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Background Paper

Ensuring sustainable peace: Strengthening global security and justice through the UN Peacebuilding Architecture

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Abstract

While demand for international peacebuilding assistance increases around the world, the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) remains a largely ineffective and marginal player in the peacebuilding field. There are many reasons for the PBA's shortcomings, including its original design, the Security Council's uneasy relations with the Peacebuilding Commission, turf battles within the UN system, and the changing nature of conflicts that require for peacebuilding interventions. In its current incarnation, the likelihood of the PBC becoming a critical player in peacebuilding—even for second or third level conflicts—is very slim. It simply does not have the political clout, the expertise or the resources to assert itself. Yet, for the international community, the opportunity cost of keeping the PBA afloat in its current form is quite high. This is an unsustainable state of affairs. This paper examines various options for making the PBA a more effective instrument of conflict management and peacebuilding

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1. Introduction

2015 is an important marker for the United Nations. It has been 70 years since the signing of the UN Charter, 20 years since the pioneering work of the Commission on Global Governance and 10 years since the World Summit endorsing the Human Rights Council, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm and the Peacebuilding Commission. Scholars agree that, despite its many flaws, the UN remains the centerpiece of global governance. They also recognize that the UN is now operating in a significantly different environment than the 1940s, 1990s or even 2000 when the Millennium Declaration was issued. Any effort to assess the UN's role and contributions to global governance today needs to start with a realistic analysis of the dramatic changes in the international environment. This is also true for an assessment of the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) which, along with the Human Rights Council and R2P, stands out as an important innovation in an otherwise fairly unreformed United Nations.

Several broad trends characterize the current international environment since the end of the Cold War: the emergence of centrifugal and centripetal forces that generate interdependence as well as various types of conflicts; the recognition of the links between peace, security and justice at the domestic, national and international levels; the proliferation of actors that are involved at the international level; the imperative for more concerted action at the global level to deal with complex transnational problems; and the constraints of the current institutional infrastructure of global governance.

The UN's PBA reflects many of the tensions and difficulties confronting global governance today. It was established to bring a concerted approach to the international community's fragmented responses to countries emerging from conflict. It was expected that the PBA would serve as an innovative experiment to break away from "business as usual" by myriad international actors involved in peacebuilding; thus, while based at the UN, PBA would be a catalytic mechanism to bring a new approach to peacebuilding by convening all relevant actors, mobilizing new resources and serving as a repository of knowledge, policy and practice. The last 10 years have seen significant changes in the international context and much has been learned from the operations of the PBA.

Commissioned by the Hague Institute for Global Justice, this paper reviews the PBA's operations since 2005 in order to better assess its contributions to peacebuilding and to generate new ideas about strengthening its role in an increasingly crowded peacebuilding environment. However, the PBA's contributions cannot be examined in isolation from the larger body of knowledge and practice in peacebuilding, especially since the Peacebuilding Commission's work has so far been confined mainly to the six countries on its agenda and has, unfortunately, remained quite marginal to the larger international peacebuilding enterprise. Accordingly, the first part of the paper focuses more broadly on international peacebuilding policy, practice and research in the last twenty years as a backdrop for the PBA's work which is covered in the rest of the paper. It is hoped that the juxtaposition of the PBA's operations against international policy and practice will serve to shed light on important points of disconnect between the UN's peacebuilding architecture and the multi-faceted challenges of peacebuilding that continue to confront the international community. The paper concludes by examining the implications of this gap for PBA and for global governance as an input for the important work of the Commission on Global Security, Justice, and Governance as well as for the 2015 review of the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture. It is fortuitous that these processes are taking place concurrently with the international negotiations around the post-2015 agenda as well as the independent review of UN peacekeeping operations and special missions. Collectively, these efforts promise to generate multi-faceted analysis and new thinking on the requirements for more effective global governance for peace and security.

2. Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Assessing Twenty Years of Policy & Practice

One thing is certain: in the last twenty years, the international community has learned much about peacebuilding.¹ When the term peacebuilding entered the international lexicon with Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 report *An Agenda for Peace*, the knowledge base was quite thin.

Throughout the 1990s, a series of ad hoc, piecemeal and multilateral interventions in various countries ranging from El Salvador and Cambodia to Sierra Leone provided the international community with a wealth of experience—leading to new policies, entities, programs and practices. The creation of the PBA at the UN in 2005 further institutionalized peacebuilding—confirming its importance as part of the UN's repertoire of conflict management tools to assist countries to overcome the legacies of violent conflict and to prevent their lapse or relapse into conflict.

Yet, peacebuilding remains an elusive and highly-contested concept which has almost as many definitions as users. It was originally presented in *An Agenda for Peace* as part of a progression of discrete interventions from peacemaking and peacekeeping to post-conflict peacebuilding. However, it quickly became clear that post-Cold War transitions from war to peace were not unilinear and could not be addressed sequentially. Confined by fragmented mandates and institutional silos, early peacebuilders sought novel approaches to support war-torn societies through multilateral action. As diverse actors working on human rights, humanitarian affairs, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and development became engaged in conflict-affected countries, there was a proliferation of activities, projects, programs, and policies that collectively came to be known as peacebuilding. Throughout the 1990s, as demand for international assistance increased, the knowledge base of peacebuilding expanded exponentially drawing from a growing body of policy and practice.

The international peacebuilding project was altered significantly after 9/11 as it became part of a larger security agenda and was appropriated by military and security institutions as governments began to see conflicts in the periphery as a threat to their vital national interests. Thus, peacebuilding became conflated with other priorities such as counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, regime change and state building in entirely new contexts such as Afghanistan and Iraq. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the co-optation and/or expansion of the peacebuilding agenda for broader geo-strategic purposes and its consequences for actors working in conflict contexts to assist local efforts to build peace. It is recognized that instability and fragility in conflict-affected countries has interlocking national, regional and international dimensions and that the United Nations has the responsibility to deal with varied conflict contexts. Nonetheless, restoring peace in the aftermath of occupation or as part of counter terrorism and counter-insurgency operations is a different enterprise than peacebuilding. Accordingly, the following section focuses on multilateral approaches aimed primarily at addressing the needs and priorities of conflict-affected countries since this is where the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture has the most to offer. The lessons outlined below are therefore specifically related to the work of the PBA.²

¹ Both the academic and policy literature on peacebuilding has grown exponentially over the last two decades. Most recently two parallel four-volume edited compendiums have been released: Roger Mac Ginty, ed., *Sage Major Work on Peacebuilding* (London: Sage, 2014) and Vincent Chetail and Oliver Jütersonke, eds., *Peacebuilding* (Abington: Routledge, 2014).

² For elaboration of these insights, see Necla Tschirgi, "Rebuilding War-Torn Societies: A Critical Review of International Approaches" in *Managing Conflict in a World Adrift*, eds. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (Washington D.C.: USIP, 2015).

Over the last twenty years, the international experience with peacebuilding has been quite varied. There is no coherent peacebuilding doctrine with clear goals, operational principles, and commonly accepted criteria for success in different contexts. Multiple actors define peacebuilding to correspond with their own institutional mandates and capabilities. Moreover, given the wide variation among conflict-affected countries, evaluating the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions is a subjective and highly contingent enterprise with differing interpretations of success.³ There is little agreement as to whether post-conflict peacebuilding should have minimalist goals to prevent renewed conflict or maximalist goals to address the root causes of conflict. While a middle ground has emerged to define success in terms of ending violence and instituting effective governance, it is far from easy to determine what this would entail in different contexts.⁴ There are ongoing debates and multiple agendas that characterize the field of peacebuilding—both at the conceptual and operational levels. The heated arguments between mainstream/problem solving vs. critical analysts of peacebuilding at the academic level are matched by the operational competition between humanitarians, development specialists, peacekeepers and peacebuilders on the ground. Nonetheless, several key conclusions can be drawn about the international community's experiences with peacebuilding since the early 1990s.

Peacebuilding is Context-Specific: Since no two countries or conflicts are alike, peacebuilding requires context-appropriate strategies that have to be tailor-made. Nonetheless, there are general principles that are indispensable to designing a sound strategy.

Peacebuilding is Political: Contemporary conflicts are predominantly intrastate in nature, albeit with complex regional and international dimensions. Peacebuilding entails intervention in what were traditionally considered sovereign affairs of a state. Accordingly, peacebuilding strategies need to be firmly grounded in an accurate understanding of the relations among multiple domestic and international actors with different motivations and agendas. How these relations are perceived, defined, and managed is an essential aspect of peacebuilding.⁵

Peacebuilding is a Multi-faceted Enterprise: While conflict represents the breakdown of politics, it is often fueled by interlocking social, political, economic, and environmental problems that require multifaceted strategies. Thus, peacebuilding lies at the intersection of security and development, with distinct pillars encompassing public safety, rule of law, governance, justice, reconciliation, socio-economic reconstruction and psychosocial rehabilitation among other priorities.⁶ The breadth of issues that require attention is vast and cannot be addressed through sector-specific and siloed approaches. One of the main challenges is how to design effective

³ There is a growing body of literature on peacebuilding evaluations. Nonetheless, the field is fraught with difficulties, not least because of the fluidity of the phenomenon to be evaluated. See, for example, Paul F. Diehl and Daniel Druckman, *Evaluating Peace Operations* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2010).

⁴ For a useful discussion of this, see Charles T. Call and Elizabeth Cousens, "Ending Wars and Building Peace," *Coping with Crisis Working Paper Series* (New York: International Peace Academy, 2007).

⁵ For an early formulation of this point see Elizabeth Cousens and Chetan Kumar, with Karin Wermester, eds. *Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001). For further exploration of the relations between domestic and external actors, see Michael Barnett and Christoph Zürcher "The Peace-builder's Contract: How External Statebuilding Reinforces Weak Statehood" in *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, eds. Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk (Abingdon, Routledge, 2009); and Christoph Zürcher et al., *Costly Democracy: Peacebuilding and Democratization after War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

⁶ One of the earliest and most comprehensive frameworks is the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Task Force Framework which was jointly produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) in May 2002; available as Appendix 1 in Robert C. Orr, ed., *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (Center for Strategic & International Studies: Washington, DC, 2004). The framework has since been adapted by other international actors, including the United Nations and the African Union.

responses to concurrent problems that cannot be addressed sequentially through humanitarian assistance, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and development.⁷

Peacebuilding is an Endogenous Process: Peacebuilding requires country-led, nationally owned, and inclusive strategies that reflect local needs and aspirations and provide a long-term vision for development.⁸ The involvement of women and representatives of civil society at all levels is essential. Despite lip service to local ownership, the international peacebuilding agenda remains largely an externally driven, short-term project that is dependent on strategies designed in donor capitals or foreign headquarters.

Peacebuilding Needs to be Anchored within Local Structures, Systems, and Processes: Because conflict results in the destruction or weakening of capacities at multiple levels, a central plank of peacebuilding is strengthening local institutions and capacities.⁹ External assistance that replaces systems of local resilience or drowns out local initiatives is bound to be counterproductive.

Addressing Regional and Transnational Factors is Essential to Peacebuilding: Although contemporary conflicts generally occur within states, they are not exclusively domestic. Factors such as cross-border flow of arms, refugees, natural resources and transnational organized crime and terrorism--along with security strategies designed to deal with them--fuel and exacerbate local-level conflicts. Peacebuilding requires efforts to identify and address cross-border and transnational drivers of internal conflicts.

The Nature of Conflict is Constantly Changing as Should Peacebuilding: The causes and dynamics of contemporary conflicts have been changing radically. The interplay between poor governance, corruption, drug trafficking and violence in fragile states such as Guinea-Bissau; the relations between environmental degradation, natural disasters and urban violence in Haiti; the far reaching impacts of Ebola in West Africa are reminders of the ever-changing nature of conflict contexts in an interconnected world.

While these general lessons are now widely (though not universally) accepted, their implementation continues to pose serious problems for the international system. For good or ill, the international community (composed of myriad actors) is now an essential part of the peacebuilding enterprise—bringing new agendas, ideas and resources into conflict contexts. Thus, one of the major challenges of peacebuilding is reforming how the international community supports peacebuilding. From the widely accepted injunction to “Do No Harm” and calls for greater coherence and collaboration among different actors to efforts to mainstream peace and conflict impact assessment in international assistance, there has been a paradigmatic change in the policy discourse about the role of external actors.

Yet, despite the lessons summarized above, the results of international peacebuilding assistance remain quite fragile and, at best, mixed. There is, however, a growing body of knowledge on factors that accompany successful peacebuilding interventions. Among others, these include: concerted and timely action by international actors, integrated strategies aligned with national priorities, sustained political engagement, and the commitment of timely and adequate resources. Although

⁷ The literature on competing priorities in peacebuilding is rapidly growing. See, for example, Chandra Lekha Sriram and Suren Pillay, eds., *Peace versus Justice? The Dilemma of Transitional Justice in Africa* (South Africa: University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal Press, 2009).

⁸ Local ownership has become a popular research topic. See, for example, Béatrice Pouligny, *Peace Operations from Below: UN Missions and Local People* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006). Also see, Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, ed., *Rethinking the Liberal Peace: External Models and Local Alternatives* (London: Routledge, 2011)

⁹ Volker Turk, “Capacity-Building” in *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*, ed. Vincent Chetail (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press).

there are context-specific factors for success (such as the nature of the war termination and the character of the ensuing political process) there is strong evidence that wavering political engagement, competing international agendas, and lack of adequate financial resources have contributed to the mixed record of international peacebuilding. Indeed, unlike the post-World War II era which occasioned high levels of political commitment and financial resources for the reconstruction of Europe and Japan, international assistance for peacebuilding remains meager as reflected in the level of aid to fragile and conflict-affected countries.¹⁰ With military and security budgets continuing to dwarf international peacebuilding assistance, donors' heightened focus on aid effectiveness has worked against conflict-affected countries—a fact that is increasingly recognized by the donor community. Thus, perhaps one of the most persistent challenges of the peacebuilding is the mismatch between the number and diversity of conflicts that require sustained, coherent and long term support and the fragmented, competitive, under-resourced and cacophonous international system engaged in peacebuilding. This, of course, was the reason for the creation of the PBA at the United Nations and, from a global governance perspective, the PBA's performance needs to be tested against its contributions in improving international assistance for peacebuilding.

3. The UN Peacebuilding Architecture: Looking back over the First Decade (2005-2015)

The UN's Peacebuilding Architecture (consisting of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Fund and the Peacebuilding Support Office) was formally established in December 2005. The main rationale behind the PBA was to ensure that the UN system does not take its eyes off countries emerging from conflict too soon and to provide a sustained and concerted approach to the international community's hitherto ad hoc, fragmented and piecemeal support for post-conflict peacebuilding.

In the last ten years, the PBA has certainly come a long way in its understanding of peacebuilding through its experiences with the six countries on the Commission's agenda and the more than 20 countries it has engaged with through the Peacebuilding Fund. There have been many academic studies and formal and informal reviews and evaluations of the PBA, including the 2010 five-year formal review which was co-facilitated by the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and South Africa. The 5-year review was a serious, consultative and sobering exercise.¹¹ In presenting their review, the co-facilitators acknowledged that, although a groundbreaking initiative, the PBA (and more specifically the PBC) had not met the expectations of its founding resolutions and was at a crossroads: "either there is a conscious recommitment to peacebuilding at the very heart of the work of the United Nations, or the Peacebuilding Commission settles into the limited role that has developed so far." They opined that the membership favored the former option and hoped that the review would "serve as a wake-up call, helping to strengthen the collective resolve to deal with peacebuilding in a more comprehensive and determined way."¹²

¹⁰ For an interesting comparison of the experiences of the United States and the United Nations in rebuilding war-torn societies, see the two volumes by James Dobbins et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008) and Dobbins et al., *The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2005).

¹¹ It is important to note that whilst the review was appropriately called the "Review of the PBA", it dealt primarily with the Peacebuilding Commission, with PBF and PBSO seen as complementary pillars. In this paper we also focus primarily on the PBC because of its centrality to the PBA and its essential political role.

¹² United Nations, A/64/868-S/2010/393.

A similar, more comprehensive review is underway for the PBA's 10-year anniversary. As the 2015 review kicks-off, the general sense is that not much progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the 2010 review. Perhaps as a result, a more consultative and grounded approach has been followed with the preparation of the 2015 review. The members of the PBC, with the support of the PBSO and several think tanks have embarked on a process of consultations that has produced terms of reference and recommendations for a review process that promises to result in a much deeper and more anchored review than was the case in 2010. The proposed review process will look beyond the PBC, and even beyond the PBA, and situate UN peacebuilding in its wider environment and context. It will start with a series of country case studies that is intended to give the review an evidence-based foundation. The cases studied will include both countries where the PBA has been active as well as some where the PBA has not been involved to enable a kind of control-group comparison. A group of 7 experts have been appointed by the Secretary-General, in consultation with member states, to undertake the case studies and to generate findings and recommendations. Finally a number of Permanent Representatives will assess the findings of the experts and suggest recommendations in an inter-governmental process so as to increase member state ownership in the findings and recommendations of the 2015 PBA review.

The ten-year review offers the opportunity to both revisit the original vision and purpose behind the PBA as well as to consider how the PBA can be strengthened so that it can realize its full potential. However, there is a strong sense among PBA watchers that the 2015 review will not differ significantly in its findings from its predecessor since the PBA has not radically changed its modus operandi nor has it significantly expanded its scope. Moreover, five years is not a long time in the evolution of a complex intergovernmental body. Thus, while anticipating the findings from the 10-year review, it is useful to analyze and build on the conclusions of the 5-year review in assessing the options for PBA's future.

The 2010 year review started by emphasizing 6 issues to frame the exercise: (a) the complexity of peacebuilding; (b) the imperative of national ownership; (c) the illusion of sequencing; (d) the urgency of resource mobilization; (e) the importance of the contribution of women; and (f) the need for connection with the field. These, of course, correspond closely to the essential principles of peacebuilding which are widely accepted. The review then looked at the operationalization of PBA, focusing on peacebuilding in the field, PBC's role and performance, key relationships, and the roles of the PBSO and the PBF.

The review noted that the PBC's experience with the (then) 4 countries on its agenda at the field level brought several issues into relief, namely, national ownership and capacity-building; developmental aspects of peacebuilding; the need for coherence and coordination; and the importance of the regional dimension. It argued that the PBC lacked vision, has struggled to mobilize resources and was associated with high transaction costs as a result of the direct engagement of the chair and members of the country configuration in the design and approval of country-level strategic frameworks.¹³

Regarding the PBC's structure and performance, the review identified continuing challenges and tensions and recommended that the Organizational Committee should focus on strategic thematic issues, partnerships and developing mutual accountability frameworks while the country-specific configurations should focus on their core mandate while exploring possibilities for multi-tiered engagement. The review questioned why a more diverse range of countries had not been referred to the Commission and, recalling the preventive dimension of the PBC's mandate, suggested that it "be utilized to the full".

¹³ Sarah Hearn, Alejandra Kubitschek Bujones & Alischa Kugel, *The United Nations "Peacebuilding Architecture": Past, Present and Future* (New York: Center for International Cooperation, 2014) 7.

In terms of key relationships, the review acknowledged that interaction with the Security Council had been limited and fell short of the expectations of 2005 but saw the potential for creating “a new dynamic between a more forthcoming Security Council and a better performing Peacebuilding Commission”—especially with respect to the PBC’s involvement in the Council’s consideration of peacekeeping mandates. It also considered the PBC’s relations with the General Assembly and ECOSOC as remaining “insufficiently developed” and recommended various steps. Regarding partnerships in general, it noted the growing sense of the importance of stronger relations between the United Nations and the World Bank and suggested more structured input by the World Bank into the work of the PBC.

Finally, reviewing issues within PBSO, the review recommended strengthening its resources and a better use of existing resources as well as increasing PBSO’s weight within the Secretariat to better reflect the priority of peacebuilding. The 2010 review also found that the PBSO struggled to find its niche, noted its staffing problems and questioned the quality of its strategic and policy work.¹⁴ The 2010 review further called for a stronger synergy and better communication between the PBC and the PBF.¹⁵ In sum, the review clearly identified the fundamental challenges confronting the new entity five years into its operations.

4. The UN Peacebuilding Architecture: Lessons Learned

The core question that should form the basis of the 2015 review of the PBA is whether the PBA has been able to address the systemic gap that it was meant to fill. Has the PBA contributed to an improvement in the coherence of the UN system and in its coordination with other international actors? And if not, how should the UN system and the PBA be reformed to enable it to better address these challenges?

It is important to start by acknowledging that the UN system’s peacebuilding work is much more comprehensive than the PBA. Many, if not all the UN’s funds, agencies and programmes work in post-conflict settings and at a minimum their work in these countries need to be conflict-sensitive. However, in many cases they also engage in peacebuilding work. In addition the UN’s Special Political Missions (SPMs) and peacekeeping missions also have peacebuilding mandates. The establishment of the PBA has contributed to a greater awareness in the UN system of peacebuilding as a useful framing for a large sub-set of the work of the UN. Peacebuilding can be seen to serve as a UN wide framework for all its peace, human rights and development related work that has a peacebuilding theory of change, i.e. that is aimed at preventing a (re)lapse into conflict. Moreover, the UN system’s peacebuilding approach is now coordinated by the Senior Peacebuilding Group, chaired by the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support.

The operationalization of the PBA has also highlighted the need to strengthen peacebuilding coordination across the UN system. The work of the PBC country configurations and the evaluations of the PBF have confirmed the degree to which the UN, and the international system more generally, lacks coherence and often works at cross-purposes with itself. Much more needs to be done to

¹⁴ In their 2014 study, Hearn, et al. also concluded that the PBSO had not yet “fulfilled the function of coordinating peacebuilding policy and best practices for which it had been intended.”

¹⁵ The PBF has been widely acknowledged as the best performing part of the PBA. It has made significant progress with improving its internal processes, including notably its results management framework, following several independent reviews including a major review in 2013. Jups Kluyskens and Lance Clark, “Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund,” 2014, accessed on September 2, 2015 at: <http://www.unpbf.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-Report-May-UN-PBF.pdf>

improve coherence among the international actors involved in peacebuilding, and the PBA should be able to play a much more meaningful role in this regard.

There has been a marked **increase in the attention the UN system** has devoted to internal coherence as well as to coordination with national counterparts and other international actors. This is at least partly due to the establishment of the PBA and the subsequent performance of the PBC, especially the early work it did to encourage the development of country-level strategic peacebuilding frameworks. Even if some of these experiences initially resulted in high-transaction costs for those involved, it laid the foundation for what is now widely accepted as **best practice, namely that the relationship between national authorities, local civil society and international partners need to be anchored in country-level compacts or strategic frameworks.**¹⁶

However, much more remains to be done and the 2015 review is likely to give particular attention to how the PBA in general, and the PBC in particular, can further refine and enhance its role in helping to stimulate and support **coherence and coordination within the UN system, between the UN and other international partners and at the country-level between international, national and local partners.**¹⁷

Another core question is whether the establishment of the PBA has had an impact on **how we understand and view peacebuilding** today, and what the role of the PBA is when it comes to peacebuilding policy coherence. One of the main achievements of the PBA is that the work it has undertaken since its establishment a decade ago has resulted in the peacebuilding concept, despite its ambiguity, developing from an obscure idea used by relatively few experts, to a concept that is now widely used, broadly understood and generally accepted and welcomed, not only in New York and Geneva, but also in Bujumbura, Kinshasa and Goma, Monrovia, Free Town, Bangui, Khartoum and Juba.¹⁸

There is now a shared understanding of peacebuilding as peace consolidation, which means a focus on preventing a (re)lapse into violent conflict in those context where a peace process has been established, or preventing an outbreak of violent conflict in those transitional contexts where peacebuilding is applied as a **preventative measure**. The PBF in particular has helped to expand the concept of peacebuilding beyond the traditional post-conflict view of peacebuilding to now include support to political transitions in order to prevent a lapse into violent conflict. The PBA has thus contributed to making the need for **early and sustained engagement more of a mainstream and widely accepted principle**. Much more needs to be done to further operationalize this concept, and the PBC, supported by the PBSO and others could play a much more central role in assessing and consolidating the knowledge generated by peacebuilding practitioners, evaluators and researchers, and to provide inter-governmental sanction for the **strategic principles and operational guidelines that should direct the UN system and the international peacebuilding community**.

The strong emphasis on resource mobilization resulted in peacebuilding being understood – in the 2005-2010 period - as essentially programmatic development with a peacebuilding theory of

¹⁶ Richard J. Ponzio, "Strategic Policy Frameworks as Peacebuilding Tools: A Comparative Study," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 5, no. 2 (2010) 6-19.

¹⁷ Michael von der Schulemburg, *Rethinking Peacebuilding: Transforming the UN Approach* (New York: International Peace Institute, 2013) 13.

¹⁸ Cedric de Coning, "Clarity, Coherence & Context: Three Priorities for Sustainable Peacebuilding," *NUPI & CIPS Working Paper*, uOttawa CIPS & NUPI's The Future of the Peacebuilding Architecture Project (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

change. As a result it was a discourse dominated by western donors and, in the PBC country configuration, it was assumed that the chairs had to be chosen from among the big bilateral donors. However, over the 2010-2014 period, **the understanding of peacebuilding has changed, and it is now essentially viewed as political and local.** Over this period, what was understood as the essential added value of the PBC has also shifted from resource mobilization to political accompaniment. This new understanding was partially informed by the failures of the largely 'technical-programmatic' approach to peacebuilding and state-building, and the relapses in South Sudan, Timor Leste, and the Central African Republic (CAR). The PBA has thus contributed to our understanding of peacebuilding as a concept, as well as how it can be programmed and operationalized.

The work of the PBA has also helped to highlight various **enduring challenges embedded in the peacebuilding concept.** Of these, the one that is perhaps the most challenging for a UN architecture that is essentially New York based, anchored in Member States and forced to work through the UN system, is **national and local ownership**, including especially the role of local civil society.¹⁹ The core of the problem with national and local ownership is not that the principle has not been accepted – almost every policy document recognizes that peacebuilding cannot be sustainable without national and local ownership – but that we have failed to internalize the rather radical implications of this principle, namely that **peacebuilding is essentially local.**²⁰ The international actors, including the PBA, still dominate the peacebuilding space, with the perverse result that international peacebuilding assistance more often than not generates the opposite effect of what it aims to achieve: it removes much needed feedback, it prevents local institutions from learning, it generates dependence, it contributes to fragility and it undermines self-sustainability.

5. The PBA between Concept and Reality

As Mats Berdal noted in 2009: "...the commission's evolution from the conceptual drawing-board to its current incarnation offers important clues about the political and practical obstacles that lie in the way of a more effective and coordinated international approach to peacebuilding. As is often the case, the UN here reflects deeper fault lines within the international system. These, more than any other set of factors, are likely to determine whether, and in what form, international peacebuilding will remain the kind of growth industry it has been for much of the post-Cold War era."²¹ Indeed, there is a big gap between the concept of PBA as a radical solution to the many challenges inflicting international peacebuilding, the limitations of its original design and the constraints of the international system.

In concluding that the PBC has under-performed, one should thus take some of the structural constraints facing the PBA into account. Indeed, the 2015 review would do well to start by revisiting the PBA's inherent limitations. Firstly, the PBC is a subsidiary advisory body to the the Security Council and the General Assembly. As the primary organ for peace and security, the UN Security Council has jealously guarded its role, limiting the space available to the PBC. The original intent was that the PBA would help the international community and the UN system to remain engaged with countries emerging out of conflict for longer than was the norm in the 1990s to avoid their re-

¹⁹ Eli Starnes, "Values, Context and Hybridity: How Can the Insights from the Liberal Peace Critique Literature be Brought to Bear on the Practices of the UN Peacebuilding Commission?" *NUPI & CIPS Working Paper*, uOttawa CIPS & NUPI's The Future of the Peacebuilding Architecture Project (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

²⁰ Cedric de Coning, "Understanding Peacebuilding as Essentially Local," *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 2, no. 1 (2013).

²¹ Mats Berdal, *Building Peace after War* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009) 136.

lapse into violent conflict. The Commission has so far been effective in this regard in the cases of Burundi and Sierra Leone, and its role in Liberia has generally been positive. However, the PBC was not able to get the Security Council to pay sustained attention to Central African Republic (CAR) and Guinea-Bissau before CAR relapsed into violent conflict and Guinea-Bissau succumbed to yet another unconstitutional change of government. The forthcoming elections in Burundi will be an important litmus test of the PBC's ability to serve as a strong advocate in mobilizing international support to prevent violent conflict. The 2015 review would need to give attention to ways in which the PBC can constructively play an advisory function without overstepping its role vis-à-vis the Security Council. One example to consider is the Human Rights Council (HRC). The HRC is a subsidiary body to General Assembly and yet it has been able to play a more prominent role than its advisory status suggests. This may be because the HRC uses tools such as its country reports to good effect, and because the High Commissioner for Human Rights has been particularly active and outspoken. The review might consider whether the PBC should generate products, like peacebuilding audits, or reports on peacebuilding coherence in the context of country-level compacts, to further focus its advice and generate an information-based platform for its role.

Secondly, the departments of political affairs (DPA) and peacekeeping operations (DPKO) in the UN Secretariat, and the large development agencies, funds and programmes in the UN system have also jealously guarded their respective bureaucratic fiefdoms. None of these bodies have the advantage of their own dedicated Member State body. They are thus aware of the potential danger the PBA poses to their own role and function and thus take steps to limit the maneuvering space of the PBSO and PBF as well as the Assistant Secretary-General for peacebuilding support. In fact, the seniority of the head of the PBSO is symbolic of this constrained role, as comparable offices and departments - DPA, DPKO and OCHA - are all headed at the Under-Secretary-General level.

Thirdly, the PBA is a New York based entity with limited capacity to monitor developments on the ground. Yet there is significant pressure on the PBA to be field relevant. This has resulted in the PBC country configuration model, and whilst it has had some early results in demonstrating the field relevance of the PBA, it has also had negative consequences. The SRSGs or ESGs in the field have complained about the confusion caused by multiple voices representing the UN system, and in general the approach had high transaction costs for all involved, including the national authorities that had to engage with the PBC and the processes it initiated. This has contributed to fewer than anticipated countries requesting to be on the agenda of the PBC. The 2015 review will need to seriously assess the country configuration model and consider whether field relevance cannot be achieved in other more efficient ways.

Fourthly, there was a strong assumption that being on the agenda of the PBC would result in additional resources being mobilized for the country concerned. This assumption was probably based on a perceived linkage between remaining on the international agenda, more aid and avoiding relapse. It is difficult to argue a counter-factual, e.g. how much peacebuilding aid Burundi would have received if it had not been on the PBC agenda over the last decade, but the perception is that those countries that are on the PBC agenda did not benefit from significantly more resource mobilization than those that were not. Perhaps the assumption that the PBC could generate resources was flawed from the outset because decisions on aid are not made by Permanent Representatives in New York. Nor are they likely to have too much influence on aid flows as they typically relate to the political rather than the development constituencies in their own ministries of foreign affairs. This assumption has had a further negative consequence for the PBA. The emphasis on resource mobilization has given the traditional donors a specific prominence within the PBA and especially within the country configurations where it was assumed that resources would only be mobilized if the country configuration were chaired by a prominent donor. The result was that a PBC discourse emerged that reflected a traditional donor culture, and that those that were not donors were unlikely to be elected to positions or play a prominent role in the debates. Once this

was noticed specific attempts were made to address this imbalance, for instance by asking Bangladesh to chair the Organizational Committee, but by then the damage was done and most non-Western countries have developed the habit of not participating in PBC meetings at Ambassadorial level. This is a pity because the PBC has potential as a Member State body with broad representation, to play an important role in helping to forge understanding across the North-South and East-West tension lines. The review should give serious consideration to correcting the donor bias in the PBA design, as well as to how it can make better use of the potential of the PBC to use its broad representation to generate coherence across Member States when it comes to the role the UN should be playing in peacebuilding.

The 2015 review will thus have to assess the PBA not just in terms of its original design but also in the context of the real political and bureaucratic space that it was allowed to operate. Yet, the PBA also has to be judged as an instrument of global governance. After all, it was created to fill an important gap in the international infrastructure of peace and security.

6. Implications for Global Governance

As the analysis above has sought to demonstrate, in the last twenty years peacebuilding has firmly established itself as an important agenda for the international community. With the creation of the PBA in 2005, peacebuilding was institutionalized and became part of the UN's repertoire of conflict management tools to assist countries to overcome the legacies of violent conflict and to prevent their lapse or relapse into conflict. While the PBA has evolved and consolidated itself in the last ten years, it remains a marginal actor in the larger field of peace and security. Far from becoming an indispensable "niche" entity in peacebuilding, it is not even "primus inter pares" in an over-crowded peacebuilding field—as reflected in the number of countries on its agenda and its limited influence.

All evidence indicates that the international community will be called upon to support a wide range of conflict-affected and post-conflict countries to get on the path to sustainable peace for the foreseeable future. This means that peacebuilding will continue to be a growth industry and the PBA, along with other key actors, will have to demonstrate its utility and relevance in an increasingly competitive field. There are three basic options for the future of PBA:

1. Better articulating its specific niche and value-added in the peacebuilding field and making the necessary changes to ensure that it delivers on it effectively and credibly;
2. Fundamentally transforming it to play a larger role internationally; and
3. Continuing in its current course, with only minor adjustments.

We believe that in view of the current shifts in the global order and the resulting uncertainties option 2 is unrealistic. Some have suggested, for instance, that the PBC should become a Council, in the hope that such a transformation will invigorate the PBC in the same way that becoming a Council invigorated the Human Rights Council. However, in the case of the Human Rights Council its transformation from a Commission to a Council essentially consisted in a change of how countries could be elected onto the Council. The fact that countries with a questionable human rights record could be elected to the Human Rights Commission questioned its credibility, and once this issue was addressed by creating a Council, it resulted in a more credible human rights body. In the case of the PBA, however, the membership of the Commission is not the problem and it is thus unclear how transforming it into a Council will address the challenges discussed in this paper unless, of course, the Council is created as an independent organ with a new mandate distinct from the other organs. Indeed, the Trusteeship Council remains an empty shell that could be converted into a Peacebuilding Council. However, there is no evidence that member states are disposed towards

such an architectural reform when other pressing reform initiatives have been systematically thwarted. Moreover, the political costs of such a reform would probably outweigh its benefits.

Whilst option 3 is not unlikely, as the response to the 2010 review has shown, we believe it is undesirable. For the international community, the opportunity costs of continuing the PBC in its current form is simply too high. As has been observed, the PBC “sucks up way too much oxygen” from other parts of the peacebuilding field in terms of political, human and financial capital. Thus, we are of the opinion that, based on the 2015 review, the PBA’s comparative advantage should be better formulated and targeted institutional and operational reforms should be undertaken to make the PBA a more effective instrument of conflict management and peacebuilding. On the basis of the preceding analysis, we offer the following recommendations:

- The PBC’s scope of work has to be strengthened to deal with more countries and issues, and to play a more proactive and preventative role in international peacebuilding;
- The PBC’s main focus should be to provide attention, accompaniment, advocacy and resources for countries where international attention and support are most likely to diminish when the violent phase of their conflict subsides and they are no longer on the agenda of the Security Council;
- The PBA (especially through the PBF) can continue to serve as a quick response, timely, and risk-taking funding mechanism to address critical needs that are unlikely to be met through the traditional donor channels;
- Finally, the PBA can position itself (through PBSO) as a knowledge hub for peacebuilding, both for the PBC and the larger UN community.

In order to implement these recommendations, the PBA will have to revise its current working methods and approaches in the following ways:

- The three standing configurations of the PBC (OC, CSMs and WGLL) need to be reconstituted to better correspond to the actual needs and roles identified above; the division of work between the various configurations should be re-considered, and in its place the PBC could develop a full work schedule that consist of both thematic issues as well as country-cases that would enable it to cover many more countries, but with less intensity than was hitherto the case;
- The PBC needs to reform the way it relates to peacebuilding countries. Instead of the CSM model, the Commission could take a leaf from the Human Rights Council and engage with peacebuilding countries via a regular report through which the PBC draws attention to those peacebuilding aspects where progress has been made and those where more attention is necessary. Such reports will generate a product that all the peacebuilding actors can use as a common frame of reference and can help to draw the attention of all stakeholders to both immediate concerns related to threats for relapse as well as the longer term capacity building needs;
- The PBA needs to work more closely with UN Peacekeeping Missions and the Special Political Missions through the SRSGs, for instance, by involving them in contributing to the country reports that the PBSO would develop for the PBC;
- The PBC needs to demonstrate how its work differs from that of the Security Council by focusing more on the medium to long-term peacebuilding needs of the countries on the PBC agenda, whilst leaving crisis management to the Security Council;

- The PBC (through the PBSO) needs to distill critical lessons from the work of the PBC to date and share them systematically with relevant stakeholders, amongst others by organizing thematic discussions in the PBC that are properly prepared and that result in reports that provide system-wide guidance on the selected themes; and
- The PBC needs to engage actively with new actors, new policies, new opportunities such as the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, the New Deal, and the post-2015 development agenda.

Thus, over the next 10 years the PBA's niche should be to deepen and strengthen its own competence in effectively and sustainably accompanying peacebuilding in diverse contexts so that it can become the "must go" entity in the UN for countries that seek sustained multilateral support and advocacy at the international level. While it is unlikely that the PBA or any other single entity can become the main actor for peacebuilding, PBA should at least aspire to be "primus inter pares" in terms of its dedicated and sustained attention to the conceptual, political, and operational challenges of peacebuilding in order to help shape international policy and practice. In retrospect, it appears that the creation of PBA was the easier challenge; the bigger challenge is in ensuring that the new architecture actually serves the purposes for which it is created.

Policy Implications

1. Given the number of fragile and conflict-affected countries that face a high risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict, peacebuilding is an essential tool in the international community's conflict management toolkit.
2. Peacebuilding is political and local. External assistance for peacebuilding should primarily be tailored to prevent countries from lapse or relapse into conflict.
3. Having been created to serve as a catalytic mechanism to bring a concerted approach to international assistance for peacebuilding, the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture has fallen significantly short of meeting expectations.
4. Short of disbanding it altogether, there are three main options for the PBA:
 - 4.1. Better articulating its specific niche and value-added in the peacebuilding field and making the necessary changes to ensure that it can deliver on it effectively and credibly
 - 4.2. Fundamentally transforming it to play a larger role internationally
 - 4.3. Continuing in its current course, with only minor adjustments
5. We believe that the most viable option is to significantly reform and reconfigure the PBA so that it can become the "must go" entity in the UN for countries that seek sustained multilateral accompaniment and advocacy at the international level beyond the crisis management provided by the Security Council.

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