

Issue Brief: Perspectives on the Peacebuilding Commission's Coordination Role

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IPI's work on peacebuilding focuses on identifying gaps and promoting reform in peacebuilding policy, and on supporting the functioning of the UN's peacebuilding architecture by facilitating informal dialogue among member states and UN officials on peacebuilding issues.

IPI's work on state fragility provides policy analysis to enhance understanding of state fragility and improve international engagement with fragile states.

The founding resolutions of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) (A/60/180, S/Res/1645) call for a review in 2010. As member states gear up for this review, IPI has prepared issue briefs to offer perspectives on aspects of the PBC's role. While there are several procedural issues that member states will want to address, this review offers an opportunity to reflect more broadly on the role of the PBC. These briefs are offered in that spirit. They are not intended to cover all aspects of the PBC's role, but rather to offer food for thought on some elements of the PBC's comparative advantage.

The founding resolutions of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) state that one of the main purposes of the commission is “to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the United Nations.” What does this mean for an intergovernmental advisory organ? Can the PBC really be expected to coordinate the many UN agencies, funds, and programs on the ground, let alone the many bilateral, multilateral, and nongovernmental actors that are present in a postconflict country? What does the PBC have to offer with respect to coordination?

Coordination should be anchored with the national government, but postconflict governments often face severe capacity and political constraints in fulfilling this function. The PBC's potential lies in providing a forum to facilitate coordinated support for the national authorities. In order to think through how it can do so most effectively, this brief addresses what kind of coordination the PBC is best placed to focus on, and how it can leverage its assets as an intergovernmental organ to facilitate coordination.

Strategic vs. Operational Coordination

- **“Strategic coordination”** refers to the coordination of policy goals, strategic approaches, and political decisions taken by a variety of actors. It has often been used to refer to the coordination of strategic approaches over time, from the mediation phase to the postconflict period. However, it also applies to the coordination of strategic approaches taken during the postconflict period by the many actors who provide political and financial support to the peacebuilding process in a given country.¹
- **“Operational coordination,”** by contrast, refers to coordination of programmatic activities within or between sectors in order to avoid duplication and to exploit potential synergies.

¹ Bruce D. Jones, “The Challenges of Strategic Coordination,” in *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, edited by Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp. 89-115.

Both forms of coordination are essential. However, while there is often some overlap, the evidence suggests that strategic and operational coordination involve a different constellation of actors at different levels. Strategic coordination has been most successful when mechanisms exist to galvanize political engagement and promote strategic coherence among actors on the ground, in capitals, and in New York. Operational coordination involves regular interaction among key actors in the field to coordinate ongoing activities and new initiatives.

In most cases, the PBC may be too far removed from day-to-day activities in the countries on its agenda to contribute directly to operational coordination. But, by providing a forum to facilitate strategic coordination, the PBC has the potential to

- (1) **foster increased coherence among the strategic approaches—including funding decisions—adopted by key actors; and**
- (2) **provide increased leverage for the Secretary-General’s senior representative to promote operational coordination among UN and non-UN actors on the ground.**²

A Forum for Alignment

In early cases of successful coordination, such as in El Salvador, the Middle East (in the post-Oslo years), and Mozambique, coherence was achieved through an ad hoc forum that brought together the key players to align their assistance strategies.³ These were not merely donor-coordination fora. They were also instrumental in bringing regional actors into discussions and decision making, and their deliberations extended to the political strategies that would be required to support the implementation of peace agreements and the promotion of recovery.⁴ The success of these fora is attributed, in part, to their ability to reach beyond

country-level representatives and produce coherent political messages and support from key players in the field, in capitals, and at the UN in New York.⁵

The PBC is uniquely positioned to play a similar function where such a forum does not already exist. The flexibility of its country-specific meetings (CSMs), the diversity of its membership, its ability to galvanize discussions on the ground and in New York, and the ability of the CSM chairpersons and/or the Secretary-General’s senior representative to use it as a platform for advocacy in capitals are distinct advantages. The PBC is not likely to create strategic interests where there are none, but it does have the potential to facilitate greater strategic coordination among the assistance strategies already being implemented in the countries on its agenda. Moreover, the permanent presence of the country concerned in the PBC’s country-specific meetings can empower that government by providing it with the space to drive strategic coordination among its international partners. Given the diversity of its membership, its flexibility, and its political function as an intergovernmental organ, **the PBC may have a comparative advantage in providing a forum to facilitate strategic coordination that can align political and financial support behind nationally defined peacebuilding priorities.**

Influencing Operational Coordination through Leverage

Coordination among UN entities on the ground depends on an effective leader with credibility and leverage. This has been well-known in the UN for at least a decade. It was first captured in *Command from the Saddle*,⁶ a 1999 report produced following one of the first reflections by former and serving SRSGs on their role in peace implementation. It was

2 This could be a special representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), an executive representative of the Secretary-General (ERSG), a resident coordinator (RC), or some equivalent.

3 Jones, “The Challenges of Strategic Coordination.”

4 Teresa Whitfield, *Friends Indeed? The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007).

5 Jones, “The Challenges of Strategic Coordination.”

6 Rick Hooper and Mark Taylor, *Command from the Saddle: Managing United Nations Peace-Building Missions, Recommendations Report of the Forum on the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General: Shaping the UN’s Role in Peace Implementation* (Oslo: FAFO Institute for Applied Social Science, 1999).

also reflected in the Brahimi report's recommendations and has since been raised repeatedly, most recently in the Secretary-General's *Report on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict*.⁷

An intergovernmental organ in New York is not likely to have a significant direct impact on operational coordination among the UN's programs and activities. Although the PBC can provide a country-level forum that may highlight duplication or gaps in support, the discussions should remain at a strategic level, ensuring that key donors and regional and national actors are pursuing a coherent strategy, focusing on nationally defined peacebuilding priorities, and meeting their commitments.

However, in certain cases, the PBC has shown that it can add value by fostering strategic coordination on sector-specific or thematic issues. At key moments, the chairpersons of the country-specific meetings have facilitated or contributed to a focused discussion among a subgroup of key players to address bottlenecks in a particular sector. We have seen this most recently in relation to demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) in the Central African Republic.

By fostering strategic coordination, especially among key donors, the PBC has the potential to provide the Secretary-General's senior representa-

tive with important leverage vis-à-vis the UN family. This is evident in Sierra Leone, where the support of the PBC has been a key factor in enabling the executive representative of the Secretary-General (ERSG), Michael von der Schulenburg, to get UN actors on board with a joint vision for Sierra Leone.⁸ Von der Schulenburg has said publicly that the support of the PBC contributes to the political leverage he needs to exercise his role as coordinator of the UN on the ground.⁹ **The PBC can, therefore, play a meaningful role in operational coordination by fostering political support for the Secretary-General's senior representative.** This is no less of a role because it is one step removed; it is the political glue that makes or breaks a coherent in-country approach.

Conclusion

The PBC has a comparative advantage in facilitating strategic coordination. As an intergovernmental organ, it can foster coherence among the strategic approaches and key decisions of political actors whose support is essential to promoting peacebuilding in a given country. It may not have a direct impact on operational coordination, but it can provide a forum to align political and financial support behind nationally identified peacebuilding priorities, and empower the UN leader through political leverage.

⁷ United Nations General Assembly, *Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict*, UN Doc. A/63/881-S/2009/304 (June 11, 2009).

⁸ See United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Mission, "Supporting Sierra Leone: A Joint Vision of the United Nations' Family," May 30, 2009, available at www.sl.undp.org/1_doc/joint_un_vision_sl_final.pdf.

⁹ Comments made by Michael von der Schulenburg, ERSG for Sierra Leone at a panel entitled "Political Dimensions of Peace Operations," Building More Effective UN Peace Operations thematic series, hosted by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN and NYU's Center on International Cooperation, New York, September 11, 2009.

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