



Making Peacebuilding Work

Reforming UN Peacekeeping Operations



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This discussion paper is a product of CSIS's Post-Conflict Reconstruction (PCR) Project, which is dedicated to improving the strategic and operational effectiveness of post-conflict interventions. Frederick Barton and Bathsheba Crocker co-direct the Project. This paper offers recommendations on the creation of a United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office.

The Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change first proposed the idea for a Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office in December 2004. The Secretary-General's March 21, 2005 report, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," further outlined the idea.¹ The Secretary-General's office is currently in the process of developing a more detailed proposal of how such a Commission and Office would function in practice.

Making Peacebuilding Work reports on the full-day conference CSIS held on March 11, 2005, with support from the Government of Norway and the United Nations Foundation. Sixty-six conference participants explored reactions to the High-level Panel report's post-conflict peacebuilding recommendations.

What follows has not been reviewed by conference participants, and does not necessarily reflect their positions or beliefs. Points of consensus and specific policy recommendations have been noted throughout. PCR Project researcher Craig Cohen served as the rapporteur for the conference, and drafted this report in coordination with PCR Project leadership and staff.

¹ See "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," 3/21/2005, <http://www.un.org/largenfreedom/>. A synopsis of the Secretary-General's proposal on the Peacebuilding Commission appears at Appendix A.

Key Points of Discussion

- Participants saw major gaps in current UN peacebuilding efforts, including functional deficiencies with security sector reform and strategies to establish rule of law, as well as significant coordination and planning deficits.
- There was broad consensus that peacebuilding should become a signature product of the United Nations, and that the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office could potentially help to achieve this goal. Participants agreed that ultimately any new institution would be judged by its ability to provide better outcomes in failing states and war-torn societies.
- Most participants agreed that the Peacebuilding Commission should play a similar role to that which the Secretary-General outlined in his March 21 report. Debate centered on the following three questions regarding the Commission's establishment:
 - 1) **Could the Peacebuilding Commission function as an advisory body with clout?** A number of participants argued that if the Commission is comprised of both UN and non-UN members, the Commission will not be able to function as a decision-making body. To ensure that the Commission functions as more than merely a talk shop, however, they suggested the Commission play a key role in advising the Security Council on funding priorities in peacebuilding operations and identifying countries that deserve the Security Council's continued attention.
 - 2) **Could the Commission play a preventive role without having an early warning or monitoring function?** A number of participants warned that charging the Commission with an overtly preventative role could stall the reform effort at the start. Participants agreed, however, that conflict prevention was an essential goal of post-conflict peacebuilding, and that the Commission could work to prevent conflict by reducing risk of countries sliding back toward war and instability.
 - 3) **Could the Commission focus on the critical six to nine months after the cessation of conflict without losing sight of the longer-term process of statebuilding?** Participants debated whether the Commission's role should be time-bound, or whether it should last until traditional development relationships resume.

Introduction

No reform proposal emerging from the UN High-level Panel report has met with more widespread enthusiasm than the suggestion to create a Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office. The general feeling both at UN headquarters in New York and in most world capitals is that this is an idea whose time has come.

With the United Nations increasingly under fire from many directions, the organization must deliver on a package of concrete reforms by the September Heads of State summit in New York. Trying to deliver on issues weighed down by heavy political baggage—Security Council enlargement, General Assembly reform, agreement on principles governing the use of force—may stall the entire reform process.

Creating a Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office could be the greatest chance for the United Nations to demonstrate its intention to reform, thereby serving as a foundation for future reform efforts. Success in this area would also further the United Nation's core mission of ending war and preventing the reemergence of conflict.

It is within this context that the Post-Conflict Reconstruction (PCR) Project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), with the support of the Government of Norway and the United Nations Foundation, assembled a group of 66 policy makers, practitioners, and scholars from the United Nations, multilateral partners and member states, and the academic and foundation world for a full-day conference on March 11, 2005 in Washington, D.C. to discuss peacebuilding reform.

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Despite the general enthusiasm for new peacebuilding architecture within the United Nations, most agreed that the plans to date on how a Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office should look and function have been vague and insufficient to allow assessment of their true potential.² As with all reform proposals, several participants voiced, the devil is in the details.

There was broad consensus, however, that this peacebuilding reform effort is vital to international stability and to a working system of collective security. Participants argued that the United Nations has both a comparative advantage and a clear role to play in peacebuilding. It has experience in dozens of operations in countries transitioning out of conflict, and has built a significant amount of technical expertise in this area. As a

² The Secretary-General's office is currently at work on a more detailed proposal on peacebuilding.

multilateral organization comprised of officials from different government and administrative traditions, it may also be better able to interact with local institutions and interpret local realities than powerful member states can on their own or in limited coalitions.

The United Nations' endeavors at peacebuilding have been far from an unqualified success, however. The organization has exhibited real weaknesses, which have served as the basis of the reform recommendations. Participants identified six particular weaknesses in the UN system that the recent calls for peacebuilding reform seek to address:

- 1) The United Nations has not done an adequate job of conflict prevention;
- 2) The UN Security Council (UNSC) does not have particular expertise with peacebuilding, and is not set up to give countries the long-term attention peacebuilding requires;
- 3) There is a poor relationship between the United Nations and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in the aftermath of conflict. The UNSC tends to take core political and military decisions without attention to economic analysis, while the World Bank takes its decisions without attention to the UNSC's political and military advice;
- 4) The United Nations' work in post-conflict peacebuilding is spread around dozens of UN funds, programs, and agencies with inadequate coordination. With expertise diffuse throughout the UN system, there is no focal point, and a lack of central capacity;
- 5) There is a recurring problem of a lack of financing to support critical civilian institutions in the post-conflict period;
- 6) The United Nations continues to lack adequate stand-by capacity and deployment capabilities, notwithstanding real improvements since the 2000 report of the Secretary-General's Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping (the Brahimi report).

This discussion paper operates along two tracks. Track One focuses on general recommendations for improving and supporting UN peacebuilding operations. Track Two offers more specific discussion on the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office.

Track One: Improving and Supporting UN Peacebuilding Operations

UN peacebuilding reform must address two sets of problems. The first concerns the United Nations' own internal constraints—problems with its capacity, financing, personnel, coordination, and integration. The second set concerns problems specific to failed states and war-torn societies.

Internal constraints

Although the Security Council is the main organ responsible for international peace and security, it has no direct links to peace operations, nor the capacity to coordinate the host of actors and agencies involved in peacebuilding. The same is true for the Secretary-General. Participants agreed that the UN's peacebuilding successes to date have not been the product of a systematized approach. Agencies and personnel involved in peacebuilding report to a number of different authorities, creating mixed signals and divergent strategies. One participant explained that because the Security Council's attention span is short, once peacekeeping troops have withdrawn, there is little concerted UN follow up.

There was broad consensus that greater coordination is needed in UN peacebuilding operations. One participant noted there are at least three separate mission assessments and planning processes undertaken in most field operations. Another argued that the primary challenge to improved coordination is that various agencies and bilateral partners hold their strategies close to their chest. This lack of transparency yields little trust, and coordination proves challenging in such an environment.

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The “lead-nation” approach in Afghanistan has made coordination even more problematic there, one participant suggested. While countries have invested more in Afghanistan because of their lead role in a specific sector, they have had less incentive to coordinate with other donors. One participant argued that coordination exists in Afghanistan only because of the leadership of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) and a few other key actors. Participants agreed that people on the ground end up using a variety of tools without much sense of any common strategy.

One participant raised the question of whether coordination in UN headquarters was truly the problem. He argued that perhaps the problem lay instead at the grand strategic or operational levels, in which case another layer of coordination in New York would fail to yield improved outcomes. Another participant took a different tack, arguing that the lack of coherent action may reflect a lack of consensus on the causes and nature of the conflict

rather than a problem of coordination. He doubted, therefore, that new coordinating mechanisms would lead to more coherent actions.

A number of participants agreed that faulty analysis is to blame for many of the problems peacebuilding operations face. Too often the United Nations makes bad decisions early, one participant suggested, and then pays for it throughout the rest of an operation. Others cited a lack of capacity, particularly the lack of a standing police capacity to bring order immediately following conflict.

Other internal problems that arose from the discussion were the lack of predictable sources of financing for peacebuilding, and inadequate human resource capacity. Participants agreed that more knowledgeable and skilled personnel are needed from the SRSG level on down. One participant suggested that the coordination problem would be improved if personnel could be recruited who understood both politics and budgeting, rather than only one or the other.

Problems of Failed States and War-torn Societies

Peacebuilding in failed states and war-torn societies presents the United Nations with a considerable challenge. One-half of all peace agreements fail, with a reversion to conflict within five years. Statebuilding, in particular, is a difficult process the United Nations has yet to master.

Participants pointed out that the United Nations continues to struggle with the appropriate length of an intervention. Statebuilding is a long-term process, and yet, domestic populations tend not to want long-term interventions. A related question is how much

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control the United Nations should exert in post-conflict environments. One participant wondered where the balance lies between missions such as East Timor (high level of UN control, high level of local criticism) and Haiti (low level of UN control, high level of chaos).

The United Nations has not performed well in establishing rule of law or reforming the security sector, according to a number of participants. They cited the inability to co-

opt or coerce spoilers, and the lack of a coherent plan for building a national army and police force. Others pointed to the lack of economic incentives critical to sustaining peace in the long term, such as the absence of jobs for demobilized soldiers. One participant argued that the United Nations rarely addresses the underlying sources of conflict. Another wondered if there was actually a consensus on how to build peace and prevent state failure.

It was left as an open question whether the United Nations can ever build a state from the outside, or whether all it can do is prevent collapse. One participant explained that if a state is supposed to be representative of its people and reflective of society, then it cannot be built on outside technical advice alone.

The Statebuilding Challenge

Ashraf Ghani, former Afghanistan Minister of Finance and now President of Kabul University, argued in a lunch-time speech that the proper framework for thinking about the UN role in post-conflict countries is statebuilding rather than peacebuilding. He argued that modern states should perform 10 functions simultaneously:

- 1) States should hold a legitimate monopoly on the means of violence, although most states today do not;
- 2) States should provide administrative control derived from rules and the enforcement of rules. Ghani argued that aid is as much a problem as an asset in rule making because donors often launch parallel rules that undermine the state;
- 3) States should manage public finances for citizen redistribution. States make a compact both with donors and their citizens on redistributing aid and raising domestic revenue. Ghani argued that it is impossible to acknowledge the rights of citizens without speaking of the duties of taxpayers;
- 4) States should invest in human capital. Ghani argued that billions of dollars of technical assistance offered by international donors provides no positive function, actually stealing the best personnel from the national government. Such strategies undermine state-building, he explained, as does ignoring tertiary education;
- 5) States should provide provisional citizenship rights through social policies;
- 6) States should provide provisional infrastructure. Ghani argued that the United Nations is too often concerned with quick impact projects, but to most people in Afghanistan, for example, building infrastructure is a key way to build legitimacy;
- 7) States should manage tangible and intangible assets through regulation. Ghani argued that natural resource rents should feed directly into national budgets;
- 8) States should create a formal economic market, enabling upward social mobility that consolidates peace. Too often, Ghani argued, peace agreements fail because they are not linked to an effective economic strategy that can create jobs and solidify a peace. Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, for instance, are rarely successful unless tied to job creation strategies;
- 9) States should engage in public borrowing from IFIs and the market;
- 10) States should provide rule of law, which leaders are subject to. Ghani argued that a good marker of rule of law is whether government hand-over takes place according to democratic processes and formal rules. Too often there is no agreement on the rules of the game, he explained, or even which game is actually being played.

Ghani argued that the United Nations must help build state capacity for each of these ten functions in a way that does not undermine existing capacity. He emphasized the need for reforming UN agencies, which he considered to be competitors of national governments

rather than assets upon which to rely. Ghani argued that if the task is truly statebuilding, then the United Nations must either reform its agencies, abolish them, or make only one agency responsible.

Ghani thus argued that the United Nations, through its own actions, often undermined the very statebuilding process it was trying to encourage. Participants were left to consider how the creation of new peacebuilding architecture fit within this context.

Track Two: Creating a Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office

There was wide consensus that if peacebuilding is to become a signature product of the United Nations, significant reform is required. One participant found hope in the example of DPKO because of the extent to which UN peacekeeping capacity has grown over the previous 15 years. Another wondered if creating these institutions in New York would raise expectations in the field without the ability to deliver on better outcomes.

Mandate of a Peacebuilding Commission

Participants debated whether the Peacebuilding Commission should be an advisory or a decision making body. A number of participants argued that if the Commission is to bring together UN actors with non-UN participants, it can only be advisory because its decisions will not be binding on many of the actors around the table. One participant said the Commission's central mandate should be to advise the Security Council in the immediate peacebuilding phase.

Others viewed an advisory body as the creation of another talk shop. One participant asked whether the Peacebuilding Commission could end up serving as a substitute for actually doing anything of substance. Another wondered what sort of analysis and discussion ever takes place in formal, public settings comprised of senior people with a lack of country- specific knowledge.

A consensus appeared to be reached, however, that if the Peacebuilding Commission is created so that it has recourse to an entity with clout, such as the Security Council, then it could play a powerful role, even in an advisory fashion. One participant argued there should be formal mechanisms for the Commission to refer its advice to the Security Council.

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Participants also debated whether the Commission should have an overtly preventative role. A few participants argued that a focus on prevention would complicate rather than facilitate the Commission's creation because a number of countries are opposed to the United Nations taking a proactive role in prevention.

At the same time, participants agreed that preventing conflict must be the goal of any UN institution, and that the culture of prevention should permeate peacebuilding because the countries most in need of prevention are those recovering from conflict. One participant stated that successful post-conflict peacebuilding actually is prevention. Another argued that prevention has its efficiencies, measured by the money saved if conflict could be avoided. A consensus emerged that there are two types of prevention—interventionist

and risk reduction, and that the Peacebuilding Commission could do the latter, but should not look to do the former.

Participants agreed that the Commission should bring the key actors around the table in New York, but its work must somehow be visible in the field—attuned to local realities and capable of yielding quick results. There was broad consensus that its impact on post-conflict societies should be the key criteria for its success. One participant argued that the Commission will need to show it has clout: that it can get money, reach the best people, take quick action, and exert influence. He saw that influence primarily exerted on the Security Council. Another warned against the Commission growing too large and becoming its own bureaucracy.

One participant argued for thinking about the Peacebuilding Commission as a donor conference focused on a particular country. The Commission could be capable of offering a joint assessment covering the full spectrum of post-conflict needs; assessing the performance on pledges and mission results; and flagging those areas that require further political attention.

Another suggested the Commission could act as a Group of Friends established to support peacebuilding. She warned, however, that Groups of Friends are most effective when they are small and self-selecting, and not dominated by any particular power with a strategic interest in a particular outcome other than peace.

Functions of a Peacebuilding Commission

The Secretary-General laid out six primary functions of the Peacebuilding Commission in his March 21 report (see Appendix A). These are, broadly: planning, financing, coordination, providing a forum for coherence, reviewing progress, and extending the period of political attention to post-conflict recovery.

Many participants expressed suggestions along these lines. The following alternative functions were also suggested:

- **Planning:** The Commission could develop a common peacebuilding strategy, fostering agreement on successful approaches and principles of engagement in fragile states;
- **Financing:** The Commission could go beyond providing an overview of existing funding mechanisms or ensuring predictable financing by paying special attention to funding priorities and sequencing, directing the money to where the gaps are greatest;
- **Reviewing Progress:** The Commission could develop metrics intrinsically tied to mission planning, offering clear benchmarks for judging success and troubleshooting when the process has gone off track;

Participants also suggested additional functions, such as:

- Analysis and anticipation. The Commission could engage in ongoing analysis, monitoring recoveries for the likelihood of renewed conflict;
- Identifying leadership talent and building field capacity. The Commission could help to develop future SRSGs, and play a visible role in building field capacity, providing real-time support when requested.

A number of participants warned against loading too much on a Peacebuilding Commission. One suggested that if the Commission is providing day-to-day oversight, operational planning, and country-level coordination of all peacebuilding operations, it would quickly collapse on itself.

Timing of a Peacebuilding Commission

There was consensus that the Peacebuilding Commission's work should begin before the Security Council takes action, and that its work should not be limited to only those countries on the Security Council's agenda.

One participant argued that when the Security Council takes the lead, the Commission could function in an advisory role to the UNSC; at some point after the cessation of conflict, the UNSC could hand-over lead coordination to the Commission; this hand-over could come after a UNSC resolution, but before peacekeeping troops had arrived on the ground. Participants agreed that there is a large gap of time in which important duties need to be carried out, and that the first six to nine months have a huge impact on success or failure.

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One participant argued that the Commission's role should continue until a normal development relationship exists between donors and the host government, which could take a decade or more. Another participant thought the Commission should function with clear sunset provisions in place.

Funding a Peacebuilding Commission

There was broad consensus that a predictable source of funding is critical to making the Peacebuilding Commission an advisory body with clout, and to ensuring that it can affect

real change in the first six months after a conflict ends and peace agreement is signed. One participant argued that getting the funding priorities and sequencing right is essential, because too often agencies jump in and take a chunk of peacebuilding funds, leaving big gaps in what is needed on the ground.

One participant argued that donors should ensure that they revise budget procedures and allocations as necessary to enable more predictable funding to ensure that all aspects of peacebuilding efforts are adequately funded in a timely manner. She thought further consideration is needed to review and replenish the already existing UN Trust Fund for Preventive Action.

Other participants argued that the United Nation's record of establishing large trust funds is not promising. One participant pointed out that the United States has tended to oppose UN trust funds, which in the current climate on Capital Hill are viewed as unaccountable and non-transparent. Some participants thought that the Peacebuilding Commission should begin with the creation of country-specific funds, which are often easier to secure and more likely to be perceived as transparent.

Membership of a Peacebuilding Commission

Participants agreed that the composition of the Peacebuilding Commission could vary from case to case, but that the core membership should remain stable. The Commission could include a representative or representatives from the Security Council, the General Assembly, ECOSOC, the host government, principle bilateral donors, troop contributors, regional institutions, and the IFIs. One participant argued that UN agency representatives should not sit on the Commission. Another suggested that efforts could be made to bring in non-traditional bilateral donors, such as China and India.

One participant questioned how the Commission would ensure it gets the right people around the table in each case. When a situation evolves, she argued, new actors become important and other actors may become problematic, particularly if they represent an offending government.

Reporting and Institutional Linkages of a Peacebuilding Commission

Participants believed that a Peacebuilding Commission requires clear lines of command, and a strong link to the Security Council. Links to the Economic and Social Council were considered more problematic because of the pressing need to reform ECOSOC. One participant suggested the Commission could report to both the Security Council and ECOSOC depending on the nature of its activities. Another argued that it should not have two bosses at the same time on the same issue.³

³ In the Secretary-General's March 21 report, he envisions the Peacebuilding Commission reporting sequentially to the Security Council and ECOSOC.

Participants agreed the Commission will need strong links to the IFIs, drawing on their expertise and analysis. One participant suggested the Commission will also need to figure out an appropriate way to relate to the UN agencies such as UNDP, WHO, UNHCR, and UNICEF.

Peacebuilding Support Office

The Peacebuilding Support Office did not capture the group's attention to the same extent as the Peacebuilding Commission. One participant suggested the main purpose of a Peacebuilding Support Office should be to develop more coherent post-conflict planning by linking the existing capacity within the UN system. Another argued that the mission should not be to serve as the Secretariat of the Peacebuilding Commission, but to focus on ongoing operations. Another suggested it could second staff from UN agencies, in the model of the U.S. National Security Agency.

One participant thought the Peacebuilding Support Office could be the body to take on a strategic analysis and prevention role. He argued that if it were to adopt an early warning capacity, though, it should not report to the Peacebuilding Commission, but to the Security Council through the Secretary General.

Conclusion

The United Nations needs reform. Peacebuilding may provide the best opportunity to deliver change that is both immediate and acceptable in New York and of considerable value on the ground. The key will be creating an institutional structure that can better prioritize resources in the immediate post-conflict phase, and that can keep the United Nations Security Council's attention once it has moved on to the next crisis.

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Creating new peacebuilding institutions will prove challenging, however. Will new peacebuilding institutions play an advisory or decision-making role? Could they play a preventive role without having an early warning or monitoring function? How will they relate to existing mechanisms? These questions will have to be answered deftly if peacebuilding reform is to move ahead and meaningfully result in better outcomes.

There are also the broader questions the United Nations continues to face of how to build peace and state capacity amid war and instability. Where does the United Nations' comparative advantage lie, and what are its limitations? A checkered record of peacebuilding success may provide a rationale for the current reform proposals, but it also underlies the importance of recognizing those areas where the United Nations and other actors have fallen short of their post-conflict goals, even when the necessary resources have been brought to bear.

The United Nations must recognize the ultimate limitations of any reform efforts, as well as the limitations of its peacebuilding interventions even in the aftermath of reform. Only then will success and progress be judged against a realistic standard.

Appendix A

On March 21, 2005, the UN Secretary-General responded to two recent reform efforts⁴ by outlining a strategy to build momentum for change in the run-up to September's Heads of State Summit in New York. In his report⁵, Kofi Annan reiterated the call for the creation of "an intergovernmental Peacebuilding Commission, as well as a Peacebuilding Support Office within the United Nations Secretariat" to reduce the risk and prevalence of war.⁶

The Secretary-General outlined a Peacebuilding Commission performing six primary functions in the aftermath of war:

- 1) To improve United Nations planning for sustained recovery, focusing on early efforts to establish the necessary institutions;
- 2) To help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities, in part by providing an overview of assessed, voluntary and standing funding mechanisms;
- 3) To improve the coordination of the many post-conflict activities of the United Nations funds, programmes and agencies;
- 4) To provide a forum in which the United Nations, major bilateral donors, troop contributors, relevant regional actors and organizations, the international financial institutions and the national or transitional Government of the country concerned can share information about their respective post-conflict recovery strategies, in the interests of greater coherence;
- 5) To periodically review progress towards medium-term recovery goals;
- 6) To extend the period of political attention to post-conflict recovery.

The Secretary-General does not imagine the Peacebuilding Commission having an early warning or monitoring function, but at any stage Member States could seek the Commission's advice or request assistance from a standing fund for peacebuilding. He sees the Commission reporting to the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council in sequence, depending on the phase of the conflict.

Kofi Annan's report outlines that core membership should be comprised of a sub-set of Security Council members, a similar number of Economic and Social Council members, leading troop contributors and the major donors to a standing fund for peacebuilding. In country-specific operations, membership should include the national or transitional authorities, relevant regional actors and organizations, troop contributors where applicable, and major donors to the specific country. The participation of international financial institutions in the Commission is vital.⁷

⁴ A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility is a 2004 report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, <http://www.un.org/secureworld/>; Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals is a 2005 report of the UN Millennium Project, directed by Jeffrey Sachs, <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/index.htm>.

⁵ In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All, 3/21/2005, <http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/>.

⁶ In Larger Freedom, pp 31

⁷ In Larger Freedom, pp 31-32