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INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COUNTRIES EMERGING FROM CONFLICT: A Review of Fifteen Years of Interventions and the Future of Peacebuilding

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The full report can be accessed online at:
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The establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission is regarded by many as the most prominent achievement of the September 2005 World Summit at the United Nations (UN). With attention now focused on the operationalization of the Peacebuilding Commission, together with the Peacebuilding Support Office and a Standing Fund for Peacebuilding, this paper provides a far-reaching review of the main features and trends in international assistance to countries emerging from conflict over the last fifteen years.

The paper traces the evolution of international peacebuilding and identifies key gaps that require continuing attention in the future. In spite of the considerable efforts and resources invested in years of practice, it is widely recognized that peacebuilding activities so far have been undertaken by a multitude of actors in absence of an overall political strategy. The main challenges are not the lack of a theoretical basis and lessons learned, but rather the failure to produce from them a commonly agreed doctrine and to translate it into meaningful guidelines on the ground. This paper argues that though progress is being made on the ground, the United Nations system and donor agencies have failed thus far to address satisfactorily three gaps discussed in the paper: political leadership, strategic coordination, and a comprehensive financial mechanism.

The creation of the Peacebuilding Commission may represent a historical opportunity to improve the international response to post-conflict countries. While this paper does not focus directly on the Peacebuilding Commission, it does question whether the new Commission will succeed in effectively addressing the main gaps identified above. Because many modalities of the Commission are still under discussion at the moment of writing, it is difficult to assess how the Commission will operate, much less its impact on the ground. However, if the past is any guide, it appears that the UN system will still be struggling with these shortcomings after the establishment of the Commission.

INTRODUCTION

- After World War II, the number of violent conflicts, and particularly internal conflicts, steadily increased, reaching its peak in the early 1990s. The end of the Cold War and the spirit of cooperation that prevailed within the Security Council provided the international community with a historic opportunity to address this dramatic trend.
- The United Nations found itself at the heart of the challenging process of developing new tools to respond to crises, which led to the rapid establishment of new structures and mechanisms in the areas of conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance to victims of conflict. At the same time, the concept of peacebuilding emerged as the combination of efforts by various actors to help war-torn societies avoid a relapse into conflict and to establish the conditions for sustainable peace.
- While statistics suggest that the international community has achieved some progress in curbing the number of ongoing conflicts, it is also recognized that "roughly half of all countries that emerge from war lapse back into

violence within five years," as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated in his 2005 report *In Larger Freedom*.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

- As a classical cross-cutting issue, peacebuilding does not fit within the exclusive jurisdiction of any single international body. At the United Nations, cooperation among the Security Council (SC), the General Assembly (GA), and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)—which is strongly advocated, at least in principle, by member states—has not led to the creation of an effective mechanism.
- The key question is, how will the Peacebuilding Commission—an advisory body under the joint jurisdiction of the three main UN organs, the SC, the GA, and ECOSOC—provide much-needed political leadership to the plethora of actors involved in peacebuilding activities on the ground?

COORDINATION WITHIN THE UN SYSTEM

- The lack of coordination within the UN system of the many actors involved in peacebuilding presents multiple challenges that are further

Type of conflict	1960	1970	1980	1990	1992	1998	2003
All conflicts	17	26	39	49	51	39	29
Intrastate	14	20	36	47	50	37	27
Interstate	1	3	3	2	1	2	2
Colonial	2	3	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Data elaborated by the author, based on Lotta Harbom & Peter Wallensteen, "Armed Conflict and its International Dimensions 1946-2004," *Journal of Peace Research* 62, no. 5 (2005), pp. 623-635.

aggravated by the absence of political leadership. Competition within the UN Secretariat and among UN agencies, funds, and programs has survived all repeated attempts to establish coordination mechanisms.

- Coordination on the ground shows signs of improvement, particularly when a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) is involved in a double capacity as head of the UN peace mission and coordinator of the UN family in the country. However, the ambiguity of most missions' mandates in terms of their peacebuilding responsibilities, and the inconsistency between the missions' tasks and budgets may lead to confusion and overlap between the peace mission and the UN country team.
- How can the Peacebuilding Commission, assisted by the Support Office, be empowered to facilitate better coordination of the UN system?

COORDINATION AMONG THE UN AND OTHER ACTORS

- The challenge of coordination goes beyond the UN system. While the Bretton Woods institutions—the World Bank and International Monetary Fund—play a key role in post-conflict assistance, a large number of bilateral donor agencies are increasingly involved in peacebuilding. This proliferation of players further complicates the task of coordination, with their mandate and financial mechanisms differing significantly from those of the UN. Increasingly, bilateral donor agencies have been willing to accept ad hoc coordination mechanisms.
- Another key challenge in the broader coordination framework is the role of national

authorities, namely the “local ownership” of peacebuilding activities.

- Will the Peacebuilding Commission have sufficient buy-in to bring all relevant actors to the same table and enable them to work more effectively?

FUNDING

- Another difficulty derives from the complex mix of funding sources currently available. Current funding instruments are largely perceived as inadequate on four main levels: 1) the overall level of resources; 2) the timing of disbursements; 3) distribution among different peacebuilding activities; and 4) the “quality” and impact of aid. The inadequacy of the funding mechanisms not only creates problems of coordination and competition among agencies, but also generates an endless discussion on the myth and reality of the insufficiency of current financial support. Financial assistance provided by the Bretton Woods institutions—and the related questions of debt relief and clearance of arrears—is a crucial component of the global picture, but remains quite separate from other economic assistance tools.
- Recent experiences with multi-donor, multi-purpose trust funds managed by the UN Development Programme and the World Bank offer new perspectives for establishing a common framework for all donors, one in which local authorities can gradually assume growing responsibilities.
- Will the Standing Fund for Peacebuilding serve to overcome the shortcomings of the currently fragmented financial framework?

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