

THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION: AN EARLY ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, established in December 2005, was designed to strengthen efforts to consolidate peace in countries emerging from civil war. It has three broad aims: first, to bring coherence to the activities of peacebuilding actors around a shared strategy; second, to marshal resources and commitments in support of this strategic vision; and third, to enhance decision-making processes relevant to conflict-affected countries across UN bodies and the international financial institutions. Two years into the life of the Commission, this article assesses its performance in these three areas and argues that progress has been limited by three main factors: the Commission's lack of clarity on the nature of a peacebuilding strategy; its vague interpretation of the mandate to marshal resources; and ongoing tensions between intergovernmental organs for influence over the Commission. There is evidence that the Commission is developing institutional momentum and learning important lessons from its first cases, but it will need to capitalise on them rapidly to achieve worthwhile results.

Introduction

In 2003, with UN member states bitterly divided by the recent Iraq war and increasingly concerned about the relevance of the institution in the 21st century, Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced to the General Assembly that the UN had reached a 'fork in the road'. In an effort to re-evaluate and reinvigorate the collective security architecture for all member states, Annan created a 'High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change' to take stock of threats to international and human security and make recommendations to improve the UN's response. Its report, which stressed the interconnectedness of contemporary threats, became the basis for a major reform initiative in 2005. The reform

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process culminated in an intergovernmental summit in September 2005, which faltered as disagreements persisted on multiple issues, including terrorism, non-proliferation, development, human rights and the use of force. One area of consensus, however, concerned the consolidation of peace in war-affected countries. The high-level panel argued that civil war, state weakness, poverty,

disease, environmental degradation, international crime and even terrorism were connected in a deadly cycle. It said not enough was being done to help vulnerable states make the transition from civil war to sustainable peace, pointing to new evidence that states emerging from civil war – such as Haiti, Liberia and more recently Timor Leste – face an alarming risk of relapse into conflict (Collier *et al* 2003).¹

The high-level panel pointed to important weaknesses in international assistance for consolidating peace agreements. First was the lack of a shared strategy among the fragmented community of bilateral donors, financial institutions, regional actors, the UN system and NGOs, each pursuing a 'laundry list' of goals. Second, with resources disproportionately directed towards peacekeeping and emergency humanitarian needs, insufficient attention was being paid to the medium-to-long-term tasks such as building sustainable institutions (Collier *et al* 2003:7). The UN Security Council had recently extended the duration of its engagement and scope of its activities in post-conflict contexts, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had set up 'ad hoc advisory groups' to mobilise resources and attention. But there was no body tackling the broader problem of strategic deficit by bringing peacebuilding actors together.

Against this background, the panel recommended the creation of an intergovernmental organ empowered to monitor and pay careful attention to countries at risk of conflict, ensure concerted action by donors, agencies, financial institutions and other actors, and mobilise financial resources for sustainable peace. It recommended that the Security Council, in consultation with ECOSOC, establish a 'Peacebuilding Commission'.² It also recommended a standing fund for peacebuilding to give financial support to nascent governments and critical peacebuilding activities, and a specialised peacebuilding office under the Secretary-General to provide substantive input for the Commission and strategic guidance to the UN system (United Nations 2004:83-85).

Although the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) was the 'low-lying fruit' of Annan's reform process, negotiations over its structure were extremely contentious. Three months after the 2005 summit, the General Assembly and Security Council passed corresponding resolutions to establish the PBC as an intergovernmental advisory body (General Assembly 2005b; Security Council 2005). The body was to meet in different configurations, including a central 'Organisational Committee' comprising 31 member states, including seven from each of the Security Council, ECOSOC and General Assembly, as well as five top financial donors and five top troop contributors to the UN. That body was to determine the agenda and assign specific cases to 'country-specific' groupings of representatives from the country under consideration, contributors of finance, troops and civilian police, other countries in the region, regional and sub-regional organisations, regional and international financial institutions and the senior UN representative in the field.³ Meanwhile, a 'Peacebuilding Fund' (PBF), a multi-year standing fund designed to support several countries simultaneously, was launched in October 2006 and a 'Peacebuilding Support Office' (PBSO) was created in the UN Secretariat.

During the lengthy debates over structural issues, the paragraphs describing the PBC's role – references to bringing together actors, marshalling resources, proposing strategies, focussing attention and improving coordination – became muddled and convoluted. The

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confusion led to criticism, with some suggesting a new intergovernmental body was not what was needed to address peacebuilding needs (Murithi & Scanlon 2006) or that its 'advisory' status would detract from its effectiveness. (Ponzio 2005:5-7). The intergovernmental nature of the PBC was in fact key to its design because its

function was to forge agreement on shared strategies at the multilateral level and then to marshal and monitor resources and commitments in support of them. The high-level panel did not conceive of the PBC as a peacebuilding actor like the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the Security Council, but instead as a forum for high-level political

engagement among peacebuilding actors. Contrary to concerns about the PBC's 'advisory' status, the key to success was not the PBC's authority, but the shared interest of its members in a more coherent approach to peacebuilding.

For the purposes of this article, and based on the author's interpretation of the language in the resolutions, a three-fold conception of the PBC's role will be used to assess the body's progress:

- First, the PBC was intended to enhance coherence among peacebuilding actors through the mechanism of a shared strategy based on a joint understanding of conflict drivers and peacebuilding priorities in a given country. Although no specific meaning was ever attributed to the term 'strategy', it was understood that it should include agreement on priorities and their sequencing, and be specific enough to result in real change in activities on the ground. The key questions are: Has the PBC improved the quality of strategic engagement by actors involved in peacebuilding? Has it resulted in shared priorities and objectives that make sense in relation to the society in question?
- Second, the PBC was to marshal resources and other commitments in support of the strategies developed. The PBC's strategic engagement was intended to create a conducive environment for donors, and its members were expected to use political leverage to rally additional and sustainable donor resources, in addition to filling some funding gaps themselves. The key questions are: Has the PBC managed to marshal and track financial resources and other commitments in support of its strategies? Has its attentions made any difference to the flow of support to peacebuilding environments?
- Third, the PBC was designed to induce greater coherence at the level of the UN system's engagement in post-conflict countries, by bridging the substantive gap between the Security Council's 'security' lens and ECOSOC's 'development' lens. It was also intended to strengthen the developing links between the UN and the Washington-based international financial institutions (IFIs), particularly the World Bank, which dwarfs the UN's role in long-term recovery.⁴ In his own report to the membership, the Secretary-General argued that the participation of the IFIs was 'vital' (United Nations 2005:32). The key question is: Has the PBC improved decision-making processes between the major intergovernmental bodies of the UN and between the UN and IFIs?

This article presents an overview of the PBC's performance based on these key questions and is intended to balance more detailed and country-specific analyses provided elsewhere.⁵ Ultimately, the only true measure of the PBC's success will be its impact on the ground, and there is no doubt that this has so far been limited. However, at this early stage of the PBC's existence, it is also important to consider whether the PBC has sufficient institutional dynamism to learn from its first cases. Although the following analysis finds the PBC's success has been limited in all three areas outlined above, it is cautiously optimistic as to the Commission's ability to evolve into a more effective peacebuilding role in coming years.

Enhancing Coherence among Peacebuilding Actors

The PBC's impact on the coherence of peacebuilding efforts has been mixed, due in part to the slowness of the body to get off the ground. After months of acrimonious discussions over the election of members, the inaugural meeting of the PBC took place on 23 June

2006, after which it held initial ‘country-specific meetings’ (CSMs) on its first two cases, Sierra Leone and Burundi.⁶ By the end of 2006, it had identified overlapping thematic priorities for each country. For Burundi, the priorities were good governance, the rule of law, security sector reform and community recovery. For Sierra Leone, they were youth empowerment and employment, democracy and good governance, judicial and security sector reform, and capacity building of public administration (PBC 2006a, 2006b). At this point, the PBC seemed unclear what to do, and the overall impression was of many meetings and new acronyms, but an absence of dynamism.

Only in 2007 did the PBC’s focus shift decisively to the country level, where consultative processes began under the leadership of the governments and with the support of the PBC, the new PBSO and the UN missions on the ground. The purpose was to engage stakeholders in the development of an ‘integrated peacebuilding strategy’, a document which would reflect agreement on priorities and form the basis for the PBC’s role in marshalling and tracking commitments. In Sierra Leone, that process was delayed by the prospect of contentious parliamentary and presidential elections in August 2007. The elections resulted in a change of government under Ernest Bai Koroma and enabled a ‘Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework’ to be agreed by the PBC in December. Meanwhile, the PBC approved a ‘Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Burundi’ in July 2007, and later a mechanism for monitoring that framework. These documents were seen as important achievements, albeit at the level of process, and ushered in a new sense of optimism about the PBC’s prospects.

The consultative processes leading to agreement on these ‘strategies’ provided important learning experiences for the PBC. In both countries, the processes were overly burdensome, involving lengthy timelines and many cumbersome meetings. Another problem was the failure to properly sequence the activities of the PBC and decisions regarding the PBF.

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Following the December 2006 announcement that both countries were eligible for PBF funds, the engagement of actors on peacebuilding priorities was disrupted by a parallel process for determining how this additional pool of donor money should be spent (ActionAid *et al* 2007). The error in sequencing PBC and PBF activities distracted

attention from the PBC process, but worse, it fostered an operational, project-based approach that detracted from the strategic focus of PBC engagement. When attention later shifted to strategic priorities, it seemed the cart had been put before the horse.

Another common weakness in the PBC’s process of strategy development concerned the involvement of civil society actors, a contentious topic in the UN intergovernmental arena. The inclusion of one or two civil society representatives at PBC meetings in New York did not contribute to meaningful strategic debate. Inevitably, these individuals struggled to reflect the views of a tremendously diverse constituency while contributing to debates about priorities and sequencing. Meanwhile at country level, CSOs involved in the process tended to be concentrated in Bujumbura or Freetown, resulting in a distorted picture of needs and a lack of involvement from rural areas. Despite widespread commitment among many PBC members to promote civil society engagement, finding effective ways to channel civil society views remains a challenge. In June 2007, the PBC finally adopted ‘Guidelines for Civil Society Engagement’, but these are considered by many to be overly restrictive.

Beyond these common factors, however, the consultative processes in the two countries took very different forms. In Burundi, the process contributed to a more systematic

engagement of peacebuilding actors by a government previously reluctant to engage in open dialogue, fostering more constructive relationships between the government, international partners, opposition groups and participating civil society actors. In Sierra Leone, however, the political climate in the lead-up to elections was less conducive to meaningful strategic dialogue, and the discussions held before the elections did little more than facilitate understandings of the PBC at the country level. The process restarted under the new government is at a preliminary stage, and it is not yet clear whether the political will exists to produce worthwhile and inclusive debate.

The strategies resulting from the consultative processes in Sierra Leone and Burundi bring security, economic and political factors into a common focus, highlighting the linkages among them. For example, Burundi's 'Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding' acknowledges obstacles to the return of thousands of former refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a conflict risk as well as a constraint on socio-economic recovery (PBC 2007b:10). Sierra Leone's 'Peacebuilding

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Cooperation Framework' recognises 'youth unemployment' as a root cause of war and a challenge to peace consolidation, as well as a factor in long-term economic growth, private sector development and foreign investment (PBC 2007c:4-5). Both strategies tend to outline priorities and issues in broad terms ('security

sector reform', 'land') rather than sequencing these as part of a single plan of action. But the incorporation of the energy sector into the Sierra Leone strategy in late 2007 indicated the PBC's ability to take bolder decisions about priorities. This occurred in the context of an energy crisis in Sierra Leone, leading to PBC discussions which highlighted the past linkages between the energy sector and government mismanagement and corruption. The PBC's commitment to marshal support for a variety of short- and long-term government plans, including the restructuring of the National Power Authority, showed its serious intention to rally peacebuilding actors around targeted and country-specific needs.

This performance seems reasonable, given that in retrospect Sierra Leone and Burundi were 'difficult' first cases for the PBC. Both are countries in which peace has been preserved for three to five years. Sierra Leone is even considered a darling of the international community, having benefited from significant donor attention. Although the root causes of conflict had not been addressed in either country, the multiplicity of programmes, strategies and systems of coordination already in place – including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), multi-donor trust funds, donor conferences and consultative groups – perhaps made it difficult for the PBC to 'add value' instead of adding to the sense of 'strategy fatigue'. In its efforts to enhance the coherence of peacebuilding efforts, the PBC should develop more flexible models for its engagement in countries under its consideration, so as not to add cumbersome processes when they do not add value.

An additional constraint for the PBC has been the near-absence of knowledge and best practice on devising 'integrated strategies' or integrating and sequencing security, development, rule of law and other activities in fragile states (Patrick & Brown 2007; Call 2005). Overcoming this vacuum requires the PBC to harness expert, substantive analysis on peacebuilding and country-specific issues such as national priorities, existing aid strategies and critical risks for peace. A role was envisaged for the PBSO in this respect, recognising that a strong analytical centre was vital to driving any intergovernmental body. But with member states wary of a proliferation of Secretariat structures or protective of their control over the PBC, months of wrangling ensued over the PBSO's size and budget, undermining it in relation to the PBC

and the wider UN system. Two years later, the PBSO has established itself despite these challenges. To help the PBC succeed, however, the PBSO should be empowered to provide it with up-to-date information, strategic know-how and objective analysis.

Marshalling and Monitoring Resources and Commitments

As the PBC's first annual report recognised, the completion of strategic frameworks for Burundi and Sierra Leone was only the first stage of the PBC's engagement in those countries. To have impact, the PBC needed to marshal financial and other resources in support of the strategies and hold actors to account for their commitments. Unfortunately, this has been a weak element of the PBC's performance. Both countries have benefited from the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which has approved projects worth over \$26 million in Burundi and \$15 million in Sierra Leone, all within the priority areas agreed upon in the PBC strategies.⁷ However, although many PBC members are PBF donors, the PBC's only role is to determine the eligibility of countries on its agenda for funding; the evaluation of projects and disbursement of funds takes place through a consultative process led at country level by the government and the senior UN official in the field. Moreover, the founders of the PBC envisaged the resource mobilisation function of the PBC to extend far beyond the limited amounts in the PBF, which were intended only to fund urgent, targeted and discrete interventions. The success of the PBC depends on its ability to ensure funding streams that are substantial and predictable, bringing resources to bear over a sustained period.

The Cooperation Framework for Sierra Leone was approved only in December 2007, so it is too early to assess the PBC's success at marshalling resources in that country and too difficult to disaggregate its influence from the effect of improved relationships between donors and the new government. It is noteworthy, however, that Ghana, Egypt and China are expanding their assistance to Sierra Leone, triggered partly by PBC discussions in at least two of these cases. Additional limited evidence of success derives from a donor roundtable held in Bujumbura in May 2007 at which Burundi exceeded its target for the first time, with pledges of \$681 million for 2007-2010 (\$191 million earmarked for budget support).⁸ Contributing to this outcome were noteworthy efforts by two PBC members, Norway and the Netherlands, which jointly chaired the roundtable, as well as efforts to rally PBC members by the Norwegian chair of the Burundi country-specific meeting.

Despite these signs of hope, a more proactive stance is needed in order to truly operationalise the PBC's resource mobilisation mandate. Donors have unfortunately proved reluctant to specify commitments or endorse terms that might oblige them financially, preferring to shift the onus to the PBC collectively. In the Sierra Leone strategy, for example,

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there are no specific commitments from donors, but instead one from the PBC as a whole to 'encourage tangible contributions' (PBC 2007c:11). The PBC approved a 'Tracking and Monitoring Mechanism' for Burundi, building on PRSP tracking mechanisms. However, its prospects are

undermined by the lack of specific commitments; the mechanism includes benchmarks and indicators for assessing progress made, but none for tracking actual resources and commitments (PBC 2007d). Far from operationalising the mandate of the PBC to marshal resources, these documents simply reiterate this mandate in a somewhat circular fashion.

The developing inclination of the PBC to hold actors to account at the political level is perhaps more encouraging. When political tensions increased in Burundi in 2006, the PBC

applied no real pressure beyond reiterating the need for ‘constructive dialogue’ between the government and the Palipehutu-FNL (PBC 2007a:5). Likewise, the strategies demand little more of the two governments than broad commitments to ‘resolve governance crises in a peaceful manner’ or ‘create the conditions for the establishment of an independent judicial system’ (PBC 2007b). Yet in late 2007, as the political and security situation in Burundi became more fragile, the PBC took a more proactive political role. In September 2007, the chair of the Burundi CSM met with the parties and made statements on the FNL, which some actors believe encouraged the ruling party to take a more conciliatory stance towards the opposition. The Executive Representative of the Secretary-General was also able to leverage the peacebuilding framework in negotiations with the ruling and opposition parties to help resolve the political crisis.

However, ongoing sensitivities about the PBC’s monitoring role continue to complicate this aspect of its work. The governments in question, while at times surprisingly frank about the problems they face, do not welcome scrutiny by the international community. Some member

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states have been extremely protective of these governments’ sovereignty. In late 2006, for example, some were especially concerned about scrutiny with respect to governance and human rights issues, arguing that such issues should be dealt with in the context of the

Human Rights Council, not the PBC.⁹ Such debates have at times encouraged the PBC to take an apolitical, technical path in the face of objections raised that ‘benchmarks’ for monitoring progress would be overly intrusive.

This atmosphere has contributed to a lack of clarity as to the limits of the PBC’s scope for specifying the roles of actors and holding them to account (see IPI, 2006a, 2006b). Members agree the PBC must define its ‘added value’ in relation to existing systems of coordination and resource mobilisation. But different understandings have always existed in practice, ranging from rubber-stamping lists of national priorities to a formal ‘compact’ between a government and international actors.¹⁰ Although the PBC was inclined to accept a compact, it has been politically averse to operationalising this by spelling out specific behaviours expected of different actors. If the Commission is to move beyond mere encouragement and to marshal and track financial resources and other commitments, it will need to forge more explicit partnerships with built-in accountability.

Improving Decision Making within the UN System

The PBC’s impact on decision making within the UN system has been similarly mixed. In truth, the Commission was perhaps intended to address the limitations of both the Security Council and ECOSOC rather than bridge them. The high-level panel acknowledged that the Security Council lacks the time and inclination to deal properly with post-conflict recovery and reconstruction issues. ECOSOC, meanwhile, was simply considered moribund; the panel’s thinly veiled reference to it suggests that ‘decision making on international economic matters’ has ‘long left the United Nations’ (United Nations 2004: 86). Ideally, the PBC was to become an alternative forum for promoting long-term attention to post-conflict countries, both to assist the Security Council and to give non-Council members a greater influence.

This was an ambitious aim in the UN context, where tensions between North and South infiltrate every aspect of decision making. First, the gap between ‘security’ and ‘development’ perspectives is not simply intellectual or bureaucratic. It is perhaps the most divisive political tension in the organisation, with deep roots in the rapid expansion

of the UN membership from the 'developing world' and that group's unsuccessful campaign for a 'new international economic order' in the 1970s. Resentment at the 'developed world's' perceived preoccupation with 'security' issues is widespread at the UN, where 'development' has become an emotive and powerful rhetoric as well as a very real interest. Second, resentments over the prerogatives of the permanent five members of the Security Council, and more recently the war in Iraq, have left 'developing' countries feeling disempowered and eager to exert influence through the intergovernmental bodies on which they are represented. The result is that UN mandates are oddly compartmentalised into 'security' and 'development' categories and relationships between the Security Council and other organs are strained by struggles for influence.

During 2005 and 2006, the PBC became a microcosm of the larger UN membership and an arena for competition between intergovernmental organs. Rivalry between the Security Council, ECOSOC and the General Assembly over control of the PBC and its reporting lines delayed the formation of the body for several months. The resolutions establishing the PBC did not suggest it should bridge the functions of the major organs, but instead reaffirmed their 'respective responsibilities and functions' and underlined that the PBC's

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'advice' should be directed to the Security Council and ECOSOC at different stages. Competition for influence also brought about a much larger body than originally envisaged by the high-level panel, with an Organisational Committee of 31 rather than the 20 originally proposed. The CSMs involve more than 50

participants representing additional member states, the Bank, institutional donors, the PBSO, the UN lead, a civil society representative and relevant regional actors. The meetings tend to be lengthy and weighed down by an excess of prepared statements.

Since the PBC's establishment, the competition for control among the intergovernmental organs of the UN has continued. For example, finalisation of the PBC's annual report in 2007 was delayed by disagreements between the Security Council and the General Assembly as to their prerogatives in placing Sierra Leone and Burundi on the agenda. In January 2007, Russia proposed an open debate to review the work of the PBC in the context of Security Council discussions on the UN Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) and the creation of the UN Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB). Suggestions were made for the Council to incorporate PBC inputs more fully into its work. This created perceptions of a Council power-grab. The General Assembly held its own review meeting, where G77 countries expressed concern at the Council's 'premature' evaluation of the PBC and upheld the General Assembly's prerogatives.

More recently, there have been signs of a firmer relationship between the PBC and the Security Council, leading to improved information exchange and communication. In the summer of 2007, there was no widespread opposition to a Security Council request for the PBC to track progress in Sierra Leone in the run-up to the elections. In August 2007, the Security Council, preoccupied with other matters, allowed the Commission to comment on the political crisis in Burundi. For the PBC's third case – Guinea-Bissau – the Council has given the body a more proscriptive referral by specifying areas on which it seeks advice. Although there is no evidence that the PBC has actually impacted decisions made by the Council, a more structured engagement between the PBC and the Security Council may yet emerge.

An indirect effect of tensions between North and South has been to entangle the deliberations of the PBC in issues of process. In the early months, there were disagreements about the

‘rules of procedure’, some countries pushing for detailed provisions and others for ‘light’ rules.¹¹ It took weeks to agree that the Netherlands would chair the Sierra Leone meetings. It likewise took several months to get agreement on guidelines for the participation of civil society and institutional donors such as the European Commission or Organisation of the Islamic Conference. Although procedural issues receded somewhat in 2007, a debate is surfacing over the need to strengthen the strategic role of the committee that organises the work of the PBC. While donor governments see the CSMs as the real innovation,

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‘developing’ countries fear being marginalised by their lack of representation in CSMs at country level, and regard the Organisational Committee as a potential counterbalance to the Security Council. Creating constructive relationships among PBC members depends on dedicated attempts to build trust, within the PBC and among the wider UN membership.

The impact of the PBC on collaboration between the UN and the IFIs appeared for many months to be negligible. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) brought a necessary economic and budgetary perspective to the CSMs, but their representatives found their patience tested in the months of procedural deadlocks among the UN members. In June 2007, the IMF signalled its intention to delay completion of the Sixth Review of the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility for Burundi, citing concerns over economic governance and allegations of corruption. This triggered a freeze on World Bank disbursements of budget support and led to an acute budgetary crisis, risking widespread discontent and social tensions. After Norway raised the budgetary issue in a CSM, intense discussions with the IMF ensued, within the PBC and informally between PBC members and IMF representatives in New York and Washington. The PBC negotiated a recommendation that the Government of Burundi take steps to address economic governance issues, and alerted the IFIs and donors to the potential for renewed violence (PBC 2007e). The discussions helped to defuse tensions. The IMF concluded in November that the government had taken appropriate measures to tackle a serious corruption case, allowing the release of the pledged budgetary support.

This incident demonstrated the potential of the PBC to become a forum for crisis resolution, but its broader goal of aligning the short-term security focus of the Security Council and the longer-term development imperatives of the IFIs has received less attention. Just as Sierra Leone and Burundi suffered no lack of strategies, these countries proved to be tough cases for bridging this divide, because troops were already withdrawn and IFI processes well advanced.

The potential for the PBC to enhance the coherence of the UN and IFIs is highest at an early stage of peacebuilding, when the Security Council and other actors tend to be absorbed by security concerns and pay less attention to institutional capacity building, development issues and economic recovery needs. In this regard, the PBC has yet to be tested in its role as a forum for enhancing decision making between the UN and IFIs, and in bridging the artificial distinctions between peacekeeping and transition, recovery and development.

Conclusion

There is little doubt the PBC has so far fallen short of the high expectations it generated in the context of the high-level panel and Secretary-General Annan’s reform effort in the following respects:

- The PBC's 'strategies' fall short of the dynamic, sequenced plans of action once envisaged, albeit that they may help to orientate peacebuilding efforts around very broad priorities;
- There is little evidence that resources have increased significantly for countries on its agenda, or of attempts to marshal resources proactively beyond words of encouragement for donors;
- The PBC has not brought greater coherence to decision making within the UN system, intergovernmental organs and the IFIs.

The result for Sierra Leone and Burundi has been a marginal shift in political attention from New York and modest funding increases through the PBF, but at a high proportional cost in meetings, missions and documents.

Three factors weaken the PBCs performance:

- A lack of clarity within the Commission about the nature of a 'peacebuilding strategy', exacerbated by the lack of best practice in this area;
- Resistance from member states to the idea of a UN body holding them to account for their financial and political commitments, resulting in a lack of rigour and a failure to monitor commitments in bold ways;
- Divisions within the broader UN membership, which have entangled the PBC in issues of process and hindered the body from acting as a bridge between intergovernmental organs.

The PBC's problems – confusion, political weaknesses and divisiveness – stem in part from its status as a UN body, which subjects it to decision making by the lowest common denominator. An early conception of the PBC – the 'Strategic Recovery Facility' proposed

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by academics at New York University – saw it as free-floating, akin to a gathering of friends or sponsors around a shared interest in joint strategic planning (Forman and Patrick 2001). The high-level panel believed there were benefits to placing the PBC within the UN, including the prospect of a more inclusive and coherent approach to decision making in

relation to UN peacebuilding activities. But the panel perhaps underestimated the stifling effect of this institutional 'home' on the PBC's dynamism, particularly during a period of extreme mistrust between groups of member states.

However, the fact that the PBC is a UN body suggests that rushed judgments should not be made. UN bodies, historically including the Secretariat and the Security Council, tend to evolve slowly as key actors gradually converge around a common understanding of the body's role and political space. In this sense, it is encouraging that the PBC appears to be undergoing a process of learning. Its strategic engagement in Burundi and its recent attentions to the energy sector in Sierra Leone suggest a modicum of vision and a willingness to direct peacebuilding activities toward in-country dynamics and needs. The role of PBC members in encouraging pledges to the 2007 donor conference indicates their sense of responsibility for resource mobilisation. Efforts to resolve the pending budgetary crisis in Burundi show that the PBC can at least help bridge institutional differences of opinion. Although these data points do not yet form a coherent pattern, it is premature to condemn the PBC to insignificance.

As new cases come onto its agenda, the PBC may yet demonstrate its potential to add value, especially at an early stage of peacebuilding when the scope for impact may be greater. Realistically, however, the field of peacebuilding is not one replete with 'easy' cases. Guinea-Bissau, placed on the agenda of the PBC at the end of 2007, is likely to

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present new challenges in the absence of an extensive, integrated UN presence on ground, in the face of a growing trade in illegal drugs and in the run-up to elections scheduled for 2008. If the PBC is to succeed as a mechanism for enhancing the coherence of international peacebuilding efforts, it will need to capitalise quickly on the lessons learned from Sierra

Leone and Burundi, put aside issues of process, and focus on the quality of its strategic engagement, concentrating on the specific needs and priorities of each case on its agenda. Such an emboldened PBC may yet have real impact on its ultimate measure of success: the risk of a country's relapse into conflict.

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Endnotes

¹ A frequently cited statistic estimates the risk of relapse within five years at 44% (Collier *et al* 2003:83). Although this estimate is disputed, there is general agreement that the risk is between one-third and two-thirds. More recently, it has been suggested that the average risk of a post-conflict society returning to conflict within a decade is 40% (Collier *et al* forthcoming).

² Variations on the PBC concept were suggested before the panel was formed. Papers from New York University's Centre on International Cooperation (CIC) proposed the creation of a 'Strategic Recovery Facility' open for participation to core organisations of the UN system, the Bretton Woods institutions, regional organisations, contributing governments and NGOs. They envisaged time-limited funding to jump-start recovery activities (with the World Bank acting as fiduciary) before dedicated country trust funds could be raised, thereby bridging the gap between relief and development financing (Forman & Patrick 2001).

³ The Organisational Committee was to determine the agenda on the basis of requests from the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly, member states or the Secretary-General (with varying provisos connected to the role of each).

⁴ Alignment of the bureaucracies of the UN – involving Secretariat departments, funds, programmes and agencies – is an additional layer, but the primary responsibility of the PBSO.

⁵ The author is grateful to Jenna Slotin, International Peace Institute, for her comments on earlier drafts.

⁶ At this meeting, Angola was elected chair, Norway and El Salvador vice-chairs, and draft rules of procedure were adopted.

⁷ The Central African Republic and Cote d'Ivoire benefited from 'emergency windows' of PBF funding, determined by the Secretary-General to a level of \$1 million. In both cases these funds were used to support political dialogue between the government and other parties.

⁸ It is worth noting that in CSMs, there have been frequent references to poor donor behaviour, narrow donor bases and the lack of direct budget support.

⁹ This meeting took place on 12 December 2006.

¹⁰ In March 2007, an informal meeting of the PBC was held on the topic of the 'Afghan Compact' and other 'compacts' in the hope that the PBC might draw lessons from existing examples of post-conflict cooperation frameworks.

¹¹ The rules of procedure were adopted at the PBC's inaugural meeting of 23 June 2006. They state that the committee would select a chair and vice-chairs for one year; meetings would involve a mix of public and private participants; the Organisational Committee would set the agenda in accordance with the original resolutions; the chair would present conclusions and recommendations. In the General Assembly review session in February 2007, Jamaica raised the lack of finalised rules of procedure and working methods on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

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