging the development of high-quality integrated peacebuilding strategies. The PBC cannot develop nationally-led strategies but, based upon them, it can promote a strategic compact between government and international partners.
- In this respect, the PBC must establish effective sequencing, allocation of responsibilities and monitoring mechanisms, with clear benchmarks for all parties. It must also be responsive to events, such that strategies remain 'living.'
- The PBC will need to work alongside existing structures for coordination and coherence in a manner that does not duplicate existing mechanisms, adds value without increasing transaction costs and does not undermine coordination at the country level.
- Through resource mobilisation, a realistic sense of duration, sequencing and respect for national ownership, the PBC should strive towards enhancing the sustainability of peacebuilding, empowering national governments rather than increasing the burden on them.
- The PBC should operate with a realistic and comprehensive understanding of the full range of peacebuilding resources and capacities, including those of regional organisations.
- The Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) will have a key role in gathering and applying experience of peacebuilding, ensuring effective links between country and headquarters levels, facilitating formation of strategies and providing monitoring and evaluation.
- The success of the PBC will be judged on the quality of the peacebuilding outcomes it assists in delivering over the medium to long term. Targeting a limited range of tasks in a small number of countries in the first year could lay the groundwork for success and a more expansive role in the future.

Introduction

1. Contrary to popular perception, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a decline in the number of civil wars raging worldwide. This is primarily due to the ending of many existing wars through negotiated settlements.¹ Yet, a startling and now oft-cited statistic paints a bleaker picture: over the same period, almost fifty percent of peace agreements have collapsed within five years, sending countries spiralling back into conflict.² A recent study concluded that countries that played host to post-conflict UN field missions since 1988 have been just as likely to revert to war as countries where the UN had no presence.³

2. The current international response in the aftermath of civil war suffers from several persistent weaknesses. Some of these are problems of commitment. Too often, there is a lack of sustained political attention to post-conflict countries: after peace agreements are signed, or after a peacekeeping mission draws down, countries cease to attract the attention of the UN Security Council and donor governments. Related to this, there is difficulty in securing sustained financing for peacebuilding activities, which often occupy a grey area between peacekeeping and development. In particular, there is a lack of early funding, as donors are slow to mobilise, and there are gaps in funding for activities that donors consider sensitive, such as those linked to political reform or the country's security architecture. Even when sufficient funds are pledged for peacebuilding, funding flows may be inconsistent and unpredictable, and recipient governments may be forced to navigate conflicting donor demands and priorities.

3. An additional set of problems relates to the poor coordination of the international community in dealing with post-conflict environments. The UN system is itself difficult to coordinate, and lacks agreed goals to which the entire system can work. There is a disconnect between perceptions in the capitals of member states and UN country teams in the field, which exacerbates the problems of

¹ Havard Hegre, 'The Duration and Termination of Civil War', *Journal of Peace Research* 41:3 (2004), p.244.

² Paul Collier et al, *The Conflict Trap*, World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003, p.7.

³ Charles T. Call, *Institutionalizing Peace: A Review of Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Concepts and Issues for DPA*, Policy Planning Unit DPA, United Nations, January 2005, p.8.

political and financial support for even the strongest field operations. But the bigger picture involves a wider range of actors: the UN, the international financial institutions (IFIs), regional organizations, bilateral donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and, most importantly, the government and civil society in the country in question. These different actors often lack a shared strategic framework that outlines priorities, coordinates roles, and sequences activities to guide their operations.

The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission

4. In response to the resource shortfalls and organisational weaknesses of the international community in post-conflict peacebuilding the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change proposed the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) as a new intergovernmental body at the United Nations (UN). The PBC is intended to fill the gap in the existing architecture by focusing attention on the needs of countries emerging from conflict. The proposal was strongly promoted by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and agreed at the September 2005 UN summit.

5. In December 2005, the United Nations General Assembly (GA) and Security Council (UNSC) passed corresponding resolutions to establish the new organ as an intergovernmental advisory body that will meet in various configurations. The Organisational Committee will be composed of 31 members, with seven selected from the UNSC, including all five permanent members, seven from the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), seven from the GA, and five each from a list of the ten largest troop contributors and financial donors. Country-specific configurations will also include actors relevant to the case, including the country itself, regional actors and organisations, financial, troop and civilian police contributors, the senior UN representative in the field and regional or international financial institutions. The Secretary-General and IFIs will be invited to participate in all meetings of the Organisational Committee. The PBC's recommendations will be publicly available as UN documents and all relevant actors are invited to take action on the basis of these.

6. The GA and UNSC resolutions laid out three main purposes for the PBC. First is to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery. Second is to focus attention on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery, bridging the gap between the immediate post-conflict phase and sustainable development. Third is to provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the UN.

7. However, since the PBC's creation, little attention has been paid to questions of policy or strategy, as UN member states have focused attention on the election of the members of the Organisational Committee. Once the membership is finalised, there will be other organisational hurdles before the PBC can commence its work. Rules of procedure must be agreed, the first chair or co-chairs must be selected, the first country case(s) chosen; and the necessary country-specific committees established. The other components of the three-part architecture, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), must also be finalised.

8. Amid all these questions of process, the PBC remains little more than an 'idea' – in fact several different ideas - in substantive terms. At the broadest level, there is no consistent and agreed definition of peacebuilding; the resolution establishing the PBC does not contain a definition, although it implicitly locates peacebuilding in a sequence of activities conducted in countries emerging from violent conflict. This lacuna gives rise to a practical question: Will a country be placed on the agenda of the PBC once a peace agreement is signed, or only when basic security is assured? More specific questions include: What will be the responsibility of the government in question? How will the PBC relate to the field? How will it mobilise resources? How will it ensure the accountability of all actors? How will it interact with the existing systems of coordination and planning of other actors? How large will its country-specific configurations be? If the PBC is to be

effective, an urgent injection of substance is required in debates between member states.

The PBC's added value

9. The GA and UNSC resolutions establishing the PBC are imprecise as to what the body will do and how it will function. Instructions that it 'propose integrated strategies,' 'focus attention,' 'marshal resources,' 'ensure predictable financing' and 'improve coordination,' successfully identify current weaknesses but leave ample room for interpretation. Translating this mandate into concrete activity is complicated by the intergovernmental nature of the PBC and by its status as an advisory body.

10. Furthermore, the PBC will not operate in a policy vacuum. To differing extents, post-conflict countries already have national leadership, strategies and benchmarks, and systems of coordination and resource mobilisation. Especially in the first cases it will encounter, the PBC will co-exist with multiple existing arrangements. It must act productively alongside the full range of actors, national, bilateral and multilateral, taking note of the variability of countries undertaking peacebuilding. Rather than simply adding a separate layer of complexity to existing processes, the PBC must define its 'added value' in relation to existing arrangements.

Integrated strategies

11. A commonly agreed element of the PBC's added value concerns the need for a strategic approach to peacebuilding, rooted in rigorous analysis of the roots of disorder and a realistic vision for the future society in question. Far from the all-too-common 'laundry list' approach, in which multiple actors pursue their preferred issues in tandem, activities in peacebuilding should be carefully sequenced to produce maximum effect. For example, urgent humanitarian needs must be satisfied early on so that populations invest in peace. Reform of the security sector must be carefully timed vis-à-vis reconciliation and human rights activities or reform of the judicial process so that people are confident their rights will not be

abused. There is agreement on the need for 'integrated strategies,' and that these should involve genuine partnerships between actors, with built-in accountability mechanisms. They must be continually updated so that they are 'living.'

12. Despite this clear need, there is some ambiguity surrounding the term 'strategy,' which has multiple connotations in this context. First are national recovery strategies, which must originate with governments. The PBC might be able to advise governments in this respect, but it cannot author such strategies. A different type of strategy incorporates and harmonises the activities of international actors in a given country. The PBC, which will bring together the UN system, donors, troop contributors, the IFIs and regional organisations and banks, will be well-placed to generate political consensus on priorities and regularly to update and reassert it. However, the PBC ultimately cannot direct donors and multilateral actors to abide by its strategic advice. With their own priorities and governance structures, many actors will preserve a measure of autonomy.

13. With these constraints in mind, the role of the PBC will not be to 'write' strategy as such, but to inform the design of high quality strategies in partnership with national governments, and to promote their implementation. The former function would involve the PBC providing advice to governments. It also envisages the PBC as a mechanism for helping national governments develop strategies in a world of multiple donors, by bringing together a wide range of actors to engage in strategy development. Such a model might avoid the problems of national governments being driven by donor strategies, or forced to pick and choose among them. The latter function would involve a political role of validating strategies emerging from national processes. It would also involve a more practical element: forging partnerships to ensure that the work of the UN and the broader donor family is aligned with the strategies; identifying gaps; encouraging actors to fill them; and mobilising funding.

14. A more formal model of how the PBC might perform these functions is that of a 'compact' between government and interested international actors, with built-in mechanisms of accountability for all partners. The January 2006 Afghanistan

Compact, laying out a five-year framework of cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations and the international community, is an example of such an agreement. Some believe the PBC should explore this model, which fulfils the dual aim of national ownership and international coordination within a shared framework of mutual accountability.

Coordination and coherence

15. Within the UN system, coordination has improved since the early 1990s, with the development of an architecture for integrated missions, joint post-conflict needs assessment with the World Bank, the establishment of committees in substantive areas, and evolving models of humanitarian coordination around the Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster leads. A further wave of changes is likely and necessary, as recognised by the Secretary-General in his recent decision to establish a new High-level Panel on system-wide coherence. This is important, since enhanced operational coordination is a necessary, albeit insufficient, precondition for the PBC's success.

16. The PBC must avoid undermining existing tools for planning and strategy, or proliferating other instruments, both at headquarters and at the field level, where new coordination mechanisms and partnerships are continually being refined. To the extent that the PBC has a coordinating role, it is an overarching one of providing 'recommendations' and 'information' to ensure that all actors operate from the same strategic framework. Key to this vision, the PBC must draw upon existing mechanisms to link political, security and development goals, working with in-country actors to develop clear transition benchmarks to bridge the 'relief' to 'development' gap.

17. The PBC might also tackle the challenge of coherence by addressing the problem of poor donor behaviour. Donors can have unrealistic expectations and create conflicting demands; funding flows are often inconsistent or unpredictable; and donors are often unwilling to fund priorities determined by the national government. In addition, transaction costs for peacebuilding are very high; national governments must go through multiple iterations of the same exercise,

responding to similar requests from donors. The PBC could provide incentives for donors to practice better behaviour and could help to make the aid system and global set of institutions less management-intensive for national actors. It could also reduce transaction costs by helping to plan the sequential timing of donor and UNSC discussions, and assisting in preparing common documentation for meetings.

18. Regional actors are also valuable interlocutors and have high expectations of how they may benefit from the PBC. Some regional organisations, such as the African Union, are themselves adapting institutionally to meet the current challenges of fragile states and civil war. There is hope the PBC will provide further tools, guidance and resource mobilisation and will actively engage all who can contribute at the regional and sub-regional levels, particularly in its country-specific discussions. But successful engagement will require realistic assessment of capacities; the UN might consider undertaking an inventory of capacities in all areas of peacebuilding, in order to establish which actors are able to perform the vital tasks and to identify areas in which the international community as a whole lacks capacity.

Sustainability and national ownership

19. Key to the long-term sustainability of peacebuilding is the creation and strengthening of a citizen-focused, functioning state that can protect and provide for its population. International and national actors must be aligned to this goal, which involves a complex set of processes. A political process, whereby ballots replace bullets and violence is renounced as a means of settling disputes, is only the start. Often, the legal framework must also be revised: a state governs on the basis of rules, and trust in those rules is critical. State institutions must be reorganised so that the role of armed forces and police is renegotiated, and political institutions and civilian authority reconstituted. Economic and social development must proceed and be seen to deliver early results, while developing sustainable plans for generating revenue and capacity to manage public finances. This will necessarily require an integrated approach that ensures that economic

recovery supports progress on the political and security front, and that political and security risks do not undermine economic progress.

20. Four factors are key to the PBC's success in ensuring sustainability. First, the PBC must develop a broad understanding of the international resources brought to bear on assisting countries in transitions from war to peace. Such resources include diplomatic attention and security assistance in addition to development aid. The PBC can add value by helping to mobilise resources, and also by linking analysis on political and security risks with analysis on economic governance risks.

21. Second, sustainability must entail a more realistic sense of duration. There is emerging evidence to indicate that peacebuilding results must be measured in decades or even generations, not years. Research has demonstrated that aid to post-conflict countries typically surges in during the first few years after conflict, when a country is not in a position to absorb those resources, and diminishes just as the capacity to use that aid effectively has been developed. The PBC must ensure that long-term durations of 10 years or more are the basis for designing strategies or assessing outcomes.

22. Third, sequencing is critical. The process must be broken down into manageable phases, with a credible set of actions where results can be demonstrated and trust created. Once goals are agreed, there needs to be consensus on strategy and detailed negotiation of rules. Designation of critical tasks becomes hugely important; and leaders and managers must be mandated to perform these tasks. A 'living' strategy requires constant reflexive monitoring so that adjustments can be made as contexts shift. This requires a degree of flexibility in decision-making. The PBC can help to build a coalition of international interests around a country, and play a mediating role to ensure that goals are realistic and that progress is well understood.

23. Fourth, although the international community has a vital role to play, sustainability in peacebuilding ultimately relies on the work done by national

governments and societies. Armed with the most rigorous analysis and best intentions, international actors have not succeeded where they have attempted to bypass national ownership or fail to understand local contexts. It is also a fallacy to think that post-conflict interventions can be divided into discrete phases, with 'stabilization' followed by 'development.' The key to a successful transition and sustainable results is early engagement with the functioning of the state, such that strategies are rooted in a shared compact between the government and the international community. The PBC must have the credibility to pressure donors to orient attention to areas that are chronically under-resourced, for example reform of the security sector and justice.

24. Yet, there is sometimes a practical tension between the mantra of 'national ownership' and the application of 'lessons learned' from other peacebuilding contexts by the international community. Drawing upon international resources, the PBC should work in partnership with the national government to ensure that strategy is based on adequate analysis of risks; integrates key political, security, economic, and humanitarian actions; and makes good use of national and international resources. There should be a detailed implementation strategy and clear benchmarks in place to determine when national institutions take over from the international community or NGOs. The PBC could help to encourage country actors to adopt broader consultation strategies with national counterparts and society leaders to ensure broad support throughout the country. It might bring in leaders from other post-conflict countries to share experience and lessons learned.

25. What would *not* be helpful is for the PBC to impose additional burdens and create additional transaction costs for national governments by adding to reporting requirements, or creating new and different strategies that compete with others already in place. It would also be a mistake for the PBC to try to create new capacities in New York at the expense of empowering national governments. For example, while it may be appealing to develop a system for tracking funding flows through the PBSO, a better strategy would be to pressure donors to regularise

reporting of funding cycles and release information to actors in country to promote transparency.

The role of the Peacebuilding Support Office

26. Accompanying the establishment of the PBC, UN member states also agreed to the establishment of a Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) within the UN Secretariat. Many regard this as the lynchpin of the new peacebuilding architecture, an innovation that would have been necessary even without the PBC. Peacebuilding is not synonymous with any of the activities of individual departments or agencies, from peacekeeping, to human rights or development; it is a composite activity that demands a less stove-piped bureaucratic structure. The PBC should also be armed with a broad understanding of peacebuilding challenges, typologies, and frameworks, so that the international community does not start from scratch in each new post-conflict country. The PBSO should thus be composed of staff with a wide range of backgrounds, including non-UN, combined with relevant field experience, excellent analytical skills, open-mindedness and strategic thinking.

27. The PBSO will be a small office with no operational role, but will serve three main functions aside from direct support to the PBC. As the PBC engages with a particular country, the PBSO's main purpose will be to consult the key actors on the ground, including the UN country team, IFIs, regional actors, national government and civil society, to facilitate the formation of strategy in collaboration with the country team. It will bring together expertise from across the UN system to give the Secretary-General and the PBC guidance on the feasibility of various options and benchmarks on what must be achieved before troops can be withdrawn. This role will vary significantly depending on the UN country set-up; lighter where there is an established and effective peace operation or country team, and more substantive where no operation has been established.

28. Second, the PBSO will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation. In this regard, it will provide a vital link between the PBC and the field, updating

sequencing and prioritisation and injecting 'lessons learned' that are context-specific. It will not publicly 'evaluate' the performance of national governments, but may privately advise the Secretary-General on the quality of the existing strategy to ensure his representatives in the field are best supported.

29. Third, it will act as a clearing house for expertise on both thematic and country-specific levels. While there is significant experience within the UN system, it is not currently harnessed in a replicable way and there is no specific repository for lessons learned in peacebuilding. Furthermore, the UN does not make good use of the vast expertise outside the system. The office will have a networking role to ensure that expertise is located and placed at the UN's disposal, and to provide a locus for knowledge that currently lacks an institutional home, such as in democratic transitions and the rule of law.

30. Although the Fifth Committee of the GA recently approved a resource allocation for the PBSO, its establishment has not been straightforward. While some member states hope to see an office that performs narrow secretariat functions only, others believe the PBSO will be the key driver, and thereby the determinant of success, for the PBC. There is considerable expertise in peacebuilding located in member states, particularly in countries that have recently experienced transition. Some states have started reconfiguring their diplomatic representation to reflect such expertise, but others have not yet considered what will be required at the New York mission to address the inter-relationship of security, political and economic issues in a single body. A strong PBSO may be needed to translate this extensive but segregated knowledge into coherent strategy on behalf of member states. The PBC should itself be involved in defining what it will need in this regard and ensuring that the PBSO is configured to meet these needs.

31. As with the PBC, the focus on politics and process has so far detracted from important questions as to how the PBSO will operate, particularly the implications of terms such as 'advice' and 'coherence.' It is vital to recognise the significant expertise in peacebuilding that has been built up within the UN system

over years of experience. The PBSO will add value to the extent that it focuses on the current weaknesses, by answering the broadest strategic questions (such as whether there should be a UN operation in a particular country) and using a problem-solving approach to difficult aspects of peacebuilding (such as reintegration and job creation). A constructive relationship with other departments and UN agencies will be vital from the start and will in turn strengthen the PBSO's relationship with the PBC. Recruiting a director at the level of Assistant Secretary-General, who is an excellent strategic thinker and diplomat, could be an important element of the formula.

32. It is also vital that the PBSO works in tandem with the UN presence in the field. The division of labour between the field and the PBSO requires clarification, particularly the question of responsibility for validating and monitoring strategy. While some envisage a limited facilitating role for the PBSO, others claim that the UN relies too much on the personalities in the field to drive peacebuilding and it should enhance direction and information flow from headquarters. Relationships between the PBSO and other offices at headquarters will need to be clear, in the service of ensuring that the UN is oriented to support the work of its teams in the field.

Conclusion: implementing the vision

33. If it does its job well, the value that the PBC could add to peacebuilding outcomes will be significant. Yet, the central question that remains is how much we should expect from this new body, the establishment of which has created great expectations. Although there is much expertise and good practice in peacebuilding, there are also no 'easy cases' of post-conflict countries. The PBC should be ambitious, but in its first years of operation it should perhaps take on manageable challenges and start with modest goals. A targeted strategy that tackles only two countries perhaps in the first year, and focuses on a limited range of tasks within those countries, could lay the groundwork for success and a more expansive role in the future. In order to manage expectations and define the

parameters of 'success,' clarity should be provided by the PBC itself, in the form of a mission statement.

34. Much speculation about the PBC's role inevitably returns to the question of which country it should tackle first. A number of countries have apparently already presented themselves to the Secretary-General as possible candidates. Some member states are strong advocates for Liberia to be the first addressed: the recent election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President and the implementation of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) signal that the time is ripe for a more robust approach to peacebuilding in Liberia after failures in the 1990s. Whether Liberia or another case, the Organisational Committee should establish clear, well-understood criteria to guide the selection process, to guard against resentment and confusion.

35. Ultimately, the success of the PBC will be judged on the quality of the peacebuilding outcomes it assists in delivering over the medium to long term; these outcomes will be difficult to assess in the short term. But creating an institution will not in itself lead to positive outcomes. Those who hope to see the PBC succeed must take stock of why the international community, including the UN intergovernmental machinery and Secretariat, has so far failed to generate 'living strategies' and turn around conflict-ridden countries.

36. Further, if the PBC is to inaugurate meaningful change, it must adopt working methods that allow for innovation. Member state representatives who serve on it should have sufficient clout and expertise to take informed and timely decisions. The PBC must carefully manage its relationship with the UN membership and Secretariat, the wider UN system, donors and regional actors, and most importantly, with the national governments in countries it addresses. An independent, properly staffed PBSO should be created to ensure the quality of inputs.

37. The ultimate goal will also be undermined if the PBC does not make concerted efforts in its first months to establish its institutional identity, credibility and leverage. As an advisory body, there is a danger that it will fall victim to a central problem of the UN system; lack of accountability. But as a political body established to deal with a specific problem, the PBC has the opportunity to enhance political accountability for performance in peacebuilding. In the following months, the PBC will be translated from a lofty ideal to an institutional reality. Its earliest decisions must be guided by the aim of ensuring the best possible chance of long-term success.

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