

# Security Council Istanbul Retreat: At the Crossroads of Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding

OCTOBER 2010

## United Nations Security Council Istanbul Retreat, June 25-26, 2010.

This summary report was prepared by Adam C. Smith and Vanessa Wyeth, *rapporteurs*. The informal retreat in Istanbul was attended by Security Council members, senior officials of the UN Secretariat, and a handful of experts and other stakeholders.

The discussions were arranged to feed into a summit-level meeting of the Council on September 23, 2010, during Turkey's presidency. Discussions were conducted under the Chatham House Rule of nonattribution. This report summarizes the *rapporteurs'* interpretation of the discussions and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants.

IPI owes a debt of thanks to its many generous donors. In particular, IPI would like to thank the government of Turkey and the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations for making this project possible.

*On June 25-26, 2010, the government of Turkey and the International Peace Institute co-organized an informal retreat for members of the United Nations Security Council. The discussions aimed to build on and enrich the ongoing debate on the interplay of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding, in part by drawing on the lessons learned from the UN's experiences in three regions: Afghanistan, the Balkans, and the Great Lakes region of Africa. A second goal was to facilitate the formulation and implementation of coherent, flexible, and integrated strategies for addressing situations in flux.*

## Key Issues

In advance of the retreat, three regional case studies and a cross-cutting thematic paper were produced to frame the discussion around the following topics:

- forging sound connections and transitions among peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding;
- producing clear and achievable mandates and adjusting them as needed to reflect changing circumstances on the ground;
- ensuring that peace operations and other missions receive adequate financial, human, and material resources to fulfill their mandates;
- ensuring coherence with the work of other UN bodies, including through enhanced communication, consultation, and exchange of information among the Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the Peacebuilding Commission;
- ensuring coordination and coherence with non-UN actors, including regional bodies, international financial institutions (IFIs), and host countries; and
- building effective state capacity and legitimacy so that host countries are better placed to lead their own recovery.

## Lessons from the Field

The authors of the case studies were asked to focus on those topics above that were most relevant to their region's experience. The following is a summary of important takeaways from the UN's recent and ongoing engagement in these regions, based on the case studies and the authors' presentations at the retreat.

In the **Great Lakes** region, recognition of the interconnections among peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding are evident in the content of the peace agreements signed for Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Northern Uganda, as well as in the mandates developed for the integrated missions in Burundi and the DRC. However, it should be recognized that processes set in motion by the Council's engagement are intrusive and are often aimed at establishing new power relations in a country. Hence, lessons for the Council include the following:

- The Council needs to be proactive and remain engaged during the entire life of the mandate, since the implementation of a peace agreement is a delicate and transformative process for the host country.
- Political strategies developed by the Council that undergird its resolutions are necessary but not sufficient to the success of peace processes. Council members need to remain consistent with respect to the spirit and letter of these resolutions in their bilateral interactions with transitional governments.
- The Council should always consider accountability and transitional justice mechanisms as a core element of peacebuilding mandates and impose them when necessary through both bilateral and multilateral pressure.
- There is a need to be pragmatic about any proposed division of labor and partnership with regional actors. The Great Lakes experience showed that African regional engagement could deliver impressive results, especially in peacemaking. Such regional engagement was important in both Burundi and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

An overarching lesson from the UN's experience in **the Balkans** is the importance of recognizing the limitations that political context puts on the Council. In this regard, understanding the Council's proper role in relation to other actors is important. While it is now common to claim that the Council should play a lead role in devising political strategies for peace operations, the Balkan cases show that the Council is often a receiver,

legitimizing, or adapter of strategies developed elsewhere.

- On mandates in the Balkans, the Security Council often wavered between two extremes: excessive and detailed mandates with constant reassessments and readjustments (1992-1995), and broad or vague mandates giving significant freedom to the mission head (post-1995). Neither extreme option was an ideal scenario. The Council should guard against the tendency to micro-manage through the production of overly detailed mandates.
- In spite of the Council's difficulties in defining effective mandates, it did make a useful innovation in its Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- There is still no standard for transitioning from one mission to another (e.g., a UN mission to an EU mission). Where possible, phased transitions are more useful than an on-off switch of authority.

Since 2004, **Afghanistan** has been in a peace-to-war transition driven by the parties excluded from the Bonn process. The resulting instability has circumscribed the UN's ability to operate effectively in Afghanistan.

- The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has no objective that it can achieve alone; it must work with and through other institutions in order to fulfill its mandate. With limited financial resources and no military capacity, the mission's success depends on its political authority and the skills of its staff.
- The mandate for UNAMA needs to reflect the limitations in staffing, staff movement, and staff security. It should focus on preserving both the UN relationship with the Afghan government and its credibility with the Afghan opposition.
- Given its limited resources, the UN should concentrate on work that others cannot do: development and governance in secure provinces; reporting on human rights; and

regional dialogue, specifically with Iran.

- Dialogue with the armed opposition should be undertaken by a separate special envoy, rather than the UNAMA Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG).
- Thorough and regular consultations between the UN Security Council and the NATO Secretary-General would be a useful supplement and “backstop” for coordination in Kabul between UNAMA and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

The analyses of these distinct cases together suggested a number of **lessons and conclusions**:

- The Security Council is not a single actor, but rather a collection of member states with diverse interests. Politics is messy and rational decision making is not always possible. Ambitions should generally be scaled down when there is no sense of common purpose among Council members.
- Periods of transition may offer the Council opportunities to consolidate gains and address gaps. Transitions from peacekeeping to peacebuilding missions, as well as mandate renewals, often offer a window of opportunity to redesign the roadmap for international engagement in a country. Yet, the process of reconfiguring the UN presence from one largely featuring peacekeeping into one in which peacebuilding dimensions move to the fore still poses significant political and administrative challenges.
- The cases suggest the need for the Council to adapt to changing circumstances without abandoning its legal and political authority. The temptation to constantly revise mandates can risk diminishing the Council’s authority and diluting its vision.
- The Council requires candid analysis and the presentation of a range of policy options to inform its deliberations. However, history suggests that the UN Secretariat is not structured to deliver this kind of analysis consistently.
- The cases suggest that the issuing of a

mandate is just the beginning of a process. Mandates and the UN’s authority are often challenged, and many actors need to be influenced repeatedly and throughout the life of the UN’s engagement. Council members can do a better job of persuasion.

- Regional and subregional arrangements need improvement. Desk-to-desk cooperation is an encouraging development, but there is a continued problem at the strategic and political levels.
- Finally, the Council must do better at matching means and ends. Proper resourcing of missions and mandates was a recurrent theme throughout the case studies.

## Key Themes and Conclusions

The remaining discussion in Istanbul was organized around three distinct but related themes: mandates, capacities, and adaptation. Below is a summary of the salient points raised by retreat participants on these topics, as well as comments on three related themes that emerged during the course of discussion: conflict prevention, partnerships with regional organizations, and engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).

### MANDATES

The retreat’s thematic discussions began with a panel focused on mandates and mandate-making. The discussions explored the process of crafting achievable and strategic mandates that have sound connections among peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Discussion also covered consultations among partners (troop- and police-contributing countries, regional and subregional organizations, other organizations, host governments, the UN Secretariat, and other UN organs) and how the Security Council, and the UN more generally, devise strategies.

There was broad agreement that mandates should be clear and achievable, based on a realistic assessment of the political context on the ground, the broader strategic context, and the UN’s capacity to deliver. The challenge, of course, is to make mandates sufficiently detailed but not too burden-

some—too often, overly detailed mandates and task lists have substituted for strategy. As political documents, mandates should be backed by a political strategy. But they also define priorities and tasks that the Secretariat is called upon to implement. The Council should involve the Secretariat (including DPA, DPKO, and the Office of Legal Affairs) in the process of drafting mandates. Other relevant actors should be included in the process as well, including the host country, regional actors, and other UN organs.

At the same time, mandate design is just the beginning of the process. Mandates need to be continually reassessed against developments on the ground. This requires continual engagement by the Council, matched by strong analytical capacity within the Secretariat. Mandate reviews should be seen as moments to assess and address shortcomings in strategy and capacity. Prioritization and sequencing are essential in implementing mandates.

Participants were reminded that there is a tendency to speak exclusively of peacekeeping when discussing mandates, whereas nonpeacekeeping mandates are also clearly important. The Council, especially during times of severe economic stress, could pay more attention to its other, less often discussed tools of peacemaking, preventive diplomacy, and peacebuilding. Of course, these types of mandates have less flexibility in terms of resourcing than do typical peacekeeping operations.

## CAPACITIES

The second panel focused on the issue of the capacities of the UN, host states, and partner organizations for peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Discussions focused on how to properly resource missions, assess capacity needs at the outset of engagement, develop host state capacity, and leverage each partner organization's relative strengths to accomplish mandated goals.

Discussion of resourcing UN missions focused on two main issues: financial resources, particularly regarding budgeting for UN missions, and human resources, particularly the issue of civilian capacity. Participants noted the apparent disconnect between policy decisions taken in the Council and financial decisions taken in the General Assembly.

Different arrangements govern budgeting for peacekeeping missions and for special political missions, which can limit the flexibility of nonpeacekeeping missions and pose additional difficulties in planning transitions. Such disconnects make it difficult to generate a shared understanding of what capacities are needed and inhibit the ability to conduct careful, conservative, and sober assessments of these needs.

Participants agreed that the Council should do a better job of matching ends and means. In an ideal world, the Council would focus on designing the best kind of mission for the task at hand, and the system would work to support the mandate. Many participants noted the need for the Council to make more frequent use of preventive diplomacy mandates and peacebuilding missions, particularly in the context of funding constraints resulting from the global financial crisis. Recent innovations within the Secretariat—such as the creation of the Department of Field Support (DFS)—have allowed the UN to support both DPA- and DPKO-led missions more efficiently. Unfortunately, budgeting remains a significant obstacle. Participants agreed that the Council should work more closely with the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly to ensure more appropriate resourcing for Council-mandated missions.

Much attention was devoted to the subject of human resources, as missions should receive both adequate numbers of personnel and the right balance between military and civilian capacity. The credibility of the Council depends on the implementation of its mandates, but missions often struggle to find staff with the right balance of skills. While military capacity remains important, the expansion of mandates to include more peacebuilding tasks has increased demand for essential civilian staff. Missions need expertise in areas such as rule of law, security sector reform, and elections. In addition, they need staff that are capable of planning and assessment, who also possess the ability to develop local capacity and transfer skills. Technical experts who can also navigate complex political contexts in postconflict countries and work effectively to build fragile institutions are a rare breed, and the UN struggles to find them.

Participants spoke frankly about the shortcom-

ings of the current personnel system, both in recruitment and personnel management. One participant noted that in some missions, “we probably have the right numbers but the wrong people.” The current climate of distrust between the Secretariat and member states leads to reluctance on the part of the Secretariat to “cut the fat,” for fear of losing overall posts and resources. Several participants spoke of the need for a new deal between the Secretariat and member states that would allow the Secretariat to shift resources more freely. On the other hand, if the Secretariat were seen to be saving money through personnel reforms, member states might prove less resistant on resourcing issues. Participants looked forward to the forthcoming civilian-capacity review undertaken by the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) to address some of these issues.

The discussion also emphasized the importance of linking the process of developing mandates with the need to assess—and, where necessary, bolster—implementation capacity. This should include regular appraisal of capacity gaps. It was suggested that each mission should maintain a gap list that could be addressed during mandate reviews and renewals. Since the Secretariat and the field both bear responsibility for helping the Council identify capacity gaps, they should both be forward-looking in terms of estimating capacity needs. At the same time, the Council could do a better job of helping the Secretary-General mobilize capacity in support of the mandates it has declared. Finally, when capacities simply are not and will not be there, the Council could be more judicious in the use of Chapter VII.

## ADAPTATION

The final panel, on adaptation, drew from the previous two panels. It focused on how the Council adjusts mandates and strategy to meet changing conditions, how missions and the Council can better use benchmarks to mark progress and refine strategy, and how the UN can be more proactive on the ground and the Council more agile and inclusive in its consultations and deliberations in New York. Among the questions posed were, How frequent should the mandate or strategy reassessment process be? How could more policy planning expertise be harnessed? And, how could the Council’s interface with the host country be

enhanced to achieve fuller consent?

Given the diversity and complexity of the issues the Council is now called upon—or has chosen—to address, many felt that the Council has, in fact, displayed an ability to adapt to the changing nature of security threats. In addition, the evolution of Council working methods and strategy can be seen in each of the regional case studies. They show that the Council has learned and adapted during the life of each mission, as well as from one mission to another. The learning, however, has been slow and uneven at times. This would argue for a continuing review of Council working methods to ensure that the learning process continues. One note of caution, however, was expressed. Too often “working method reform” is used as code for increasing the transparency and openness of the Council. It is argued that such reforms should rather be concerned primarily with how the Council could forge better mandates.

It was asserted that more could be done with the tools the Council already has, rather than working to develop new tools. The Council needs to make more efficient and more effective use of its tools, in addition to generating greater political will and better follow-up to assess implementation. In this regard, benchmarking is an important tool of which the Council could make better use. There could be more frequent meetings between the Security Council and the Secretariat, with the Secretariat not necessarily always represented at the Under-Secretary-General level. More use could be made of the Council working group on peacekeeping operations. However, establishing a working group for each mission, such as the joint working group on Chad, would overburden already busy member states.

Finally, the discussion turned to the possibility of undertaking a strategic reassessment of the efficacy of the UN’s peace and security architecture and instruments in light of changing conditions and opportunities. The Council had not initiated such a broad-based review since January 1992, when its first summit-level meeting launched the process that produced the Secretary-General’s report, *An Agenda for Peace*. Almost twenty years later, it may be time for the Council to step back and consider how to organize a new strategic review. Such a process could take stock of what has been achieved

since *An Agenda for Peace*, but also acknowledge the limitations of the concepts of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and postconflict peacebuilding as outlined in that report, as well as of the departmental silos and institutional arrangements that flowed from those concepts. Such a review could consider ways to break down silos in terms of leadership and management of the UN's peace and security efforts, analytical support, budgets and resourcing, and the design of political and peacekeeping missions.

## RELATED THEMES

### Conflict Prevention

Under Article 34 of the UN Charter, the Security Council may investigate any dispute or situation that “might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute.” Although recently discussed in a formal meeting of the Council on July 16, 2010, retreat participants continued the discussion of how to strengthen the role of the Council in preventing crises, whether through preventive diplomacy, preventive deployment of peacekeepers (e.g., to Macedonia), or through special political or peacebuilding missions.

There is little argument that the Council should be more active in the field of conflict prevention. Yet, despite this consensus and the desire for more cost-effective conflict-management tools like prevention, there is no easy consensus in the Council on which countries should be placed on its prevention agenda or on how exactly to go about doing prevention work. Such a decision is fraught politically, and it would be problematic to attempt a preventive deployment without the full consent of the host state. The Secretary-General, on the other hand, can use his good offices for the cause of prevention with comparative ease. In this, the Secretary-General could be supported by the Department for Political Affairs and would not need a consensus in the Council. The newly established DPA regional offices could be useful in this regard.

Participants also called for a fresh look at how missions are designed. Some urged the use of more Chapter VI mandates that address underlying causes of conflict, rather than relying on Chapter VII mandates, which are intended to “put out fires.” Recent successful examples of this include the

special political mission in Nepal and the Timor-Leste mission. Both focused on the more pressing political issues likely to spark a return to conflict. Another proposal was for the Council to develop a new kind of mandate that would specify a leading role by a particular member state in each selected prevention opportunity. The leading member state would serve as the chair of a working group with responsibility for political outreach and reporting back to the Council. This arrangement would be similar to the country configurations in the Peacebuilding Commission. Should the Secretary-General appoint a special envoy or other representative to address that situation, the chair of the prevention working group would be charged with coordinating closely with that person.

### Partnerships with Regional Organizations

All three case studies highlight the important and evolving role of regional and subregional organizations in conflict management. This topic also surfaced repeatedly in the ensuing thematic discussions. Participants noted both the potential comparative advantages of such regional partners and the gaps regional organizations could help to fill, such as on rapid response, mediation, force enablers, and, at times, local legitimacy.

Despite the benefits of partnership, significant challenges at the operational, strategic, and political levels remain. On the operational side, the lack of a realistic assessment of the capacities of partner organizations complicates any effort to define roles and responsibilities or to attempt a de facto division of labor. In addition, the UN and the Council still struggle with how best to offer support (including financial resources and capacity building) to regional and subregional organizations. Adding to the oft-cited operational difficulties with partnerships on the ground, it is still unclear how the Council can best coordinate with external partners. Even in a UN-led mission, the Council is never the sole actor. It must work in collaboration with a number of other stakeholders. These factors underscore the value of a strategic vision on the part of the Council regarding why, when, and how to use partnerships to greatest effect.

At the political level, while the formal relationship between the Council and regional bodies is codified in the UN Charter, in practice, the

relationship is less clear. Article 53 of Chapter VIII prohibits any enforcement action under regional arrangements without Security Council authorization, but contrary to the Charter, Council authorization is often sought *ex post facto*. Article 54 calls for the Council to be kept fully informed at all times of activities undertaken or contemplated by regional arrangements for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security. Although it may be unreasonable to expect the Council to be kept fully informed of such activities at all times, more regular reporting to the Council by regional and subregional organizations would be welcome.

### Engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission

The discussion also addressed how the Council might better collaborate with other parts of the UN system, particularly the Peacebuilding Commission. Some described the PBC as an “orphan” and exhorted the Council to take better care of its child. It was suggested that those with permanent seats on both bodies could do more to fully engage the PBC.

Several ways for the Council to collaborate more closely with the PBC were proposed. For example, the chairs of the PBC’s country-specific configurations could be invited to Council discussions. The PBC could be given a role in advising on and helping to monitor peacebuilding benchmarks in Council mandates. If appropriate, the next country placed on the Council’s agenda could be concurrently placed on the PBC agenda to foster integration between peacekeeping and peacebuilding. The Executive or Special Representatives of the Secretary-General of PBC countries could report first to the PBC and then allow the PBC to report to the Council. The Council could learn from the PBC’s flexible working methods and emphasis on national ownership. There was some disagreement over whether the PBC should be prepared to take on a “bigger” case to demonstrate its value, with some participants arguing that countries had yet to see the value in being placed on the PBC’s agenda. Above all, there were a number of calls for a more organic institutional relationship between the PBC and the Council, reflective of the value of a more integrated approach to peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

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