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***On the far side of conflict: the UN Peacebuilding Commission
as an optical illusion***

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The past as prologue

On 24 October 2005, sixty years after its creation, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a voluminous resolution, A/RES/60/1, reflecting the outcome of a lengthy process that culminated in a World Summit meant to bring the United Nations into the twenty-first century. One of the main features of this resolution was the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission “as an intergovernmental advisory body.”¹

While this, at first blush, would seem to be a major accomplishment, it is in fact the disappointing ending to an evolutionary process that at some points of its trajectory carried considerable promise. The decisions that brought it down and left only a shell of its potential behind were driven by that most ominous and politically charged concept of “UN reform”.

As a rule, organizations develop organically, and if they don’t adapt to external changes, they either die, as the League of Nations did, or they become a historical relic functioning on the margins, like the symphony orchestra – dressed up in the symbols of a bygone era. Those who see the UN as a viable institution, and therefore fear its ability to set global standards and make sovereignty into a relative term, would like to see its powers diminished. They hope to achieve this by depicting the organization as a corrupt and outdated entity that requires “reform”, much as a delinquent is sent away to an institution where a few decades of austerity and hard labor will drive out the evil spirits. The UN, in fact, has been evolving and adapting continuously, and it has done so quite effectively, particularly when it comes to its ability to support peace processes and help countries recover from conflict. Most of the tools and mechanisms at its disposal to do so were not even there ten years ago.

In this chapter, I plan to trace some of the major transformations whereby the UN’s development arm evolved from a post-colonial extension of the “imperial model” to an organizational network that has a unique array of skills and insights to support countries in transition. In doing so, I will point out some of the intellectual landmarks

¹ A/RES/60/1, para. 97

that shaped this gradual reversal, and discuss the various precursors of the current newly established Peacebuilding Commission.

Common system coordination in the early years

It all begins with the so-called “Capacity Study”, conducted by Sir Robert Jackson in the mid-sixties, which ultimately, in 1970, led to the creation of UNDP out of the Special Fund and the Expanded Program for Technical Assistance that managed UN development aid.² This study was done at the request of the donors, who wondered why there were so many UN system agencies independently operating in the developing world, each advocating its own programs, each with its own counterparts in governments, each with a governing structure of its own, each with its own funding and resource mobilization mechanism, and with no system in place to coordinate the various actors.

UNDP was originally designed to serve as the central funding agency for all UN system development aid, including the activities of the specialized agencies. Donors gave all their money to UNDP, and UNDP was the sole interlocutor with the government in recipient countries, working with the ministry of planning to make an inventory of the country’s needs and to plan how the UN system could help. Projects were then allocated by UNDP to the specialized agencies and the UN’s Technical Assistance Program; UNDP paid these agencies when the work was done, and by having a tight grip on the purse, UNDP could enforce coordination.

This all came to an end in 1976, when UNDP had made commitments well beyond its means, and had to close down or cancel \$40 million worth of projects already in the pipeline.³ The specialized agencies, led by FAO, rebelled, and convinced the donors that the central control exercised by UNDP was a bad thing. Donors were asked to place funds in trust directly with the specialized agencies instead, giving them far more control over the programming of these funds, and chaos returned, earmarked funds replaced needs-based planning, and UNDP was left behind, losing market share, forced to invent a new role for itself.

These early efforts at field coordination, and their dramatic demise, all happened in the context of “development cooperation”, a process rooted in the very same mechanisms whereby the colonial powers in the past had built capacity in the countries they administered. Particularly those colonial powers that managed their wards through “indirect rule” used existing national structures as their tools, and gave advice and guidance from behind the scenes. Much of the expertise of the UN system in the sixties and seventies in fields such as tropical agriculture or medicine was colonial expertise, and many of the colonial administrators returned to the South wearing UN hats, but maintaining the values and attitudes of their previous

² A Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System, DP/5, UN Geneva 1969, followed by General Assembly resolution GA 2688 (XXV), dated 11 December 1970

³ Craig N. Murphy, *The United Nations Development Programme: A Better Way?*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 158 ff.

incarnations. The fact that so many post-colonial regimes in the developing world were in fact hand-picked by their former masters, or financially dependent on them, meant that very few countries receiving UN system technical assistance questioned the underlying premise of Western superiority.

Filling the vacuum after the Cold War

This all changed when the Cold War came to an end at the beginning of the nineties. Not only walls came down, but the grip of the Western and Eastern blocks on their client states loosened. What had been proxy wars (Afghanistan, Cambodia, Angola, Mozambique, Central America) now became vicious intra-state conflicts, while new wars erupted where the iron grip of the big powers relaxed and left a vacuum, as was the case in the Balkans, parts of the former Soviet Union, and large tracts of Africa – the Democratic Republic of Congo can serve as an illustration.

For the UN, this brought about a completely new role, which was incompatible with the old, cozy post-colonial values. All of a sudden, the UN was drawn into the business of nation building. Peacekeeping, the traditional purely military effort to monitor peace accords (Middle East, Cyprus, India/Pakistan line of demarcation in Kashmir) became a mandate to create viable states. In quick succession, between 1989 and 1994, the UN helped Namibia make the transition from South African “protectorate” to an independent country, set up a transitional administration in Cambodia (UNTAC), and carried out a holistic peace process in Mozambique (ONUMOZ).

These three missions had in common that they suddenly forced the UN to introduce an entirely new set of competencies into its arsenal: support complex political peace negotiations, carry out the demobilization (military) and the reintegration (socio-economic) of former combatants, plan and conduct elections, monitor human rights, train police, design strategies for economic recovery, help local media find their voice, clear landmines, address the humanitarian needs of populations caught in the cross-fire of violent conflicts.

An analysis of these three early missions shows that all the issues that now shape the debate about the substance of “peacebuilding” were already on the table in the early nineties. The UN improvised brilliantly in those days, and the results were consolidated in new organizational units within the UN Secretariat, such as the current Mine Action Service, the Electoral Assistance Division, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and a strengthened Department of Political Affairs. Within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), this also led to an enhanced multidisciplinary field mission support capacity, strengthened logistics and procurement, and a more sophisticated military *cum* civilian policing doctrine. In fact, therefore, the concept of “integrated missions” was born with Marti Ahtisaari’s

design of the Namibia mission, way back in 1989, a decade before the term was coined in the so-called “Brahimi Report” (about which more will follow).⁴

At the same time, it became very clear that the lack of coordination among the resident agencies at the country level, caused by UNDP’s loss of financial control, was unacceptable to donors and recipients alike. This was a time when the UN system suddenly had to respond to the needs of governments that were truly seeking a voice and sovereignty all their own, solutions that were indigenous and structures that reflected local cultures and values. No longer constrained by the shackles of the cold war, the UN was now challenged to provide support that was credible, unbiased, with few strings attached. It was not prepared to do so.

The era of sweeping reform proposals

In response to this gap in system capacity, many proposals came forward, both from inside and outside the UN family, how the organization should adapt to its new context and its new mandates.

In 1991, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden launched their report “The United Nations in Development: A Nordic Perspective”.⁵ They recommended the creation of an “International Development Council” that would give overall policy guidance for the UN’s operational activities for development, and they advocated a complete overhaul and simplification of the UN’s organizational structure. The various operational funds and programs (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP and IFAD) could be brought into one framework, with a joint governing body, becoming “in essence one organization”, with a consolidated budget of some \$ 4 billion annually, a 2000 strong professional staff, and some 6000 local staff. This would result in a unified career system, a unified representation at the field level, with one single Resident Coordinator heading the country teams, located in a common office.⁶ At the time, the funds and programs protested fiercely, but many elements of the “Nordic” proposal have in fact been introduced over time, be it short of total integration. The most recent efforts by a high level panel to develop recommendations on the creation of a more coherent UN system, presented in 2006 in a report entitled “Delivering as One”, is in fact little more than a resurrection of the Nordic proposal, long considered dead and buried.⁷

In the same period, the Ford Foundation sponsored a consultative process on the state of the UN system, which led to a series of four reports, issued between 1990 and 1994, and driven by the intellectual leadership of Sir Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers, who had both served the UN brilliantly in senior capacities earlier in their career. These studies addressed questions of leadership, the structure and functions of the

⁴ A/55/305, August 2000

⁵ The Nordic UN Project, Almquist & Wiksell International, Stockholm 1991

⁶ Ibidem, page 57

⁷ “Delivering as One”, Report of the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence, United Nations, New York, 9 November 2006

Secretariat, the system's humanitarian emergency machinery, and reform of the overall UN system. The final volume, "Renewing the United Nations System", concluded, when it came to operational activities in the field, that "mere centralization at the global level is not the answer". The authors recommended that the system be decentralized instead, with a shift of resources and structures to the regional and country level. They concluded that the separate identities of the UN funds and programs were not sacrosanct, and that they all existed "solely to serve the temporary needs of the peoples of developing countries". The "special influences through financing" should be brought to an end, while there should only be one UN system office in any developing country, "headed by a UN Coordinator" with no allegiance to any one program. At the global level, all funds and programs should be brought under the authority of the Deputy Secretary-General (a post that did not exist at the time, but which the authors considered essential).⁸ Once again, the executive heads of these programs staunchly resisted such an extreme makeover.

As these discussions were going on about the framework for the traditional development oriented activities of the UN system, the then Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, presented an "Agenda for Peace" in 1992 that drew previously underexposed connections between peacemaking, peacekeeping, and economic development. It foresaw an era of peace as the cold war came to an end, and mapped out the opportunities to link peace enforcement, conflict resolution, the introduction of the rule of law, development assistance and support for state formation along a seamless continuum, leading from violent conflict and disarray to stability and prosperity. While this messianic vision was soon discredited by the developments in Rwanda and Srebrenica, the conceptual connection between peacekeeping and peacebuilding had been made, and it remains valid.⁹

This understanding of the meaning of post-conflict recovery was further developed in the sequel to the Agenda for Peace, the 1994 Agenda for Development. This document foreshadowed the later work done by the Commission on Human Security, as it defines development as a fundamental human right, and stresses the strong links among peace, the economy, the environment, society and democracy. In this context, Secretary-General Boutros Ghali mapped out what we now call "post-conflict reconstruction" as a key challenge for the UN, where it at the same time has a strong comparative advantage.¹⁰

All this implied a trend which in retrospect is very clear: the move of the UN system away from the traditional development assistance model, dating from the post-colonial era, to an approach whereby development no longer is a goal by itself, but a strategy on the road towards human security, dignity, or in other words, human rights. This, in turn, has shaped the later debate on the nature of collective security. The World Bank has, in fact, taken over the UN's old franchise of classical development,

⁸ Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart, *Renewing the United Nations System*, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, 1994, pages 87 ff.

⁹ A/47/277-S/2411, 17 June 1992

¹⁰ A/48/935, 6 May 1994

working with middle income countries, whereas the UN system has become the Salvation Army for the truly down and out, the lowest ranking forty countries on the UNDP Human Development Index, or the countries identified by the Crisis Group as most at risk for conflict, or immersed in it.

The twenty-first century: an end to innocence

Since September 11, 2001, a new set of considerations has been added to this already complex matrix of forces driving international development assistance. The fear of terrorism and uncontrollable migration has become the lowest common denominator shaping the motivation of the international community to address global poverty and instability. Compassion and solidarity (if they ever were drivers for political action) have now largely made way for security concerns. The need to diversify the industrialized countries' access to natural resources, and to oil in particular, has only added impetus and urgency to the renewed global efforts to mitigate conflict and build peace.

I would therefore argue that one cannot detach peacebuilding from the broader challenge of overall poverty alleviation. This holds true whether one is motivated by moral concerns or by very pragmatic calculations of national interest. Peacebuilding, therefore, should not just be reactive, repairing the damage after conflict, but it should be proactive, stepping in before massive human rights violations and exclusionary policies create violent and desperate outbursts. Instability does not pay.

In the light of all we have learned in the past fifteen years, we should by now be able to define some criteria for a successful global peacebuilding mechanism. Key would be its ability to identify crises before they erupt, and to act in a timely and forceful manner to prevent them from escalating. It should have the power to convene all potential actors, build consensus on the steps to be taken (both politically and practically), allocate tasks among the key agents, draw on massive pooled funding, and plan along timelines measured in decades rather than years, gradually strengthening national capacity. How far have we come?

Nearly ten years ago, on 29 September 1998, the Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement on peacebuilding that encouraged the Secretary-General to “explore the possibility of establishing post-conflict peacebuilding structures as parts of efforts by the United Nations system to achieve a lasting solution to conflicts.....”¹¹ This suggestion fell on deaf ears.

Shortly thereafter, however, appalled by a series of failed peacekeeping missions during much of the nineties, ranging from Somalia and Rwanda to the Balkans, the General Assembly asked for a study to examine how peacekeeping operations should be restructured to reflect the reality of complex, multidimensional missions. This led to the establishment of a Panel on UN Peace Operations, chaired by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, which reported its findings and recommendations in a lapidary and

¹¹ Cited in A/55/305, para. 35

remarkably undiplomatic document now known as the “Brahimi Report”.¹² This appeared in August 2000, just before the General Assembly was to begin its fall session, and its impact was both immediate and massive. It challenged the member states to invest massively in order to “build UN capacity to contribute to peace building, preventive and post-conflict, in a genuinely integrated manner”, and argued that peacekeeping was only one component of an inseparable quadrant: conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. None of these could function on its own. Preparations for peace operations had to involve all partners, and “integrated mission planning” was the new shorthand for a collaborative interagency approach.

Towards an organizational framework for peacebuilding

In his report, Brahimi defined peacebuilding as “activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war.”¹³ These tools, Brahimi argued, included the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, the establishment of the rule of law, training police, building respect for human rights, providing electoral assistance, supporting free media, resolving latent conflicts, combating corruption, clearing landmines, and combating infectious diseases. In fact, these were exactly the activities that had made the operations in Namibia, Cambodia and Mozambique so effective ten years earlier.

The Brahimi report then mapped out the capacities that had to be developed or strengthened within the UN Secretariat to support such complex multidimensional operations, and advocated to creation of a Peacebuilding Support Unit, located within the Department for Political Affairs, and working closely with UNDP, under the guidance of the Secretary General’s Executive Committee on Peace and Security.¹⁴

Though the Report did not say so in so many words, this would have provided a much needed counterweight to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which would be limited to supporting the military and logistic components of peace operations. The Brahimi report thus saw no need for a new political organ, but defined all that had to be done in purely operational terms. It was tacitly assumed that the Security Council would be the driving political force.

Around the same time, during the summer of 1999, the Brookings Institution in Washington hosted a series of meetings to discuss the “relief to development gap”, bringing together the UN system agencies, key donors, and non-governmental organizations. A discussion paper commissioned for these meetings, prepared by New York University’s Center on International Cooperation, identified gaps in the international community’s ability to conduct joint needs assessments, and argued for pooled start-up funds, a long-term planning timeline, clearer aid coordination, less

¹² A/55/305

¹³ Ibidem, para. 13

¹⁴ Ibidem, para. 46, also para. 239

conditionality, more coherence at the field level, more focus on national capacity building, and more accountability through the monitoring of aid flows. To spearhead these efforts, the NYU team recommended the establishment of an independent Post-conflict Recovery Facility, located outside of the UN system as a neutral joint venture of multilateral, bilateral and civil society actors, with convening authority, executive powers, and central control of funding... The Brookings “process”, however, remained inconclusive.¹⁵

The next landmark in the peacebuilding debate was the report of the Commission on Human Security, entitled “Human Security Now”, which came out in 2003.¹⁶ This Commission was jointly chaired by Sadako Ogata (the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees) and Amartya Sen (the well-known Indian economist); Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi was one of the Commission’s most active members. The report addressed the special needs of countries emerging from conflict, and stressed the links between political, social and economic action. In doing so, it noted security gaps, governance gaps, international response gaps, and resource gaps. To remedy these shortcomings, the Commission identified several human security clusters that need to be covered simultaneously after conflict – public safety, humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, reconciliation and coexistence, governance and civil society empowerment. To facilitate this approach, the Commission recommended the establishment of a separate transition fund for each post-conflict situation. This would be managed with participation of the national authorities in order to set priorities and ensure ownership, but other parties to conflict were to be included as well. The Commission noted that pledges of aid were unreliable, that the quality of charity was uneven, that compassion fatigue had a paralyzing effect, and it concluded that “greater coherence is required in planning, budgeting and resource mobilization for countries emerging from conflict.” As positive examples, it cited the 1994 Johan Jorgen Holst Peace Fund for donor support to the Palestinian National authority, as well as Japan’s Peace Building Grant Aid.

The genesis of the Peacebuilding Commission: too little too late?

All of a sudden, the pace of the discussions began to accelerate. The Secretary General saw the forthcoming sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations as an opportunity to set a new course for the Organization, and he commissioned a High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change to map out how the UN system could best channel its energies.¹⁷ In its report, the Panel paid considerable attention to the need to preserve or restore peace through non-military means. It noted the void created by an institutional gap, as no agency had a primary mandate in the field of early recovery, and it stressed that the United Nations system could play a unique role

¹⁵ Shepard Forman and Dirk Salomons, “Meeting Essential Needs in Societies Emerging from Conflict”, Working Paper prepared for the Brookings Roundtable on the Relief to Development Gap, NYU Center on International Cooperation, New York, 2000, available at www.cic.nyu.edu

¹⁶ Commission on Human Security, “Human Security Now”, New York, 2003

¹⁷ Report of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, “A more secure world: Our shared responsibility,” New York, 2004

in filling that void. In order to strengthen the United Nations' capacity for peacebuilding, covering a continuum from early warning through preventive action to post-conflict recovery, it recommended the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission.¹⁸ This Commission was to serve as an organ of the Security Council, to be established in consultation with ECOSOC, acting under article 29 of the UN Charter.

We now come at an interesting crossroads. Here we have yet one more proposal to institutionalize the UN system's peacebuilding capacity, consolidating numerous ideas launched earlier. It did not, however, take into account the changes that had occurred in the UN's operational environment. By the year 2004, the reality of the United Nations capacity on the ground had already changed fundamentally. While clamoring for UN reform over and over again, member states did not give sufficient credit to the incremental but essential changes made from within.

To begin with, field coordination had been strengthened considerably as the Resident Coordinator system began to catch on. Joint planning had progressed to the point that the UN country team in each program country prepared a Common Country Assessment, and all the UN actors participated in formulating a UN Development Assistance Framework, drawn up in collaboration with the government. At the same time, the World Bank prompted governments to produce Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. A UN Development Group had been established by the UN funds and programs, providing joint planning and programming tools, and supporting the Resident Coordinator system. Most of all, the UN had gained considerable experience in addressing post-conflict challenges, having dealt with Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Kosovo, Eastern Slavonia, East Timor and the Democratic Republic of Congo in quick succession. The learning curve had become steeper.

The international community, moreover, had discovered that long term support was key to recovery. In both Cambodia and Mozambique, for example, the donors provided close to \$1 billion, year after year, to sustain the momentum created by the initial peacekeeping operation. After most successful peacekeeping operations, voluntary funding sustained the momentum long after the blue helmets had phased out.¹⁹

Crucially, a joint post-conflict needs assessment methodology had been developed and tested, bringing together the UN system actors, the international financial institutions, and key NGOs. Resource mobilization was done jointly and effectively through UN donor meetings and World Bank Roundtables. Funding mechanisms such as dedicated multi-donor country trust funds flourished. Pooled funding models were piloted. Lessons learned were captured and disseminated. The Millennium Development Goals were used as benchmarks to measure progress. Was there really

¹⁸ Ibidem, page 83, chapter XV

¹⁹ Dirk Salomons and Dennis Dijkzeul, *The Conjuror's Hat, Financing Peace Operations*, Fafo Institute, Oslo, and Cemter on International Cooperation, New York University, 2002

still a need for an overarching political institution as envisaged by the High Level Panel?

The High Level Panel was ambitious. It saw as the Peacebuilding Commission's core functions the responsibility "to identify countries which are under stress and risk sliding towards State collapse; to organize, in partnership with the national government, proactive assistance in preventing that process from developing further; to assist in the planning for transitions between conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding; and in particular to marshal and sustain the efforts of the international community in post-conflict peacebuilding over whatever period may be necessary".²⁰

The Commission would have a broad membership, bringing together representatives of the Security Council, ECOSOC, the IMF, the World Bank, regional development banks as well as ad-hoc invitees such as national representatives, principal donor countries, troop contributing countries, or relevant regional and sub-regional entities. This made sense in the context of the proposed robust mandate. In addition, the Commission would obtain operational backing from a well staffed and resourced Peacebuilding Support Office, taking over some of the tasks of DPKO. This proposal, again, was grounded in a solid needs assessment reflecting stakeholder consensus. If this had indeed been implemented, its might have added value to the existing mechanisms, particularly at the political level.

For the Secretary General, however, these recommendations were too bold, and in his own report to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, entitled "In larger freedom", he presented a diminished version.²¹ To fend off all controversy, the Secretary General introduced his proposal with the statement that "I do not believe that such a body should have an early warning or monitoring function".²² Instead of a robust, preventive and proactive mandate as envisaged by the High Level Panel, the Peacebuilding Commission's tasks would now be limited to a few activities to be undertaken only after war: improve planning, help ensure financing, provide a forum, improve coordination, review progress, and make sure that international attention would remain focused on countries coming out of crises.²³ In fact, all these tasks seemed remarkably similar to the work already done quite effectively by the newly reorganized UN system. Having the Commission report "in sequence" to both the Security Council and to ECOSOC did not appear to strengthen its clout.

In the summer of 2005, there was considerable diplomatic activity to prepare an "outcome document" for the General Assembly's sixtieth anniversary session that would be bold, forward looking, and strong enough to be seen as a blueprint for UN priorities in the twenty-first century. This process was often tense, as the developing

²⁰ Report of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, "A more secure world: Our shared responsibility," New York, 2004, page 83, chapter XV

²¹ "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", Report of the Secretary-General, A/59/2005, 21 March 2005

²² Ibidem, para. 116

²³ Ibidem, para. 115

countries were wary of the industrialized powers' intentions – they did not want to see reform measures serve as a Trojan horse to shift decision making powers from the General Assembly to the Secretariat, and thus to the realm of the uncontrollable. In this climate, the discussions about the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission were often acrimonious and adversarial.

When the dust settled, the General Assembly decided to establish a Peacebuilding Commission as “an intergovernmental advisory body”, with as its core task “to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery”.²⁴ It would “focus attention”, “provide recommendations to improve coordination”, “develop best practices”, and help “to ensure predictable financing”. Its membership would be broad and diffused, and an Organizational Committee would serve as the *de facto* core, with again a broad and diverse membership. Most importantly, the Commission “should act in all matters on the basis of consensus of its members”. This proposed structure more or less guaranteed that only the lowest common denominator would prevail and that potential spoilers would have extra-ordinary powers.²⁵ In reporting to the General Assembly, the Commission had in fact, moreover, been placed into a political “second tier”. A “small peacebuilding support office” was to draw on the best expertise available, but had no operational responsibilities.²⁶

In addition, the General Assembly decided to create a Peacebuilding Fund, under the control of the Secretary-General, not the Commission, funded by voluntary contributions. This Fund was to ensure “the immediate release of resources needed to launch peacebuilding activities and the availability of appropriate financing for recovery”. The General Assembly did not address the question how the Fund would relate to the newly developed tools already in existence, and used in recent peace operations, except noting that it should take “due account of existing instruments”.²⁷

For good measure, the Security Council three months later also passed a resolution once more establishing the Peacebuilding Commission, reiterating the functions and structure already adopted by the General Assembly, but giving far more specifics about the composition and the working methods of the Organizational Committee.²⁸ A key new feature was the requirement that the Peacekeeping Commission only place issues on its agenda at the specific request of the Security Council, the Secretary-General, or in exceptional circumstances of ECOSOC or the General Assembly.²⁹ As an afterthought, through a subsequent resolution, the Security Council made sure that all its permanent members would be guaranteed a seat on the Organizational Committee.³⁰

²⁴ A/RES/60/1, 24 October 2005, para. 98

²⁵ Ibidem, paras.

²⁶ Ibidem, para. 104

²⁷ Ibidem, para. 103

²⁸ S/RES/1645 (2005) of 20 December 2005

²⁹ Ibidem, para. 12

³⁰ S/RES/1646 (2005), of 20 December 2005

Off to a timid start

In February 2006, the Secretary-General submitted a detailed proposal to the General Assembly for the mandate and staffing of the Peacebuilding Support Office, describing as its core tasks “to facilitate coherence, identify gaps, recommend ways in which these gaps may be addressed and ensure that the Peacebuilding Commission is able to draw [.....] on the expertise and capacities of the United Nations system as a whole as well as on the outside expert networks, regional organizations and other institutions”. For this purpose, fifteen posts would be required, of which eight had to be filled through redeployment or secondment (at the expense of the UN agencies), and seven to be charged to the new Peacebuilding Fund, to “ensure the full management of the resources received”.³¹ This was a far cry from the robust operational entity foreseen by the Brahimi Report or the High Level Panel. Thematically, there seems to be considerable overlap with the tasks of the UN Development Group and the Lessons Learned Unit in DPKO. The General Assembly, however, accepted the proposal and the Office was created, headed at the Assistant Secretary-General level.

Later that year, in August, the General Assembly received the Secretary-General’s proposal outlining detailed arrangements for establishing a Peacebuilding Fund, with as its key objective “to support interventions that are considered critical to the peacebuilding process”. The Fund, managed by the Peacebuilding Support Office and administered by UNDP, would be allowed to charge a management fee of 11% to cover costs incurred. Funds could go to any country “reviewed by the Peacebuilding Commission”, and the allocation of resources would be “informed by an analysis of critical gaps in peacebuilding that would be conducted by the national authorities and the United Nations presence in the country concerned”. This gave a “dual key” control to governments and the Secretariat.³²

While the composition of the Commission as a whole did not receive much further attention, the role of the Organizational Committee took on a larger dimension than initially foreseen, and it became the *de facto* decision making body, bringing together seven members selected by the Security Council, seven elected by ECOSOC, five top financial contributors, the five top troop contributing countries, and seven members elected by the General Assembly – a total of 31 members. Four institutional donors, the World Bank, the IMF, the European Community and the Organization of Islamic Conference received a standing invitation to participate.³³ A first annual report was expected by the end of June, 2007.

³¹ A/60/694, 23 February 2006

³² A/60/984, 22 August 2006, Annex: Terms of Reference for the Peacebuilding Fund

³³ Press release General Assembly PBC/12, dated 16 May 2007

In June 2006, the Security Council invited the Peacebuilding Commission, in first instance, to focus its attention on Sierra Leone and Burundi, and early 2007 the Commission conducted field visits to both countries to see how it could support the peace process there. At the same time, the Peacebuilding Fund made allocations of \$35 million and \$25 million respectively to these countries to meet perceived gaps. This led to a series of reports to the General Assembly and the Security Council jointly that may be indicative of the Commission's long term potential. While it may be premature to judge the Commission on the basis of such a short track record, it is tempting to do so nevertheless.

One example may be cited to illustrate the projected downward trend. In its report on its field visit to Sierra Leone (in which nine diplomats participated), the Commission gave an analysis of the peace process there that closely followed the reports already regularly provided by the Department of Political Affairs and by the UN peacebuilding mission in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL). It stressed the importance of addressing the lack of employment opportunities for young people, emphasized the need for good governance, security sector reform and similar issues, and it observed, with some disappointment, "a generally limited awareness among all partners in Sierra Leone about the work of the Peacebuilding Commission as separate from the Peacebuilding Fund. Many stakeholders in the country remain primarily focused on the disbursement of the \$35 million allocated to Sierra Leone by the Peacebuilding Fund"³⁴.

This one paragraph, while only providing anecdotal evidence, may in fact be construed as the epitaph of the Peacebuilding Commission. Earlier in this paper, we identified some key criteria for the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission that could give it added value. Here, the Commission falls short on all counts. Where independent analysis is needed to identify countries at risk, the Commission has been muted by the General Assembly. Where a proactive and preventive mandate is required to initiate interventions, its functions are merely contemplative. Where a strong coordinating capacity at the country level is required, the UN system has already built its own, without waiting for a political body to take the initiative. The Commission can only observe from the sidelines. Where robust funding is needed, the new Peacebuilding Fund, limited in scope, has been cleverly rerouted from the Commission's control to that of the Secretariat. Where new policies, methodologies or strategies have to be developed to meet the specific demands of post-conflict reconstruction, the UN Development Group is well ahead of the game. Where strong political advocacy could focus international attention, one spoiler can shut down or reduce the Commission's voice to a whisper. In fact, one may wonder whether the creation of this intergovernmental body has not just added one more layer of bureaucratic resistance. All in all, the newly minted Commission may well prove to be an optical illusion, suggesting reforms while in fact representing a hinder rather than a help.

³⁴ A/61/901-S/2007/269, 14 May 2007, para. 8

What could rescue the Commission? The appointment of a charismatic and competent High Commissioner for Peacebuilding, giving a face and a voice to the needs of countries in transition; the mandatory assessment of one percent of member states' defense budget to beef up the Peacebuilding Fund to a level with real clout; the revision of the Commission's terms of reference in accordance with the High Level Panel's original design specifications; the transfer of key operational responsibilities from DPKO to the Peacebuilding Support Office. Short of such drastic measures, the prospects of the Commission are bleak.