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Re-engineering the UN Peacebuilding Architecture

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Working Paper
The Future of the Peacebuilding Architecture Project

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Preface – From the Project Director

At the 2005 World Summit in New York City, member states of the United Nations agreed to create “a dedicated institutional mechanism to address the special needs of countries emerging from conflict towards recovery, reintegration and reconstruction and to assist them in laying the foundation for sustainable development”. That new mechanism was the UN Peacebuilding Commission and two associated bodies: a Peacebuilding Support Office and a Peacebuilding Fund. Together, these new entities have been characterized as the UN’s new peacebuilding architecture, or PBA.

This Working Paper is one of nine essays that examine the possible future role of the UN’s peacebuilding architecture. They were written as part of a project co-organized by the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. All of the contributors to the project were asked to identify realistic but ambitious “stretch targets” for the Peacebuilding Commission and its associated bodies over the next five to ten years. The resulting Working Papers, including this one, seek to stimulate fresh thinking about the UN’s role in peacebuilding.

The moment is ripe for such rethinking: During 2010, the UN will review the performance of the PBA to date, including the question of whether it has achieved its mandated objectives. Most of the contributors to this project believe that the PBA should pursue a more ambitious agenda over the next five years. While the PBC and its associated bodies have succeeded in carving out a niche for themselves, that niche remains a small one. Yet the need for more focused international attention, expertise, and coordinated and sustained assistance towards war-torn countries is undiminished. It remains to be seen whether UN officials and the organization’s member states will rise to the challenge of delivering on the PBA’s initial promise over the next five years and beyond, but doing so will at least require a vision of what the PBA can potentially accomplish in this period. The Working Papers produced in this project are intended to provide grist for this visioning effort.

Roland Paris
Ottawa, January 2010

Summary

This paper argues that if the PBC and the PBSO are to avoid long-term institutional decline, they will, over the next five to ten years, need to position themselves to play new roles – in terms of mandate, resources, procedures, and partnerships. Four potential roles are discussed. First, the PBA could seek to lead an integrated approach to conflict prevention – not just lessening the risks of war recurring in countries ‘emerging from conflict,’ but also reducing the chances of an initial outbreak in countries facing an array of destabilizing forces. Second, the PBA could occupy a more central niche in the stabilization and recovery planning process by managing an otherwise-decentralized international civilian-response capacity. Third, the PBA could be tasked with ensuring that donors and aid-receiving post-conflict states live up to commitments found in country-specific peacebuilding ‘compacts,’ which must be arrived at through a more streamlined process. And, fourth, the PBA’s work plan could be tied to the process by which countries ‘graduate’ from the Security Council’s agenda (as distinct from the PBC’s agenda, where such countries may remain for a longer period). The paper identifies the pedigree of all four proposals, which have surfaced from time to time, and assesses the chances that future circumstances might prove more conducive to their enactment.

I. Introduction

The three and a half years since the UN’s new ‘Peacebuilding Architecture’ (PBA) began operating in 2006 have been marked by considerable reflection on how the three institutions of which it is composed can best contribute to the shared objective of sustainable peace. Soul-searching over the most effective roles for the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) – individually and collectively – has taken place at internal ‘retreats,’ expert seminars, online ‘virtual’ discussions among practitioners, ‘induction’ events for new PBC member states, and a range of other forums – including, of course, formal meetings of the PBC itself.¹ Annual reports on the PBC’s work have been issued.

¹ For instance, Thomas J. Biersteker, ‘Prospects for the UN Peacebuilding Commission,’ *Disarmament Forum* (2007), pp. 37–44; and Report on the Stanley Foundation Conference, ‘Peacebuilding Following Conflict,’ New Paltz, New York, June 19-21 2009 (mimeo).

Both the Security Council and the General Assembly have debated the question of the PBA's value-added.² A number of formal and informal review documents – including more than one assessment of the PBF's terms of reference – have also afforded a glimpse into the opportunities and constraints facing the PBA.³

Because they have been conducted mainly through official (or quasi-official) channels, these reflections have tended to work within a fairly restrictive set of reform parameters that are deemed to reflect political realities. In making arguments about the future of the PBA, this paper attempts to overcome the preoccupation with what is currently considered feasible. It does not assume that any and all options are equally viable. But neither does it accept as immutably given the set of constraints that presently passes for pragmatism. The paper also includes a brief conclusion that focuses on the nearer-term future, particularly the 2010 review of the PBC.

With respect to the longer-term perspective – of roughly five to ten years – the paper argues that, over the next five to ten years, the UN system should seek to equip the PBA – in terms of mandate, resources, procedures, and partnerships – to play four key roles. First, the PBA should deal comprehensively with conflict prevention – including not just the recurrence of war in states 'emerging from conflict,' but also reducing the chances of an initial outbreak of violence in countries facing an array of destabilizing forces. Second, the PBA should occupy a key niche in the peace operation planning process by taking the lead role in establishing and managing an international civilian-response capacity. Third, the PBA should be accorded greater authority to ensure that both donors and aid-receiving states live up to commitments stated in country-specific peacebuilding 'compacts,' which must be arrived at through a more streamlined process. And, fourth, the PBA's work plan should be directly tied to the process by which countries 'graduate' from the Security Council's agenda (as distinct from the PBC's agenda, where such countries may remain for a longer period).

With respect to the paper's secondary analytical objective – providing guidance in the context of the 2010 review of the PBA – the paper argues that various near-term objectives can be pursued to increase the likelihood that these new roles become possible

The paper argues, further, that – *especially* in the near term – to maximize its leverage as an agent for comprehensive prevention, robust

² UN Doc. S/PV.5627 (31 January 2007).

³ For instance, Nicole Ball and Mariska van Beijnum, 'Review of the Peacebuilding Fund', June 4, 2009 (mimeo).

civilian-response capacity, rules-based aid relationships, and a streamlined Security Council agenda, the actors that collectively constitute the UN PBA must build on the existing interagency structures that envelope the UN system. Many of these – such as the Senior Peacebuilding Group⁴ – are relatively new and untried. Others, such as the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, have been around longer, but not much. In other words, an older ‘peacebuilding architecture’ – constructed piecemeal over time, without the aid of a blueprint – was in existence before the ‘new peacebuilding architecture’ arrived. Making the two work together will require substantial institutional re-engineering over a prolonged period, extending beyond a decade. But in the near term, these organizational sinews represent a good opportunity for the PBA to initiate steps that could lead its component institutions onto a new trajectory.

The paper is organized as follows. Section II provides an overview of the factors that must shape any assessment of the PBA’s future, including the potential impact of existing organizational structures. Sections III-VI examine, respectively, the four proposed roles outlined above. The analysis focuses on how current practice among the institutional components of the PBA has informed these proposals and the benefits associated with each. Section VII concludes by outlining some of the reasons why the proposals contained within this paper may be more feasible in five to ten years than they seem today, and indicating steps that could be taken in the interim to assist the achievement of mid-course organizational-reform benchmarks.

II. Framing a New Approach

Any assessment of what roles the PBC, PBSO, and PBF might usefully play five to ten years from now requires an awareness of three processes: (1) the gestation and birth of the PBA; (2) the PBA’s functioning to date; and (3) the prevalence, frequency, and ongoing nature of organizational restructuring throughout the UN system.

It is helpful to begin with the process through which the PBA came into being. Much that was originally planned for the PBA fell by the wayside as debates over its structure and functions dragged on, and consensus-seeking compromise took its toll. Earlier proposals for

⁴ The SPG is chaired by the ASG of Peacebuilding Support, and includes DPKO, DPA, DFS, DESA, DOCO, OCHA, UNDP, OHCHR, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, the World Bank, and the Secretary of the Policy Committee. It meets at ASG (or ‘comparable’) level.

something like the PBC provide insight into institutional gaps that, arguably, still require filling. For the purpose of this introductory discussion, four such proposals are outlined, each relating to a different dimension of the future PBA vision outlined in Sections III-VI.

First, with respect to conflict prevention, it has been noted since the *Brahimi Report*⁵ was issued in 2000 – indeed all the way back to *An Agenda for Peace*,⁶ the document that in 1992 introduced the term peacebuilding into official discourse – that the UN needed a single, comprehensive approach to conflict prevention. *Brahimi* recommended the creation of an early-warning information collection and analysis capacity within the UN, but was rebuffed.⁷ Similarly, in 2004, the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change advocated the creation of a standing mechanism through which global, regional, and country-specific security forecasts could be devised, assessed, and routinely acted upon.⁸ To the dismay of many observers and practitioners,⁹ the early-warning function was stripped out of the Secretary-General's subsequent proposals for the PBA. The need for such a capacity has not lessened.

Second, regarding the mobilization and maintenance of an integrated international civilian-response capacity, this issue too has a long pedigree in discussions about what came to be the PBA. Analytical inputs to the High-Level Panel's report emphasized the importance of creating a stand-by pool of expertise, organized into formed support teams, to restore the rule of law, begin delivering basic services, and provide effective security.¹⁰ After the Panel's report was issued, consultations facilitated by the Governments of Denmark and Tanzania received briefings on how decision-making within such a system might be organized as well as estimates of the resources required.¹¹ A combination of resistance by 'Non-Aligned' countries, the still-fresh diplomatic wounds following the US intervention in Iraq, and turf-protecting machinations by various UN entities – Department of

⁵ *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, UN Doc A/55/305-S/2000/809 (21 August 2000).

⁶ United Nations, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* – Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. A/47/277 - S/24111 (17 June 1992), paras. 55-59.

⁷ The proposal was for this capacity was to be managed by the ECPS (Executive Committee on Peace and Security) Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat – or EISAS.

⁸ United Nations (2004), *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* – Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, New York, 2004.

⁹ Among these were Richard Ponzio, *The Creation and Functioning of the UN Peacebuilding Commission* (London: Saferworld, November 2005), pp. 4-5; and Lawrence Woocher, 'Peacebuilding and Prevention,' World Federation of United Nations Associations-USA, 26 June 2006, http://wfunauna.civiblog.org/blog/_archives/2006/6/26/2057643.html

¹⁰ Shepard Forman, *Building Civilian Capacity for Conflict Management and Sustainable Peace* ('Discussion Paper Prepared for the Government of Denmark's Meeting on Strengthening the UN's Capacity on Civilian Crisis Management'), June 2004, <http://www.cic.nyu.edu/archive/conflict/Forman-%20Building%20Civilian%20Capacity.pdf>

¹¹ For example at a discussion forum held on 17 January 2005.

Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and UN Development Programme (UNDP) among them – triggered the demise of this idea.¹²

Third, with respect to promoting and overseeing rules-based aid relationships in conflict and post-conflict settings (another potential role for the PBA), the PBC's prehistory again provides clues to what might have been and still might be. Soon after the *Brahimi Report* was issued in 2000, proposals to create something like a PBC emerged. The Strategic Recovery Facility proposed in 2001 by Forman et al. was a very different organism than the PBA that ultimately came into being. But it had at its heart the objective of ensuring 'the timely disbursement of aid in a more coherent and equitable manner.' The Facility was supposed to address 'challenges that the international aid community must address to maximize its support for sustainable peace and reconstruction in the wake of conflict.'¹³ The Facility's architects called for 'stricter collaboration' in several key activities, among which were designing aid interventions, harmonizing aid conditions, coordinating assistance locally, and ensuring accountability in aid delivery and implementation. As we will see in the analysis of the PBA's performance to date, this remains a largely unmet need.

Fourth, there are precedents for considering the PBA a potential instrument for assisting 'exit' – that is, a country's 'graduation' off of the Security Council's agenda. That the PBC's continuing attention could help to ease the Council's burden was one of the reasons why Fearon and Laitin suggested that a new peacebuilding institution be established. They recommended 'a newly constructed arm of the UN to address some of the issues once handled by the now-defunct UN Trusteeship Council.'¹⁴ Discussions among member states and between them and UN officials, particularly in the months prior to the September 2005 World Summit in New York, included efforts by some highly placed UN officials to portray the PBC as something like a down payment on Security Council reform/expansion.¹⁵

In addition to these four elements of the PBA's genesis, devising a new approach to this still-young set of institutions requires a brief assessment of the PBA's experience thus far. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a comprehensive evaluation of the PBA's work to date, this section reviews the operation of its compo-

¹² Memorandum Issued on Behalf of the 'Non Aligned Movement' (New York, April 2005).

¹³ Shepard Forman, Stewart Patrick, and Dirk Salomons, 'Recovering From Conflict: Strategy For An International Response,' *Policy Paper Series* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁴ J Fearon and D. Laitin, 'Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States', *International Security*, 28:4 (Spring 2004), pp. 5-43, (p. 8).

¹⁵ Author interview with a senior advisor in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, 13 February 2007.

ment institutions, efforts to redefine the scope of their mandates, and the PBA's relations with other organizations (within and beyond the UN).

Each of the three institutional components that comprise the PBC has a mixed record. The intergovernmental PBC has worked diligently to fulfill its mandate – taking seriously its stewardship role *vis-à-vis* the first four countries on its agenda: Sierra Leone, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, and the Central African Republic. It has succeeded in focusing a considerable degree of international attention on these countries, though there is a limit to how much attention can be devoted to a particular set of post-conflict cases in a highly distractible world where new conflicts frequently erupt. Even ensuring predictable financing for these post-conflict states, another of the PBC's responsibilities, is a tall order, given the relentless frequency with which donor roundtables and 'flash appeals' for fast-breaking humanitarian crises occur.

The PBC has experimented with various means of fulfilling a core element of its mandate – 'to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding.' This task has been undertaken largely in the context of countries on the PBC's agenda. Several factors have constrained the PBC's ability to perform this task effectively. Among these are the PBC's lack of operational authority (which deprives it of the carrots and sticks necessary to ensure coherence in donor approaches to supporting post-conflict recovery and state building); the considerable distance that the first two countries on its agenda (Burundi and Sierra Leone) had traveled down the post-conflict timeline before the PBC became engaged; and the lack of clarity concerning the PBC's ability to control PBF resources. The result has been a great deal of frustration among PBC members, post-conflict countries on its agenda, and issue specialists and advocates who hoped that the PBC might help to ensure a consistent approach to peacebuilding.¹⁶

For its part, the PBSO has over the past three years gradually improved its capacity both to serve as the secretariat for the PBC and to engage in other activities consistent with its own reading of its mandate, including knowledge dissemination, participation in mission planning, and the development of indicators and benchmarks on peace consolidation. The PBSO has consistently sought and obtained high-level decisions – for instance, through the Secretary-General's Policy

¹⁶ A range of issue-specific interests had sought from the time the PBA was coming into being, to influence its priorities. On gender, see UNIFEM and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, *The UN Peacebuilding Commission: A Blueprint for Amplifying Women's Voices and Participation: A Discussion Paper*, November 2005, www.peacewomen.org/un/ngo/.../Women_and_the%20PBC.pdf. On internally displaced persons, see William G. O'Neill, 'IDPs and the Peacebuilding Commission', consultation paper (New York: November 2006), mimeo.

Committee – confirming the PBSO’s remit in particular policy domains. It is significant that the PBSO received its mandate in the form of a formal ‘decision’ of the Secretary-General nearly six months *before* the Security Council and General Assembly passed resolutions authorizing the PBA’s creation.

The PBSO has worked assiduously to demonstrate its value-added, squeezing as much as possible from its mandate. The PBSO’s mission to consolidate knowledge and disseminate best practice on peacebuilding has produced some useful reflection. The Peacebuilding Community of Practice is a worthwhile innovation.¹⁷ Expecting it to make an immediate concrete impact on the effectiveness of programming is unrealistic, but as a networking forum it serves a useful function. Other knowledge-consolidation initiatives have proven less fruitful. The PBC’s Working Group on Lessons Learned – for which the PBSO should provide the intellectual and programmatic backbone – has been the subject of complaint, both for its level of organization and the sometimes dubious value of its deliberations.

Attempts to improve the sharing of best practice – for instance, by decentralizing the process – have yielded mixed results. In August 2009, the PBSO helped to facilitate a ‘south-south’ learning process between Burundi (which has elections due in 2010) and Sierra Leone (which successfully completed its second post-conflict elections in late 2007). Sierra Leonean election officials and civil society representatives engaged in a structured dialogue with their Burundian counterparts. Such events, while no doubt useful at the margins, frequently serve as an occasion for UN officials to highlight the invaluable role they are playing. In this instance, the Deputy SRSG took the opportunity to reiterate the value of the PBC’s support to Sierra Leone’s Election Commission and police force, and the PBC’s commitment to doing the same in Burundi.¹⁸

The quality of the PBSO’s analytical work, with certain exceptions, proved disappointing. Documents produced for country-specific briefings have often provided little serious, actionable, insight into conflict/recovery dynamics in the countries on the PBC’s agenda. Despite staffing constraints (brought on partly by the workload that came with overseeing the PBF) and limited leverage (due to the PBC’s lack of an operational mandate), a more focused PBSO could have generated analysis of direct use to PBC members, which despite the PBC’s insti-

¹⁷ PBSO, ‘United Nations Peacebuilding: Practical Guidance Note,’ Discussion Paper for the UN Peacebuilding Community of Practice Workshop, 21-25 July 2008, Hiroshima, Japan.

¹⁸ ‘Burundi Adopts Best Electoral Practices from Sierra Leone,’ *Newstime Africa*, 31 August 2009, <http://www.newstimeafrica.com/archives/1948>

tutional shortcomings possess influence in their several other capacities.

The PBF is less an independent entity, less a third pillar in the peacebuilding architecture, than an instrument through which various actors, including but not limited to the PBSO and the PBC, seek to advance their ideas and interests. The PBF has funded a range of programmes across many thematic areas, including with respect to gender equality and environmental sustainability, two cross-cutting issues specifically identified in the General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions that established the PBA. There remain, however, many criticisms of the way in which the PBF has operated. These include concerns about slow implementation, severe understaffing at headquarters-level, variable quality of both priority-setting and project-approval processes at country level, poor integration between PBF-funded interventions and those supported by other forms of development assistance, and a lack of meaningful performance measures for PBF projects.¹⁹

Having gained some perspective on the PBA's complex origins and how its component parts have worked, let us note briefly a third process which may hold important implications for the PBA's future, and which therefore requires consideration by those examining ways of making the PBA more relevant. This is the disruptive presence of lengthy, multiple, ongoing and pending programmes of institutional reform. Most such restructuring efforts are located within the UN, but others range beyond as well. An example of a non-UN process is the movement for 'Aid Effectiveness' and the international machinery that propels it from one summit and agreement (the Paris Declaration, 2005) to another (the Accra Agenda for Action, 2008). This international agenda has inserted itself into the institutional DNA of the new PBA – born within months of the Paris Declaration, and a child of its time – an emphasis on promoting 'national ownership.' Ownership, in this context, refers to the existence of genuine belief among officials in aid-recipient states in the efficacy of the policies they pursue. The ownership imperative is based on the conviction that if policy agendas are imposed from abroad – by the World Bank, the WTO, the European Union – then national actors will be less committed to implementing them. This emphasis on home-grown policy solutions has been so dominant during the PBA's early years that it has constrained actors working with and in the PBA from pursuing a more activist agenda-setting role.

¹⁹ See Nicole Ball and Mariska van Beijnum, 'Review of the Peacebuilding Fund' (New York, 4 June 2009).

In the context of the UN system, seemingly permanent organizational restructuring – at various levels, of varying severity, over a diverse range of time scales – casts a huge shadow over efforts to reinvent the PBA. This is partly, but not exclusively, due to the varied expectations to which these institutional reform efforts give rise. Among the reform initiatives that have affected the PBA to date is the gradual emergence of an agreed Integrated Mission Planning Process (IMPP). The development of the IMPP was an arduous process, stretching over years. Much of the fine-grained detail is being worked out in the ‘implementation phase.’ However, over the past five years the only high-profile institutional reform that has involved the creation of a permanent intergovernmental body, besides the establishment of the PBA, was the upgrading of the Human Rights Commission to create the Human Rights Council, another institution still finding its feet. Conflicts in one body have a way of expressing themselves in others.

Another reform that affected the PBA’s early years was the adoption of the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect, which has slowly been taking root within the UN system and within international law. Some developing countries reacted sharply to the emergence of ‘R2P,’ which, like the PBC, was endorsed at the 2005 World Summit. Some fear that imperial adventures will result from the international community’s decision to take upon itself the duty of rescuing civilians and restoring security in cases where governments prove unable and/or unwilling to prevent or halt genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other high international crimes.²⁰ Critics charge that R2P is a slippery slope to the passing of state sovereignty. The dismay at this prospect has at times generated extreme bitterness and has spilled over into other forums, including the PBC, where issues of sovereignty are never far from the surface.²¹

Among the entities that undergo constant organizational restructuring are the constellations of interagency and interdepartmental standing committees, working parties, and task forces spread across the UN system. These typically assume relatively informal organizational forms, and therefore do little to bind the UN’s funds, agencies, and programmes to an agreed division of labour. As with bilateral aid programmes, specialized UN agencies respond vertically to their governing bodies and largest donors, not horizontally to (or collectively with) their counterparts working on similar issues in other UN entities. This substantial layer of interagency sinew complicates peacebuilding

²⁰ See, for instance, *Statement by Mr. Nirupam Sen, Permanent Representative, at the Informal Thematic Consultations of the General Assembly on The Report of the Secretary-General entitled “In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All” (A59/2005) (On Cluster III Issues: Freedom to Live in Dignity)*, on 20 April 2005 (New York: Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, 2005).

²¹ Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and For All* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

planning; but it also provides opportunities for PBA actors seeking additional points of leverage. These will be discussed in the context of each of the four elements of the future PBC vision outlined in the paper's next four sections.

III. Coordinating Comprehensive Prevention

The PBA can and should evolve into an institution that addresses all types, aspects, and stages of conflict-prevention. Currently, the PBA is mandated to engage only with states 'emerging from conflict.' It is confined, in effect, to one subsector of peacebuilding – *post*-conflict peacebuilding, which is conceptually distinct (but in many respects indistinguishable) from *pre*-conflict peacebuilding, which usually goes by the name of 'prevention.' Limiting the PBA to post-conflict states – for which the key issue is the *recurrence* of violence – undermines the ability of the UN system to develop an integrated and comprehensive approach to conflict-prevention, broadly conceived.

There are two dimensions to this problem – one organizational, the other operational. First, assembling core expertise on the risks of and responses to fragile states – whether statistical (e.g., based on an analysis of conflict drivers) or qualitative (e.g., based on extensive country knowledge) – requires a systematic pooling of resources. This does not happen when 'prevention of outbreak' and 'prevention of recurrence' are placed into two separate categories, prompting unnecessary organizational fragmentation. Second, there is an operational advantage to a unified system for (a) monitoring developments within and across at-risk countries; (b) sharing this information with key decision-makers in real-time; (c) charting the effects of decisions made; (d) tracking the uneven process through which countries engaged in peace negotiations fall into and out of armed conflict; and (e) providing high-quality analysis of security, economic, and humanitarian developments in states emerging from conflict.

Under a 'unified' peacebuilding approach, staff working on a country at the post-conflict end of the prevention cycle would be operating on the basis of not only current information but also longitudinal data that has been consistently collected and analyzed over time. Because the data would reach back to the pre-conflict period, a comprehensive case file would be maintained for all states at risk. The type of information the PBC and PBSO are currently able to process for the coun-

tries with which they are engaged (which for the PBSO extends beyond the countries on the PBC's agenda) provides only a snapshot. The prior context that would be provided through a comprehensive conflict-prevention threat-assessment system would offer something closer to graphic animation. The ability to trace back in time, through a chronologically arranged dossier, is a huge advantage for officials who must assess, for any given conflict situation, whether and how earlier clues had been misread and expectations mismanaged.

The proposal, in short, is to bolster the PBA's presence in the conflict-prevention field by overcoming the largely artificial division between pre-conflict and post-conflict subsectors. Indeed, a more meaningful distinction is between different *forms* (rather than *moments*) of prevention – namely, the structural, the systemic, and the operational. Structural prevention primarily concerns the use of aid instruments to bring about institutional reforms that it is hoped will address the underlying sources of conflict – the so-called 'root causes'. By contrast, an approach based on systemic prevention examines global scenarios to determine how to reduce the stresses vulnerable societies encounter as a result of transnational factors related to, inter alia, trade (licit and illicit), refugee flows, and climate change. Finally, operational prevention refers to traditional methods of managing and defusing crises – through diplomatic outreach, targeted resources, and the exertion of great-power leverage. The PBA will have assumed a significant role in the UN system if it can improve coherence and consistency across these three levels of conflict prevention.²²

There is, admittedly, a certain perversity to examining the PBA as an instrument for generalized conflict prevention. Any kind of early-warning role had been specifically rejected when the PBA's institutional design was debated among UN member-states and officials during the first half of 2005. As noted, the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change wanted the PBC to have a more expansive prevention mandate, including an 'early warning' capability that would allow the UN to track 'pre-conflicts' and other threats to the peace far more systematically, including in 'post-conflict' countries where war was far enough in the past to warrant dropping the post-conflict prefix.

The PBC's supporters had to sacrifice the early-warning capability in order to salvage the proposal to create the new Commission. There was genuine fear that the entire PBC concept could end up on the UN reformer's equivalent of the cutting-room floor. To allay continuing concerns, the Secretary-General ultimately issued an addendum to his

²² Barnett R. Rubin and Bruce D. Jones, 'Prevention of Violent Conflict: Tasks and Challenges for the United Nations,' *Global Governance* 13 (2007), pp. 391-408.

March 2005 report on UN reform, *In Larger Freedom*, explicitly revoking any suggestion that the PBC would perform an early-warning function.²³ This reflected the widespread view among G-77 members that the PBC represented another attempt by the leading Western powers to enhance their capacity to intervene in the affairs of states they deemed misgoverned. It was in the climate created by these debates – which took place in the shadow of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq – that the proposed PBC was stripped of its early-warning function.

Even though, currently, the PBA's engagement is formally limited to the prevention-of-recurrence subsector of the prevention field, the PBSO is nevertheless routinely drawn into interagency structures that deal with the full range of prevention issues. In practice, the PBSO finds itself with an indirect voice in discussions about the *initial outbreak* of violence. Spaces created by interagency structures can foster the creative extension of organizational mandates.

Part of the ambiguity that surrounds the role of the PBC in any UN-wide comprehensive conflict-prevention system stems from the question of when does a post-conflict country stop being a post-conflict country. There were some who felt that Sierra Leone was too far along the post-conflict road to constitute a good case for a new intergovernmental body dedicated to smoothing the path from peace implementation to development. Sierra Leone, in effect, was a 'post post-conflict.' A similar reaction accompanied the announcement that Guinea Bissau would be the third case on the PBC's docket. It was initially felt that a case from outside Africa – e.g., East Timor – would be selected to provide 'regional balance' to the PBC's portfolio. But more importantly, Guinea Bissau was an intriguing choice because it represented a different kind of post-conflict country – one whose brief period of open conflict had ended almost eight years earlier, in 2000. Political instability has clearly afflicted Guinea Bissau in the interim. Nevertheless, to classify Guinea Bissau as a state 'emerging from conflict' is fundamentally to redefine this category of cases.

It might be argued that the Security Council's continued interest in Guinea Bissau is sufficient grounds for locating this case in the post-conflict category, and not somewhere further up the conflict-prevention timeline. Regardless of official taxonomies, however, the profile of the Guinea Bissau case – which exhibits the classic symptoms of a fragile, *pre-collapse* state – ensures that the actions the PBC takes, and the strategies it recommends, will at least be heard within, if not exert direct influence over, the wider conflict-prevention field. Guinea Bissau possesses the chief characteristic of the archetypal pre-

²³ See 'Addendum 2: Peacebuilding Commission – Explanatory note by the Secretary-General', <http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/add2.htm>

vention case: a state that is increasingly incapable of controlling flows of goods and people across its borders. For Guinea Bissau, narcotics trafficking is the key issue, a driver for the entrenchment of gangs and guns, both of which challenge the state's supremacy.

Not surprisingly, as a bureaucratic actor the PBSO has been more receptive than the PBC to embracing a more broadly conceived conflict-prevention agenda. This is partly because the PBSO can exploit the opportunities afforded by participation in interagency structures. States, on the other hand, display great caution where issues of sovereignty are concerned. There is, in addition, a generalized concern that an excessive preoccupation with specialized 'conflict prevention' aid interventions may divert resources away from long-term development and toward piecemeal actions designed to in some instances prop up venal, non-performing governments, which can be both a cause and consequence of persistent instability.

The PBSO's ability to broaden its engagement in conflict prevention has taken place through two channels. The first is based on the PBSO's mandate to draw on and consolidate knowledge from across the UN system. In this connection, the PBSO has been engaged in the UN Interdepartmental Framework for Coordination on Early Warning and Preventive Action. The 'Framework Team' is coordinated by the UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) but includes a wide range of UN actors. The Framework Team's mission is to refine methods for anticipating the outbreak of violence, to assess the likely severity of nascent conflicts, and to suggest appropriate programmatic interventions. The Framework Team maintains an informal 'watch list' of countries to be monitored. Because it monitors *all* countries where regime stability is threatened by systemic violence, not just states 'emerging from conflict,' the Framework Team provides the PBSO a ready-made entry point into conflict-prevention discussions.

The PBSO has arguably been most successful in migrating further up the prevention timeline through its use of the Peacebuilding Fund. Because of the PBF's reliance on voluntary contributions, its managers are relieved of at least some of the bureaucratic and financial shackles that constrain most Secretariat entities. The PBF also operates at some remove from the member-state politics that afflict the PBC itself. The mandate of the PBF, moreover, has been defined to permit PBF work in countries beyond those on the PBC's agenda. Through this special 'window,' the Secretary-General, acting 'through the ASG for Peacebuilding Support,' is accorded wide latitude in using the fund to nip inchoate violence in the bud. This window may well be dominated in future by activities funded in fragile-but-not-yet-collapsed states. For

the PBF to continue to play this kind of pre-conflict prevention role, however, this division of labour between the PBSO and the PBC will likely need to be retained. Were the PBC to gain too much *de facto* control over the disbursement of PBF resources, contributions would likely decline. Remaining internally *unintegrated* holds certain advantages for the PBA.

IV. Establishing and Managing an International Civilian-Response Capacity

As noted in Section II, even before the PBC was born, proposals existed for using a PBC-like entity to ensure the international community's ability rapidly to plan for and deploy, in a variety of configurations, the civilian components of multi-dimensional peace operations. Indeed, Forman saw the PBC (and the PBSO) as a natural follow-on to efforts by governments, such as the UK and the US, to develop their own civilian-response capabilities, the shortcomings of which had become apparent soon after the US-led invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq two years later. According to Forman, a dedicated intergovernmental body was needed because of the risk that, as new crises crowded their way onto the international agenda, many post-conflict situations would 'fall into the category of forgotten or neglected crises,'²⁴ for which it would prove increasingly difficult to secure the requisite financing, expertise, diplomatic backing, and logistical support.

Since the PBA came into being, the need to empower its component parts to play such a role has been voiced from time to time. The idea of a 'standby capacity' at the international level was in fact part of the motivation for the UK's decision, while it held the Security Council's rotating chair in May 2008, to press for a focus on 'early recovery' activities in the 'immediate aftermath of conflict.' The Council, characteristically, called for a report on the subject, which provided an occasion to revisit some of the debates that attended the formation of the PBA.

²⁴ Shepard Forman, 'Working Better Together: Implementing the High Level Panel's Recommendation on Peacebuilding', *Working Paper* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2005).

The Secretary-General's June 2009 'Early Recovery' report went through several iterations, and among the points debated were the need for a surge capacity (and therefore a roster-based 'standby' system); the difficulties of maintaining and operating such a mechanism; the skill gaps that persist in the absence of pre-deployment training geared specifically to peacebuilding and state-building; and a lack of adequate financing for these and related activities. Nevertheless, the process that produced the report revealed wide agreement on the need for the international community rapidly, coherently, and efficiently to provide: 'basic safety and security' (DDR, SSR, and the rule of law), 'political processes' (elections, reconciliation), 'basic services' (health, education, sanitation), the restoration of 'core government functions' (particularly public finance), and 'employment generation.'²⁵ The report concluded that contributing to the restoration of these functions 'requires augmenting capacity on the ground by deploying additional international civilian capacity.'²⁶

A major theme of the 'Early Recovery' report was the need to engage in national capacity building as early as possible. Even so, huge external inputs are required in the immediate term. As the report indicated, some of the already-on-the-ground humanitarian capacities that establish themselves during the fighting can be 'redirected or transitioned towards early peacebuilding priorities, particularly through those entities that have a dual humanitarian and development mandate, such as UNICEF, FAO, WFP and WHO.'²⁷ This still leaves a large gap. In addition to advancing proposals to improve the recruitment of mission leadership and the management structures through which they work, the report recommended that management teams be 'supported by shared analytical, planning and coordination capacities in the form of small, unified teams of experts that can be rapidly supplemented by additional pre-identified expertise.'²⁸

The 'standby capacities' referred to consist mainly of 'rosters of pre-vetted candidates able and ready to deploy rapidly to serve as staff members of a United Nations mission or under engagement with other United Nations organizations, international financial institutions, NGOs or external partners.' The report notes that this is easier said than done: 'experience has shown that roster maintenance requires significant investment, particularly to ensure depth, range and diversity of expertise, particularly from the South.' In addition, 'expert-level rosters are rarely interoperable or coordinated and there is no single point for national and UN actors to transmit requests or obtain

²⁵ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict*, UN Doc. A/63/881-S/2009/304 (11 June 2009), Para 16.

²⁶ Para?

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Para 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Para 30.

information on what resources are available.’²⁹ The report distils the problem to its essence by explaining that ‘[e]xperts continue to be deployed piecemeal with different rules and procedures to support separate parts of the United Nations in-country presence.’ This, combined with other factors, ‘complicates their ability to come together quickly and work together effectively.’³⁰

The report recognizes the management issues – particularly concerning lines of authority extending from the SRSG to agency field staff and agency-funded consultants – that hinder the formation of effective, rapidly deployable civilian response teams. Part of the proposed solution is to develop ‘mutual accountability mechanisms’ to bind the various actors participating in the implementation of jointly agreed ‘integrated strategic frameworks’ at the country level.³¹ In the absence of hard enforcement provisions, however, such mechanisms hold little potential to spur long-term improvement.

In earlier drafts of the report – indeed as late as the draft of 18 May 2009 (less than a month before the report’s release) – the PBSO was proposed as the entity best suited to leading the development of principles and guidance on this topic. These analytical products would form the basis for training material. In the 18 May draft, the recommendation was that ‘[t]he PBSO should work with roster leads to facilitate the development of common standards, training, and guiding principles to enhance the interoperability across expert rosters within each of the typical priority areas.’³² A remit to develop guidance is traditionally a weak form of mandate. Under the right circumstances, however, the formulation offered in the draft text could conceivably have provided a bureaucratic foothold (or at least toehold) en route to a potentially larger role in coordinating international civilian-response capacity. For instance, one element of this draft proposal was for the PBSO to play a role in developing ‘common standards.’ With sufficient buy-in from other entities, the identification of standards can evolve into a system of specifying ‘minimum requirements’ for governments, international bodies, NGOs, and others that contribute to civilian-response teams. Such a system can vest those who design and operate it with significant influence.

In the final version of the Secretary’s General’s report, the PBSO was not tasked with performing this function. The revised text replaced ‘the PBSO’ with ‘[t]he United Nations Secretariat.’ To decide to nominate the ‘Secretariat’ to perform this function is of course a non-decision. Failing to specify which *part* of the Secretariat will take the

²⁹ Ibid., Para 64.

³⁰ Ibid., Para 30.

³¹ Ibid., Para 35.

³² Ibid.

lead role on this matter is to encourage continued jockeying for position among the departments and offices that consider themselves most capable of taking on the challenge. This is significant given the strong interest shown by some member-states in having UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery serve as lead actor in this area. That such a seemingly small role was a point of such intense maneuvering is an indication of the extremely defensive posture adopted by organizational units that have undergone continuous reform over at least the past dozen years. The creation of new departments, such as the Department of Field Support (DFS), has accentuated this tendency of late. If nothing else, the final text of the Secretary-General's 'Early Recovery' report made clear that it was within the Secretariat, not the agencies, that this function should reside.

Because the Secretariat-based arrangements have yet to be finalized, the PBSO retains a chance to emerge as a significant actor in this field. A number of enabling conditions would, however, need to arise for the PBC and/or the PBSO, to play an important role in this area. The first would be a genuine interest on the part of the Secretary-General to use the PBSO as a means of expanding his authority over mission planning. On an expansive reading of the Charter, the Secretary-General is free to devolve further de facto authority on any Secretariat unit he deems suitable. What deserves explicit recognition is that, to the degree that the PBSO can assume responsibility for managing a standby international civilian-response capacity – or is able to influence how such a system would work by developing standards, guidance, and training – it would be doing so as part of a centralizing tendency, an assertion by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) of more regularized powers of decision-making. This is not about coordination, but about centralization. Excessive concentrations of power are not generally desirable, but as Roland Paris has argued, the costs of pursuing coordination are high as well.³³ The key benefit of centralized authority is that it provides leverage to demand improved response from the governments and NGOs that supply recovery expertise. This can mean better availability of the highest-priority expert categories – actual corrections officers, for instance, rather than retrofitted police constables – and that the standards adhered to by contributing member states and other organizations are consistent with obligations found in UN policy.

The second condition that would have to be met is more appropriate staffing patterns. For instance, the PBSO would need much greater country-specific expertise, including desk officers with more exten-

³³ Roland Paris, 'Understanding the "Coordination Problem" in Postwar Statebuilding', in Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk (eds), *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

sive first-hand experience of (and in) the countries with which they are to work.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, as with the conflict-prevention role outlined in the previous section, the PBSO would need to make use of interagency structures and processes to increase its presence in planning for early recovery. In this case, however, there are several potential organizational entry points. Past efforts by the PBC to make use of them have been mixed, but this need not foreclose future options. One vehicle that could prove useful is the Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery (CWGER). This network has been growing both in size and in influence. It undertook work in more than 20 post-conflict contexts in 2008, developed guidance on the identification of early recovery priorities, and participated in discussions on the Secretary-General's report. An empowered PBSO, which would require the strengthening of the PBC to provide political (intergovernmental) backing, could build on this framework rather than reinventing, for the sake of it, tools that already exist.

Another existing structure that could help to facilitate the emergence of such a role is the Integration Steering Group (ISG), created in mid 2008. It describes itself in its communications with field missions as 'mandated by the Secretary-General to oversee implementation and progress on integration-related matters,' which gives it a very broad remit. The PBSO currently participates in this group, which is composed of both Under Secretary-Generals (USGs) and Assistant Secretary-Generals (ASGs), placing the ASG for Peacebuilding Support at a technical disadvantage in terms of rank, but one whose effects are in practice mitigated by the PBSO's direct reporting line to the EOSG. During the process of drafting guidance for field missions on how to devise various strategic framework documents, the PBSO, despite its small size and its lack of operational authority, was an influential player. It helped that the PBSO also participates in several phases of the Integrated Mission Planning Process, including the Strategic Assessment phase, which determines the feasibility and desirability of establishing a mission. In an August 2009 group communication, the ISG presented this guidance document to Special (and Executive) Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs/ESRGs) as a binding statement of 'minimum standards,' with respect to both process and content, which would thenceforth have to be met when preparing country-level Integrated Strategic Frameworks.³⁴ This hinted at the authority with which the ISG felt itself invested.

³⁴ 'Minimum Standards for Integrated Frameworks', document transmitted via the Undersecretary for Peacekeeping Operations, 11 August 2009.

V. Overseeing a Rules-Based Aid Relationship

For each of the countries on its agenda, the PBC develops, ‘in partnership with the national authorities,’ an ‘integrated peacebuilding strategy’ (IPBS), as is called for in the PBA’s founding resolutions. The underlying rationale for initiating such a process was the need for international assistance – whether focused on humanitarian, security, or recovery/development objectives – to be coordinated. Coordination in fact consists of three related but conceptually distinct elements. The first is agreement on a set of objectives that is logically coherent, in that the pursuit of one does not necessarily imply impairing the ability to achieve others. The second is the translation of these goals into activities that, taken together, can reasonably be accomplished by the organizations concerned, including the government of the post-conflict country under consideration. And, third, coordination implies agreement on a division of labour among the actors concerned.

The IPBSs created under the PBC’s auspices have helped in the first category – increasing logical coherence – but have been less strong on the second and third categories, having had a negligible impact on what activities are undertaken and who performs them. The IPBSs completed thus far have been structured as ‘compacts’ – solemn undertakings between post-conflict governments and their international donors, concluded under the blessing of the PBC (which itself undertakes to perform various functions, such as mobilizing additional funds), but with little real legal force behind them. Most notably, there is no mechanism for enforcing compliance. When promises are not fulfilled, there is scant recourse for any of the parties involved. Given the UN’s basis in a charter that enshrines state sovereignty as the source of all legitimacy, this is not surprising.

The basic structure of these IPBSs – or what came to be called country-specific ‘peacebuilding frameworks’ – was crafted in the PBSO and elaborated upon through the PBC’s intergovernmental process. The IPBSs to date have not been terribly innovative, either in terms of their substance or their operative mechanisms. The initial test cases for the PBC – Burundi and Sierra Leone – both resisted anything but the most anodyne ‘priorities.’ This was understandable given the profusion of strategic plans in existence, including highly detailed Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) require for access to concessional lending facilities.

The IPBSs for each of the countries on the PBC's agenda consisted primarily of a selection of agenda items from preexisting national poverty-reduction and peace-consolidation plans. The monitoring and reporting mechanisms were badly designed – victims of political compromise rather than bureaucratic incompetence – and perform accordingly. In the case of Sierra Leone, little more than a year after the original Peacebuilding Framework – however flawed – was at last agreed between the PBC and the Government, it was superseded by a new all-encompassing peace consolidation plan announced by the Government of Sierra Leone. The PBC naturally embraced this 'nationally owned' effort as a step toward self-sustaining peace. To save face it had to. But it is difficult to interpret the disappearance of the fruits of 18 months of PBC labours – the IPBS for Sierra Leone – as a particularly promising development.

A strong North-South cleavage characterized much of the PBC's deliberations during the development of the IPBSs. Again, this came as no surprise given that the topic under consideration was, in effect, the nature of the aid relationship. Aid-recipient states among the PBC's membership were, on the whole, eager to lend moral support to government officials representing the post-conflict countries on the PBC's agenda, all of which were, by definition, highly aid-dependent. For instance, when a senior Burundian cabinet member, representing his country's case before a country-specific meeting of the PBC, urged a 'lighter touch' on the 'review' and 'tracking' processes contained within Burundi's IPBS, he was warmly received among southern PBC members whose own experiences with intrusive aid donors had clearly made them sympathetic to pleas for a lot more autonomy and a bit more slack.

The recipient-friendly PBC environment provides post-conflict countries on its agenda an incentive to 'forum-shop.' That is, when post-conflict authorities are dissatisfied with the aid 'settlement' obtained through ordinary negotiating channels, the existence of the (partially PBC-controlled) PBF, an alternative finance window – one offering additional funds with less-onerous conditions – is highly prized. The PBC represents a new forum in which post-conflict governments can again plead for more aid, aid differently structured, aid with fewer strings attached, or aid for previously prohibited activities. The PBC's attraction is that its membership is far more sympathetic than the usual line-up of Western donors found in country-level aid coordination mechanisms. Consultative Groups and other such donor forums leave national authorities isolated amidst a group of aid agencies, which are never fully like-minded, but nevertheless able to close ranks to impose certain constraints on which a core consensus exists.³⁵

³⁵ Rob Jenkins, 'The UN Peacebuilding Commission and the Development of International

The PBC, with its large contingent of aid-receiving states, mostly drawn into the PBC via the GA and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) membership categories, is seen in many quarters as a place where restrictions imposed by in-country donor representatives can be revisited and potentially relaxed. In the early phases of the PBC's engagement with Sierra Leone, for instance, it became clear that the Government wanted to use the PBF, the operating procedures of which were less clearly specified then than they are today, to finance initiatives that key donor representatives in Freetown, closing ranks, had refused to fund. These included plans for an elite civil service fast-tracking programme and a poorly thought-through employment-generation scheme. Both were put on hold pending the outcome of Sierra Leone's 2007 elections, as was the further elaboration of the country's IPBS itself. In the end, the \$35 million granted to Sierra Leone via the PBF did come with fewer strings attached than the average external financing mechanism. This was not to the liking of donor representatives in Freetown, who felt their efforts at tough love being undermined.

Given all this, it is reasonable to be skeptical about the ability of the PBC to play a central (or even constructive) role in making aid relationships more rules-based. After all, earlier hopes for a similar role were not realized. For instance, when the PBC was coming into being, transnational civil society organizations, such as the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, had called for the PBC to act as a force for ensuring that human rights benchmarks were achieved.³⁶ This proved to be short-lived rhetoric, uttered more out of hope than conviction, though subsequent statements showed intermittent support for the idea.³⁷

A more potent ground for skepticism is the degree of polarization in the PBC: the deep divisions cutting through the PBC's membership arguably render it unfit as a forum for forging aid agreements (which is what, in part, integrated peacebuilding strategies are). In its current form, the PBC would indeed not serve the function of promoting a rules-based approach to aid relationships. But if tasked with administering a transparent system for distributing assistance on the basis of clearly identifiable benchmarks, a transformation of the current insti-

Norms', Working Paper for the LSE Crisis States Program, May 2008 (www.crisisstates.com).

³⁶ 'What Difference Would the Peacebuilding Commission Make? The Case of Burundi, presentation by Gareth Evans, to the EPC/IRRI Workshop on 'The Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, Brussels, 20 January 2006, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3903&l=1>

³⁷ At a later NGO consultation, another IGC representative suggested that '[t]he PBC should keep an eye on the human rights situation in Burundi', possibly with aid-sanctions as a means of pressing change. 'Informal Briefing by the Chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission, with members of the, Commission and non-governmental organizations, to discuss peacebuilding priorities in Burundi and Sierra Leone' (New York: World Federalist Movement, 11 December 2006).

tutional climate is not impossible. Operating under a mandate that required regular review and assessment of country cases, PBC members might settle into the routinized activity of official deliberation, the regularity of which may provide incentives for members to moderate their views and cultivate relationships across the North-South divide.

This paper does not spell out the details of the system over which the PBC could preside, but options include the sorts of enforceable mutual-accountability mechanisms outlined in Barder and Birdsall's much-discussed proposals for a 'Payments for Progress' approach to administering development assistance.³⁸ The advantage of such a system is that it binds donor governments to their funding commitments more closely than is typically the case in mutual-accountability systems, such as the various arrangements contained within the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) framework. An escrow account, containing pledged funds, remits payments directly to recipient-government treasuries on the basis of pre-specified performance criteria. One of the difficulties of creating such a mechanism is the lack of an adequate infrastructure for impartially operating it. In the context of post-conflict states, a strong case could be made that only the PBC possesses the breadth of membership to make such a system legitimate.

Even during the PBC's first three (sometimes shaky) years, there were indications that the North-South divide could occasionally be bridged, and that doing so could induce positive developments. Two examples can briefly be cited. Both, perhaps not coincidentally, were connected with cases where the PBC was able to provide something of a counterweight, however slight and however temporary, to the preeminence of the World Bank and the IMF over economic policymaking in the context of one post-conflict country. The dominance of the Washington-based institutions – particularly regarding macroeconomic issues, but with a fairly strong presence in most policy sectors – is evident even in many post-conflict states where, in theory, an 'integrated mission' – representing the Secretary-General, the Security Council, and the UN Country Team of relief, development, and standards agencies – is the preeminent international institution. UN actors frequently react to this situation by asserting the UN's primacy in peacebuilding (or conflict-prevention/avoidance). The PBC sought to do precisely this in both instances.

The first concerned relations between the IMF and Burundi. In 2007, the IMF was slow in disbursing the final tranche of funds from its Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility agreement with Burundi. The

³⁸ Owen Barder and Nancy Birdsall, *Payments for Progress: A Hands-Off Approach to Foreign Aid* (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2006).

Fund was in fact not reviewing the government's performance on various agreed 'benchmarks,' the achievement of which was a condition of continued financing. This was because the Fund was disappointed with the government's tepid commitment, privately conveyed, to remedying clear problems, particularly with respect to public expenditure management. A visit to Burundi by the chairperson of the PBC's Burundi configuration took place around the same time. His report diagnosed the complex governance pathologies afflicting the country. After considering his report and debating the issue, the PBC came to a strong consensus that, no matter how problematic the government's stewardship of the economy, or how egregious its failure to mend broken institutions, when a return to violent conflict was a clear and present danger, threatening to withhold funds from a government that could barely pay its army was too risky a method for seeking to improve policymaking and implementation. The PBC called for the IMF to release the funds, and for the Government of Burundi to exercise greater maturity in managing its public finances.³⁹

In effect, the PBC insisted that peacebuilding must trump economic orthodoxy.⁴⁰ The legitimacy that the UN possesses on security issues meant that the PBC was taken more seriously than the UN usually is in such matters. It helped that several key donor governments were PBC members. Once it became clear that the PBC might take a strong position on the Burundi case, senior Bank and Fund officials began engaging with the PBC for the first time. Within days, the IMF issued a waiver related to Burundi's non-fulfillment of its loan conditionalities, and the remaining funds were released, avoiding a major crisis. One cannot know whether the PBC's exertions had any concrete impact. Either way, the consensus that emerged within the PBC – that economic rationality must at times be subordinated to the logic of peace – spanned the North-South divide.

A second example concerned the priorities expressed in Sierra Leone's peacebuilding strategy. Representatives of the Government of Sierra Leone argued that delays in the restoration and extension of electricity-generation and distribution constituted a barrier to building lasting peace. The World Bank opposed bringing the PBC into what had, to that point, been a policy domain in which the Bank exercised preponderant influence. The new conception of peacebuilding (extending into the 'development' phase) was contested by PBC members who adopted a relatively time-restricted conception of peacebuilding, with a focus on the early phases of 'recovery,' or roughly the first 18 months following a conflict's conclusion. These members

³⁹ See Rob Jenkins, 'Organizational Change and Institutional Survival: The Case of the U.N. Peacebuilding Commission,' *Seton Hall Law Review*, 38:4 (2008), pp. 1327-1364.

⁴⁰ Graciana del Castillo, *Rebuilding War-Torn States: The Challenge of Post-Conflict Economic Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

considered power-generation a development issue that belonged somewhere other than the PBC. The division over the electricity issue was, somewhat surprisingly, not completely along North-south lines. In the end, the importance of the power sector to the execution of the peacebuilding consolidation plan was duly highlighted in the revised text. This opened up a broader range of ideas and approaches to dealing with Sierra Leone's power shortage than had been part of the discussion theretofore. Some PBC members took unusually nuanced stands: a developing country member that pushed for the inclusion of electricity generation as a key priority for peace consolidation in Sierra Leone also advocated a strong role for the private sector, a position usually adopted by Western states perceived as instinctively pro-business.⁴¹

As ephemeral cases of partial influence on mainly minor matters, these examples are of limited general applicability. But they offer glimpses of the moderating influence that can emerge when intergovernmental processes become routinized and open (relatively speaking) to external scrutiny. The dual legitimacy the PBC derives from its location in the UN, which has a unique mandate with respect to peace and security, and its status as a broadly representative stakeholder-based body, makes it a potentially useful instrument for deciding how assistance is to be allocated, in what form, to whom, in what quantities, with what frequency, for which purposes, on the basis of which benchmarks, and across what total length of time. It is of course difficult to persuade donors to dilute their control over national aid contributions by placing them under the authority of a multilateral body. But it is not impossible.

As with the other proposals for reimagining the PBA's role, placing the PBC at the center of a rules-based system for distributing assistance to post-conflict countries will require the PBSO, whose support to this new PBC function would be essential, to make use of existing coordination structures. Some of these may be located *outside* the UN. For instance, the PBC may want to draw on the analytical toolkits devised by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, whose work in the area of 'aid effectiveness' has provided indicators to measure the extent to which donors fulfill their commitments under the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action. The PBC and/or PBSO may, in turn, be well placed to inform the design of such indicators, tying them further to deliberative processes that engender moderation. *Within* the UN system, the Senior Peacebuilding Group may be able to serve as a vehicle for jointly developing the mechanisms through which relevant information can be collected and conveyed to PBC members.

⁴¹ Author interview, New York, 26 January 2008.

VI. Facilitating Graduation from the Security Council Agenda

As noted in Section II, above, the possibility that a new intergovernmental body might be of assistance in easing countries off of the Security Council's agenda was among the reasons why proposals to create the PBC received such broad support in the first place. Fearon and Laitin were merely the most explicit about this vision. It is widely recognized that the Security Council is ill-equipped to provide the requisite level of ongoing attention to the large volume of cases it has been forced to carry in recent years. The Council was not designed to retain a close watching brief on countries where war has ended but the restoration of state authority, the revival of economic activity, and the return of community life may take a decade or more. Recent cases of conflict relapse – such as East Timor – have made the Security Council skittish about scaling down its operations too hastily. But the desire to clear space on the Council's agenda remains strong, as does the concern to ensure that 'graduating' countries receive continued attention from an institution of some political weight. The inclusion of the P5 within the PBC makes it at least potentially able to play this role.

Ironically, the Secretary-General's 'Early Recovery' report focused on the role the PBC could play in *earlier* phases of Council engagement with a conflict country rather than on the later stages, during which the Council's involvement is brought to a conclusion. The report asks the Council to 'consider more proactively how the advice of the [Peacebuilding] Commission could contribute to its work during the early phase of the Council's consideration of post-conflict situations, for example, by providing an integrated peacebuilding perspective and specific suggestions for the Council's own engagement with the country on its agenda.'⁴²

The proposal advanced in this paper, however, concerns the later phases, without prejudice to the question of whether earlier PBC engagement would help as well. As the report put it, 'the respective roles of the Council and the Commission need to be seen as complementary and in parallel, as envisaged by the founding resolutions, rather than sequenced in a manner that would diminish the Commission's role during earlier phases where it could add significant value.' Two analytical errors can be found here. The first is to conflate 'complementarity' with operating 'in parallel.' The second is to assume that it is not possible to operate both in parallel and sequentially, when in fact

⁴² United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict*, UN Doc. A/63/881-S/2009/304 (11 June 2009), Para 82.

what is being proposed here is precisely that: the PBC would work alongside the Council, but would then become the recipient of a ‘handover’ – a form of sequentiality – when specified benchmarks have been met.

The PBSO has already been deeply engaged in the process of identifying performance measures that accurately capture progress toward self-sustaining peace consolidation. It has done this through its engagement with a number of interagency structures, including the Working Group on Transitions, which brings together a vast array of UN entities under the aegis of a collaboration between two umbrella groupings, the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). PBSO staff members, supported by PBC (and non-PBC) member-states with an interest in this question, also interacted with the UN’s interagency Framework Team, whose work was discussed briefly in Section III with respect to the development of a comprehensive conflict-prevention role.

There has never been a fixed procedure for ‘graduation’ off the Security Council’s agenda. Indeed, the issue has been clouded by confusion over the distinction between graduation in the sense of no longer remaining an agenda item, and ‘exit’ in the sense of winding down the security components of multidimensional peace operations. While there is no reason why the PBC should not take on countries far in advance of any such exit or graduation moment, and follow the situation concurrently with the Council, advising as necessary, the PBC should also be prepared to inherit cases that have become stable enough for the Council to, in effect, let go, at which point the peacebuilding or integrated mission/office would instead begin reporting to the PBC on a regular basis.

What constitutes ‘stable enough’ is in part a question of the methodologies employed to design metrics. It is also a political matter that, in the end, the Council will have wide latitude in deciding. The essential point is that there are incentives for the Council to decompress its work programme; a measurement and analysis tool validated by an impartial UN office provides cover for taking the necessary decisions on cases that constitute a lower priority. In proposing such a system, it would of course be reiterated, though it should be apparent already, that nothing (besides a P5 veto) would prevent the Council from again becoming seized of any conflict situation it had handed off to the PBC.

The PBC has already taken actions that, de facto, position it potentially to assume a role of this type. The most significant has been the

evolving practice of chairpersons of PBC country-specific configurations participating – as invitees – in Council meetings devoted to the countries concerned. This is consistent with the expert-input function implied in the language of the PBA’s founding resolutions, which designate the PBC as an advisory body, without specifically limiting the scope of its advice.

A report issued by DPKO’s Best Practices Unit concluded that ‘it is the prerogative of the Security Council to decide whether a United Nations peacekeeping operation should hand-over responsibility to another United Nations body or non-United Nations entity, and withdraw.’⁴³ The report maintained, however, that ‘the Secretariat and the United Nations peacekeeping operation have a responsibility to ensure that the Security Council’s decision is based on an honest assessment of real progress made towards the achievement of a sustainable peace.’⁴⁴ PBC Country-Specific Meeting (CSM) chairpersons who have engaged in recent field visits have been particularly welcomed by Security Council members, who appreciate an alternative point of view from that provided by the SRSG/ESRG and by the Secretary-General’s regular country-situation reports. That the CSM chairpersons are also member-states can, depending on their personal qualities and which countries they represent, carry a certain amount of weight with Council members – in most cases, more so than a presentation by a Secretariat official.

It would be through a mechanism of this type, suitably modified, that the linkage could be made between the Council and the PBC for the purpose of determining whether a conflict situation continued to merit a place on the Council’s agenda, or whether it could expeditiously and safely be passed into the care of the PBC, which would inherit some limited subset of the powers conferred on the Council, not least the right to request and deliberate upon progress reports, make recommendations to the SG on restructuring elements of the remaining UN country-level presence to correct deficiencies identified through the review process, and call on resources available to fill peacebuilding gaps. As with the other proposals in this paper, designing the precise mechanics of a graduation system would require a substantial consultation effort and likely would encounter huge resistance from several quarters.

For planning ‘[t]he transition from a United Nations peacekeeping operation to subsequent phases of United Nations engagement,’ according to the DPKO report alluded to earlier, ‘benchmarks and indicators

⁴³ United Nations Secretariat, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Best Practices Section, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (New York, 18 January 2008), Para 174.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

are required to determine when the United Nations peacekeeping operation can begin the process of hand-over and withdrawal, without jeopardizing ongoing efforts to consolidate the peace.’⁴⁵ The ‘hand-over’ may not be only to national authorities, but to a multilateral body, of substantial legitimacy and political weight, that can exercise oversight for an extended period of time. The PBC may best fit this description.

VII. Conclusions and Prospects

The PBA has done well to survive its traumatic birth and infancy, even if the quality of its performance has not been what some had expected and others hoped. The organizational components that make up the PBA – the PBC, the PBSO, and the PBF – possess their own characteristics and face unique incentive structures. Each has demonstrated a capacity to seek out and exploit new opportunities within the loose structure provided by a fragmented UN system. It is on the basis of this impressive degree of adaptability that the scenarios outlined in this paper have been predicated. There is nothing inherent in the PBA’s institutional design that impels it toward playing the sorts of roles indicated.

On the other hand, there are reasons why, say, five years from now moving in some of these new directions may seem more feasible than it does today. First, there is sustained pressure from various constituencies to continue exploring ways of increasing the perceived fairness of the system of global governance, both within and beyond the UN. This includes perennial agenda items such as Security Council reform, for which there remains nothing remotely approaching consensus. To the extent that reinforcing the powers and functions of the PBA can be sold as a further down-payment on future Council reform, revising the PBA’s mandate becomes an attractive means of buying time.

The second reason why a more propitious environment for redefining the PBA’s mandate may materialize over the coming years is improved relations between senior officials of the UN and the IFIs. There has for some years been evidence that field staff and management have developed a more constructive *modus operandi*.⁴⁶ A spirit of active partnership is increasingly evident at leadership/HQ levels as well. This has been manifested most visibly in the process of refining

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Para 177.

⁴⁶ Madeline O’Donnell, 2005, *UN Peacekeeping and the World Bank: Perceptions of Senior Managers in the Field, DPKO External Study November 2005.*

joint post-conflict needs assessment instruments. This has extended beyond UNDP to include a large number of other concerned UN entities (including the PBSO). In addition, agreements have been signed at senior management levels to ensure the interoperability of UN- and IFI-managed multi-donor trust funds. If reasonable cooperative institutional relations can be maintained, then the idea of the PBC and the PBSO playing some of the roles outlined in this paper may be less off-putting to Bank and Fund officials than might otherwise be the case.

Finally, we must consider one factor that has been largely implicit in the analysis thus far: the sequencing of, and ‘interaction effects’ among, the four roles proposed in this paper. It may be that the changes that primarily involve the PBSO, such as establishing and managing an international civilian-response standby capacity, attract less political opposition and are therefore easier to implement. The proposed institutional roles that involve the PBC, on the other hand, tend to impinge more directly and obviously on other powerful actors – such as donor governments (in the case of managing a rules-based aid relationship) or the P5 (in the case of bringing the PBC into the process of clearing cases off the Council’s agenda). These differences may call for a tailored approach to sequencing.

Another consideration that may need to be borne in mind when determining the order in which such changes might be introduced is the question of how the performance of one role can affect the ability to be considered for, or effectively undertake, another. So, for instance, were the PBC and the PBSO to begin playing a more active role in conflict-prevention in countries that have not yet ‘emerged from conflict,’ they may build up the contacts, resources, and goodwill necessary to take on some of the other challenges outlined in this paper, such as managing international civilian-response capacity. Similarly, experience gained in devising the operation of a rules-based aid-disbursement system may prove useful in winning access to the kinds of forums necessary to participate in identifying the benchmarks and indicators to be used when assessing a country’s readiness to graduate off the Security Council’s agenda.

Even with these enabling factors, reinventing the PBC will be an uphill struggle. The need for consensus in order to authorize institutional reform is a powerful ally of the status quo. A five to ten-year timeframe may, in retrospect, seem woefully insufficient and short-sighted. This is all the more reason why interim measures are necessary. The prospects for the longer-term (five to ten year) vision for the PBA to materialize will hinge largely on decisions taken in the near term, particularly on questions related to organizational design and institutional practice. It is worth briefly discussing some of the inter-

mediate objectives that could constitute process milestones en route to the functional profile envisaged in the preceding pages.

The advantage of the four functions identified in this essay is that they can be incrementally achieved, or at least demonstrated, rather than remaining merely aspired to. Each can be realized in parts. All four functions are amenable to indirect/unofficial approaches, allowing ‘sheer presence’ and routine to begin exerting a legitimizing influence on the performance of these roles. The interagency structures identified earlier in the paper – the organizational sinews that help to hold the UN together – will also be crucial.

With respect to the comprehensive prevention function, there may be fewer near-term obstacles than is commonly assumed. Both DPA and DPKO have shown themselves more amenable in recent years to deeper and more sustained partnerships with other UN entities pressing for a more ‘inclusive’ approach to conflict prevention and resolution. Both DPA and DPKO have worked with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), for instance, to address the many issues that stem from conflict-related sexual violence – a phenomenon that cuts across prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Through DPA’s Mediation Support Unit and DPKO’s Best Practices Unit, as well as by means of other less-obvious entry points, the PBC and PBSO may be able to begin a discussion about the merits of building a better UN-wide predictive capacity, which could serve as the basis for future collaboration between all three entities.

As for enhancing the international community’s ability to plan for and rapidly deploy the civilian components of multidimensional peace operations – whether during peacekeeping or peacebuilding – there is evidence that the PBC and PBSO are making headway. The PBSO is playing a lead role in an interagency analytical exercise designed to map international civilian-response capacity. Depending on how it is handled, this role could be a useful springboard to a more permanent position in the management of an integrated system of functionally specific rosters. The current patchwork system offers no single mechanism for consolidating, let alone fulfilling, requests for assistance.

The milestones on the way to the PBC assuming anything like the third function – overseeing the conduct of rules-based aid relationships – are even more difficult to discern. There is, first off, a large element of chance involved, depending on which countries happen to fill the various PBC quotas in upcoming stakeholder-election cycles. If progressive donors take control, an initiative to set truly mutual

benchmarks might get off the ground. But this is not necessarily likely. Similarly, the role the PBC can play will depend on what transpires in other aid-management forums beyond the UN. The key point is that the PBC has the potential, if Northern and Southern countries learn to moderate by transcending their interests/identities, to become a site in which trade-offs between security and economic objectives can be assessed and appropriate decisions taken in countries on the PBC's agenda. The PBC will need to prove itself first, however, which makes the selection of future post-conflict cases for the PBC's agenda of the utmost importance.

Finally, there is the question of 'graduation.' There are indications of increased interest in this question among PBC members. Unfortunately, the initial wave of enthusiasm has come with respect to possible ways of determining whether a given post-conflict country is ready to graduate off the *PBC's* agenda, when logically speaking, decompressing the *Security Council's* agenda should be the first order of business. All countries currently on the PBC's agenda are also on the Council's agenda. The PBC, one can only assume, will not be taking any country off of its agenda that the Council considers a matter worthy of its continued scrutiny. Once a country comes off the Council's agenda, there would indeed be a need to determine how long thereafter the PBC ought to keep the country under review. But in the meantime, the PBC would stand a better chance of enhancing its organizational profile if it were to seize the opportunity to shape the Council's procedure for deciding when countries no longer constitute a fit 'matter' for it to be 'seized of.' This can be done without changing the PBC's mandate if its membership is willing to take the initiative. In fact, as a general rule, actions which require no formal authorization – to expand a mandate or increase direct funding – are likely to remain the primary means by which the PBA's component institutions go about pursuing new roles for themselves. A more fundamental form of re-engineering will take considerably longer and require a commensurably deeper well of good fortune.

List of Working Papers – The Future of the Peacebuilding Architecture Project:

Kwesi Aning and **Ernest Lartey**: *Establishing the Future State of the Peacebuilding Commission: Perspectives on Africa*

Thomas Biersteker and **Oliver Jütersonke**: *The Challenges of Institution Building: Prospects for the UN Peacebuilding Commission*

Cedric de Coning: *Clarity, Coherence and Context: Three Priorities for Sustainable Peacebuilding*

Rob Jenkins: *Re-engineering the UN Peacebuilding Architecture*

Carolyn McAskie: *2020 Vision. Visioning the Future of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture*

Erin McCandless: *In Pursuit of Peacebuilding for Perpetual Peace: Where the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture Needs to Go*

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Necla Tschirgi: *Escaping Path Dependency: A Proposed Multi-Tiered Approach for the UN's Peacebuilding Commission*

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