

Attention and commitment: Practical approaches in bridging gaps in UN's post-conflict peace building capacity

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1. Problem description

After the end of the Cold War the United Nations has increasingly been involved in peacekeeping operations worldwide. This has led to a transformation of UN activity after the end of the Cold War. The UN has a wide range of instruments at its disposal to respond to conflict situations: Humanitarian assistance, reconstruction aid, DDR projects, local training and education, sanctions and peacekeeping operations, just to mention a few.

Practice shows that the UN often acts *after* the outbreak of an armed conflict, that is, when a situation in a country has deteriorated severely. International action is necessary to prevent further escalation or diffusion of a conflict. This is a difficult time to enter conflict situations and requires a coherent and long-term strategy or coordination which is often difficult to shape and maintain. The short term measures may reduce tension or bring a conflict to a halt, even resulting in a peace agreement. However, the risks of the recurrence of armed struggle may be great. Recent experience of conflict is *itself* a high risk factor. There is a tendency for post-conflict regions to re-emerge as war zones. Around 85 % of new civil wars are either occurring in marginalized countries falling into conflict or post-conflict countries relapsing into new armed conflicts.² An estimate is that countries coming out of civil war face a 44 per cent risk of relapsing into war during the first five years of transition.³

These observations result in three major problems in the UN post-conflict peace building endeavours, going from the observation that preventive measures are likely to be cheaper to the UN and the international community than the start and restart of war.⁴

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² Collier, Elliott, Hegre, Hoeffler, Reynal-Querol, Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003) chapter 6.

³ World Bank internet source,

<http://inweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/ConflictPreventionandReconstruction>

⁴ See UN Secretary-General's report A/57/77, E/2002/63 (2002).

Problem A: How to more actively monitor post-conflict situations?

Most of the conflicts since the Cold War have been internal, in the sense that the issues, actors and action are localized to particular countries or regions. To monitor such situations in a post-conflict setting raises a sovereignty issue for an organization based on state membership. It is hard to sustain a more continued engagement in a particular country, as it will be seen as an infringement on its integrity, both by that country and the UN membership. Furthermore, there is no systematic capacity within the UN system to analyse the information. This may be an important explanation as to why there is a tendency to reinvent the wheel in every new situation.

This is part of a problem which could be labelled the *attention gap*. What constitutes a 'major' emergency can be dictated by political or strategic interest, and most significantly, by the media. According to the Secretary-General's report (A/57/77-E/2002/63) the past eight years have demonstrated a clear trend of resources to concentrate around the highest profile humanitarian crises for that year (see for example the former Yugoslavia, the Great Lakes region and Iraq). Also, when the emergency is over and the situation has entered a post-conflict phase it usually means a reduction in international attention. This may also imply less funding to rebuild the country.

Problem B: How to bridge the gap between emergency activities and long term peace-building efforts?

From the way problem A is handled follows that there is an interest in humanitarian action for a shorter period of time, and that this is not sufficiently spilling over into long-term peace building efforts. Even so according to the Secretary-General's report (A/57/77-E/2002/63) the overall levels of humanitarian funding have remained static. This has resulted in a decline in the resources available in proportion to the increasing levels of need. Even in major humanitarian crises aid flows have not increased but resources have been diverted from other appeals. In such circumstances there will be a growing phenomenon of 'forgotten emergencies'. It also means that the needs of post-conflict peace building will become larger. A more even approach which maintains attention over a longer period would also mean that resources are spread more consistently over time. This means that there is a *financial gap*: More humanitarian efforts than long-term peace building.

There is also the gap between organisations, agencies and mechanisms dealing with immediate relief and those bodies occupied with peace-building/development activities (what we might call a *mandate gap*). The gap includes funding priorities but also coordination, programming and planning issues. An illustration of this is the mandate gap between military intervention (peacekeeping operations) and humanitarian and development activities (i.e. the gap between the military, political measures and the humanitarian and development activities) leading to tensions on

the local level between the different donors or even branches within the donor community).

Problem C: How to keep an international presence and commitment in situations where there are no state structures?

This problem focuses on what we could call extreme situations, characterized by weak government structures, lack of democracy, no rule of law etc. In the report of the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues it is stressed that governments, however weak and inexperienced, must be an active partner in all development activities in the post-conflict phase. But in an extreme post-conflict situation local communities are not likely to be able to lead or assume ownership over the transition processes. This means the UN must be present, maintain responsibility and even assume leadership for transition and peace-building activities. However, some donors are reluctant to provide aid/funding without government commitment.

The lack of attention given to Haiti is primarily based on the perception that Haiti after the return of democratic conditions in 1994 soon developed into an increasingly extreme case: the promised democratic reforms were not realised and as a consequence international aid to the country began to diminish (prior to the events of 2004). For instance, during 2003 the European Union suspended aid to Haiti because of the failure of democracy in the country (ReliefWeb, 15/9-2003, *Refugees International*). To quickly resurrect resources after the crisis in 2004 turned out to be difficult. This means that the commitment to working with the extreme cases may quickly be waning, and thus the likelihood of a relapse into conflict may increase. In other words there is a *commitment gap*, which may be particularly obvious in extreme cases.

In this report we focus on the situation in which an armed conflict has ended and the situation thus entered into a post-conflict phase. A crucial question is how to maintain the interest of the international community (that is to deal with the attention gap) so as to avoid that the conflict re-emerges. This, we believe, is closely connected with the commitment gap, that is to maintain political will and funding for the difficult cases. A corollary to this is the situation where the state actor(s) itself is a part in the conflict (repressive government, lack of democracy, rule of law, etc.). We believe the described situations are in a higher risk of re-emerging as conflicts and therefore demand a more coherent and decisive response from the international community.

On a theoretical level the solutions to problems A, B, and C is to develop a flexible member state mechanism. Such a mechanism should cover the extreme situations. From this a need can be identified for reform in three areas: analysis capacity in the UN Secretariat; member-commitment through existing organs, for instance ECOSOC;

and the creation of subsidiary organs of the Security Council. This is explored in the following sections.

2. Existing information networks: Dealing with the attention gap

Organisations and mechanisms like International Crisis Group (ICG) and OCHA's ReliefWeb/UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), to some extent, are important in bringing marginalised and forgotten conflicts to the attention of the international community. FEWER, Forum on Early Warning and Early Response, which is committed to preventing conflict by providing early warning and informing peace-building efforts, is a similar organisation dealing with information on conflict situations. International Alert, Conciliation Resources and other, more regional networks also contribute to this more global, less biased coverage of world events. The Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research now operates an on-line conflict database with information on all armed conflicts since 1989. Furthermore, human rights organizations have an extensive global coverage of internal conflict situations, from the perspective of repression, etc. Some are national efforts, many are multinational.

It is our understanding that there are often considerable resources devoted to follow developments, but often outside immediate governmental circles and international bodies. There is attention, and more information available than often acknowledged. This, however, needs to be brought into the UN system in a systematic way. The problem is not lack of information but lack of mechanisms to transform this information into political activity. The present emergency in Darfur, Sudan, is an example of how the international community fails to respond in a timely way. Information on the situation in Darfur was available long before it became acute, for instance among non-governmental and international organisations.

At the UN Secretariat level the Policy Planning Unit (DPA) was established to analyse and develop policy in various fields, peace-building, democracy and transition issues, just to mention a few. However, reality has not matched the expectations. The Unit is severely understaffed and resources necessary for working effectively are not available.

General reflections

To strengthen UN's capacity to analyze information and develop ways of action for both the organization and member states, a central capacity for systematic analysis of field information should be established or existing unit for planning and policy should be strengthened, both in terms of financial and human resources.

Alternatively, the suggested unit should build its analysis on information flows from UN agencies, as well as from the field level and from other organizations. The aim

should be to present analysis and possible actions of particular situations and encourage member states to act on such recommendations.

A central analysis capacity at the UN level along these lines would be an effective tool to bridge the attention gap by conveying relevant information on present and looming conflict situations to member states. In addition, such an analysis unit could strengthen the UN's capacity to formulate strategies and increase coordination and cooperation between UN departments and agencies. It would also give the Secretary-General greater possibilities to highlight conflict situations and bring them to the attention of the Security Council.⁵ See more in section 4 below.

3. Dealing with commitment: Some examples of current UN mechanisms for coordination and coherence

The UNDG/ECHA report on 'Transition Issues' addresses the inter-agency coordination and calls for a single coherent strategy for all UN actors in transition contexts.⁶ The background of the report is to further improve coordination and increase the UN system's effectiveness in promoting development and building peace. On an inter-agency level it can be noted that reforms have been undertaken during the last decade, although this does not mean that these are sufficient or that they function in a satisfactory way. Some examples of UN mechanisms have been listed to further illustrate this (see 3.1). This overview is not exhaustive but presents a few examples to illustrate a development.

3.1 UN organisation level

Within the UN Secretariat:

- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (former Department of Humanitarian Affairs, DHA), established in 1991. The aim was to strengthen UN's capacity to respond to complex emergencies and natural disasters. In addition, the resolution also created the high level position of Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) to function as the UN focal point in complex emergencies and natural disasters, an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the 'Consolidated Appeal Process' (CAP) for resource mobilisation, and the 'Central Emergency Revolving Fund' (CERF).
- UN's four Executive Committees. The committees were established in 1997 by the Secretary-General to increase coordination between UN agencies and UN departments in different areas. The Committees are grouped in four sectoral areas: EC on peace and security (ECPS); EC on economic and social affairs (EC-ESA); EC on humanitarian affairs (ECHA) and EC on development (Development Group, UNDG).

⁵ A similar capacity has also been proposed in the Brahimi Report (Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations, A/55/305-S/2000/809, p. 12-13).

⁶ Report of the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues, February 2004.

- Despite the establishment of the Executive Committees for coordination additional mechanisms were set up in the case of Afghanistan; the Advisory Committee on Afghanistan which reports directly to the SG and not to the ECPS; and later in the case of Iraq, the Steering Committee on Iraq which reports directly to the DRSG and not to the ECPS.
- Senior Management Group (SMG), established in 1997, serves as the SG's cabinet to ensure strategic coherence throughout the organisation.
- Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Interagency Affairs (UN DESA).

Inter-agency level:

- Common Country Assessments (CCA) and the Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF), established in 1997 to enhance coordination and effectiveness.
- UN System Chief Executives Board (ECB) for Coordination which brings together the executive heads of all organisations
- The Resident Coordinator system, UNDP, encompasses all organizations of the UN system dealing with operational activities for development on a country level.

UN agencies:

- Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) (former Emergency Response Division, ERD), UNDP.

General reflections

As the short overview shows the UN, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, has engaged in a series of reform since 1997, to increase coordination and coherence at both UN headquarters level and at inter-agency level. Mechanisms have been developed to increase the efficacy of the work conducted on the field level but also in terms of developing policies and coordination. The focus has been on coordination to obtain *operational* effectiveness. More may be asked for in terms of improving the coordination, but the moves appear to be in the right direction of bridging the attention and commitment gaps. Problems seem to include the recurring practice of establishing new mechanisms although similar ones exist, and the lack of commitment from member states to make the existing mechanisms work.

As mentioned in section 2 there is a need for an analysis unit directly at the Secretary-General level. For these efforts to be successful they need to be supported by an equal amount of coordination, coherence and commitment on a member-state level. Concerning member state mechanisms on a UN level some examples are presented (see 3.2).

3.2 UN member state level

General Assembly:

- The open-ended ad hoc working group on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace in Africa, established in 1999. The aim of the group was to monitor the implementation of the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report 'The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa' (A/52/871-S/1998/318). On the basis of the recommendations made by the group an ad hoc advisory group on African Countries Emerging from Conflict' was established (see below under ECOSOC).

Security Council:

- Peace-Building Support Offices (PBSO). Under the Department of Political Affairs and through Security Council mandate, Peace building Support Offices were established in Liberia – 1997, CAR - 2000, Guinea-Bissau - 1999, and in Tajikistan, 2000.
- The restructured Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC, 2004) consisting of a two part structure. A Plenary - comprising the Security Council's 15 member states and focusing on wider strategic and policy decisions - and a Bureau - comprised of expert and Secretariat staff, known as the Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), headed by an Executive Director.
- Security Council ad hoc working group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa (2002) (S/PRST/2002/2) (see below).

ECOSOC:

- 'ECOSOC ad hoc advisory group on African countries emerging from conflict' (2002). One idea with the ECOSOC advisory group is that together with the Security Council ad hoc working group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa (see above) it would lead to increased coordination between the two UN bodies within the area of conflict prevention in Africa.
- ECOSOC ad hoc advisory groups on African countries emerging from conflicts, for instance Guinea-Bissau and Burundi.

General reflections

On the level of member states the focus has been on developing recommendations and on the setting up of ad hoc advisory groups. This means establishing institutional mechanisms, ad hoc groupings and committees rather than directly focusing on what the member states themselves can improve. The recommendations, for instance, in the Guinea-Bissau and Burundi reports (see above) are on a general level and not directly addressed towards increasing member state efforts. The efforts conducted by member states in ECOSOC tend not to lead to any direct or concrete improvements, for instance in field-based activities. Its output seems to be focused on report writing and producing recommendations. Its potential relevance requires some further comments.

Comments on ECOSOC: Its functions and limitations

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) could serve as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues and for formulating policy recommendations addressed to member states and the UN system. This has the potential to give this UN body an important role in addressing peace-building issues within the UN system and increasing commitment among member states.

The main task of ECOSOC is to coordinate the economic and social activities of the UN and its specialized agencies. In practice, its functions are limited because each specialized agency is organized separately and is governed by its own constitution and elected bodies.

Despite the demand for development work, many of ECOSOC's original functions have increasingly been taken over by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Consequently, the need to enhance the authority of ECOSOC has been debated during the years. Several studies and reports, notably by the General Assembly's Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the 'Group of 18' (a group of high level intergovernmental experts from 1986) and the Secretary-General's report from 1992, *An Agenda for Peace*, just to mention a few, have called for a reformed and revitalized ECOSOC. It is time again to think seriously about ECOSOC as it consumes considerable time, resources and energy, with little notable impact outside the UN.

4. Mechanisms for commitment and attention: Recommendations

The study has shown that member states have a great role to play in addressing and responding to international conflicts. However, it is also evident that the international needs in this field are far from filled. Member states could do better when it comes to increasing coordination and coherence so that their response is the most appropriate. The reform focus during the last decade seems to have been on increasing inter-agency and field level coordination and efficiency in humanitarian and post-conflict situations. This means that the role of member states has not been

of central concern. In UN fora where member states can play a role in these matters, for instance in ECOSOC, the results have in effect been poor.

Increase member-state commitment

To further enhance UN member states' ability to act and to increase their commitment, a discussion of proposals to increase coordination and coherence on a member-state level in response to complex emergencies will be presented. The idea is to find mechanisms that respond in particular to the attention and commitment gaps we have raised. Here are two possibilities:

1. *Sharpen the role of ECOSOC.* There are good reasons to more specifically define the role of ECOSOC. As already stated, the economic and social issues have increasingly shifted to other organisations. The resources needed to keep ECOSOC running are not in proportion to the actual work this body conducts. The performance in other fields has not been conducive for attention and commitment to particular issues and its work has become less relevant for the UN system. By concentrating its role to the core UN Charter functions, considerable energy, in terms of time and resources, is freed for developing other parts of the UN system. Therefore, it is our recommendation that two areas of ECOSOC's work are highlighted and strengthened while other tasks in a corresponding way are reduced. The first is to pursue the necessary elections (Article 61 of the UN Charter) and the annual reporting from the specialized UN agencies (in accordance with Article 64 of the UN Charter). The second is to give ECOSOC a task in keeping international attention on particular conflict situations. This would give ECOSOC a sharper role in managing post-conflict situations together with the Security Council.

Some ideas are presented on what this would entail in terms of changes in how ECOSOC conducts its work. The work could be made more effective by limiting the high-level ministerial and official July session and instead meet more regularly throughout the year. The Chairman of the ECOSOC should also make more frequent use of Article 65 of the UN Charter and report regularly to the Security Council on issues of concern. The body should reform its work by more frequently appointing ad hoc advisory groups for specific conflict situations and countries. These kinds of mechanisms are currently being tried out and could be seen as precedents. In particular the ad hoc advisory groups for Burundi and Guinea-Bissau seem to have proven the viability of this model. The advisory groups should include donors, regional organisations, nongovernmental organisations and, of course, the government of the country of concern.

These proposals would give a reformed ECOSOC a greater role in bridging both the attention and commitment gap by streamlining its organizational structure and freeing more resources to deal with peace-building in an effective way.

2. *Establish new mechanisms under the Security Council, as subsidiary organs (in accordance with Article 29 in the UN Charter).* The Security Council has legal and real powers. Linking the efforts of peace-building directly to the Council gives 'automatic' attention and commitment. When it comes to establishing Security Council subsidiary organs there are important precedents. It is our understanding that nothing prevents the Council from adding other than SC members to such organs. These organs would serve to make the Security Council more representative by adding other than the incumbent Council members. The Council could at each occasion establish such organs but give them long-term mandates and authority. They should report regularly to the Council and would become focal points for all UN activities concerning specific conflict situations.

A model is the Counter-Terrorism Committee, which now has both a political/diplomatic Plenary and a Bureau of support and expert staff, integrated in the same committee. In this way the committee will be the focal point for the political process in the country, for contacts with donors and other organisations and at the same time assist in developing ideas and policies for further UN actions. This serves as a way for keeping attention and developing commitment to particular situations, even as the Security Council itself is concerned with new, more acute crisis.

Strengthen UN coordination and analysis capacity

3. As neither of the recent UN reforms on how to increase coordination and formulate strategies and policy in the areas of peace and security have turned out to be as effective as it was intended to be, a recommendation to establish a professional analysis capacity at the UN Secretariat level is still highly valid.

A central analysis capacity at the UN level would be an effective tool to bridge the attention gap by conveying relevant information on present and looming conflict situations to member states. In addition, such an analysis unit could strengthen the UN's capacity to formulate strategies and increase coordination and cooperation between different departments (DPA, DPKO, just to mention a few). It would also give the Secretary-General greater possibilities to highlight conflict situations and bring them to the attention of the Security Council.