

Peacebuilding – the Asian Perspective

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There are few issues on which there is greater consensus, or higher expectations, than on the responsibility of the United Nations to help States and societies recover from the devastation of war

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan

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Introduction

UN efforts to build and maintain peace, whilst showing some remarkable results, have not always succeeded in instilling stable and peaceful societies. In 2005 the UN Secretary-General wrote that that “Our record of success in mediating and implementing peace agreements is sadly blemished by some devastating failures. Indeed, several of the most violent and tragic episodes of the 1990s occurred after the negotiation of peace agreements.” UN endeavours have been especially successful at initially establishing secure environments conducive to infrastructural reconstruction and political institution building. However, the creation of self-sustaining structures that would allow for economic growth and social transformation has proven elusive. A great of attention in recent years has been focussed on developing a new institutional framework that would provide a more comprehensive and effective solution to challenges in conflict-prone societies. The new Peacebuilding Commission that started work in June 2006 aims to address post-conflict situations in war-torn countries in an effort to bridge the institutional divide within the UN between peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. Peacebuilding, in contrast to peacekeeping or reconstruction, aims at pre-empting the collapse of peace settlements, promoting reconstruction, reconciliation and institution building through integrated strategies. By doing so, it lays the foundations for sustainable long-term development. The most important function of the newly created Peacebuilding Commission is to ensure the link between the immediate post-conflict efforts on the one hand and the long-term recovery and development on the other. When it comes to initial peace operations, peacebuilding calls for both internal and external involment on policy-making and operational levels. This is to ensure local ownership of peace operations as well as monetary and technical support from outside actors, especially from neighbouring regional groupings. The new PBC will be the central node for the promotion of peacebuilding strategies both in general terms and in country-specific cases.

Background

The UN millennium summit marked a shift in consciousness for the UN. The outbreak of various regional conflicts in the aftermath of the Cold War and the establishment of a large number of peacekeeping operations by the UN Security Council [UNSC], with little attention paid to how they were to be carried out, has left

the UN organization overburdened and stretched beyond its human and financial limits. Accordingly, this situation led policy-makers to realize the need for reform of defective UN institutions that were endangering the long term viability of the UN system. The UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change consequently proposed the establishment of an intergovernmental Peacebuilding Commission [PBC] aimed at providing a coordinated, coherent and integrated approach to post-conflict peacebuilding and assisting countries with the transition from war to long-term peace. The PBC was established by General Assembly and Security Council resolutions at the UN world summit in September 2005 and began its work in June 2006. Corresponding resolutions also led to the establishment of a Peace Building Support Office [PBSO] and a Peacebuilding Fund so as to effectively mobilize, manage, and allocate financial resources for the purpose of peacebuilding.

The most important element of the PBC's mandate is to advise the UN Security Council [SC], the ECOSOC and the General Assembly [GA] and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery by focusing on reconstruction, institution building and sustainable development. The agenda of the PBC will be set by its Organizational Committee at the request of the Security Council, the ECOSOC or the General Assembly. The PBC may also initiate on its own investigations into member states which are on the verge of lapsing or relapsing into conflict, if it is not already engaged in the matter by the SC or GA. The new 31 member intergovernmental advisory committee will function as a subsidiary organ of the GA and the SC, taking on the role of facilitating collaboration and coordination amongst political, military, humanitarian, development and UN actors. It also has country-specific configurations to address specific country cases on the PBC's agenda.

Peacebuilding activities are set to encompass:

- Establishing security and restoring law and order through disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants into society;
- Restoring the provision of basic human needs and security;
- (Re)establishing state institutions and building/strengthening their capacity to restore service delivery and to support democratization;
- (Re)establishing a sustainable market economy which does not exacerbate tensions in the fragile post-conflict society and finally leads to development;
- and repatriation and settlement of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Peacebuilding activities may seamlessly follow peacekeeping operations that have been halted due to an expiry of mandate. They build on the foundations laid down by the peacekeeping operation and address the root causes of the respective conflicts. In the past, incoherent and un-integrated strategies for addressing post-conflict situations have often led to fragmented international assistance. The SC has thus asked the international community for closer, long-term collaboration between regional and sub-regional organisations, donor countries and international financial institutions. A collective approach allows for coherent financing of peacebuilding projects as well as strengthening of mechanisms that promote self-reliance by improving capacity building activities.

This brief will discuss advancements in peacebuilding made in Asia against the backdrop of a recent conference named 'People Building Peace – Human Resource Development in Asia for Peacebuilding' held in Tokyo on 28 and 29 August 2006.

Regional Organisations and the PBC

Asia, being the largest contributor of troops to UN Peace Operations, has been highly commended by the UN on its ongoing peacebuilding endeavours. The selection process of PBC members has accordingly favoured the Asian group, with a particular focus on countries that have experienced post-conflict recovery themselves. Membership of such countries enables the PBC to directly draw on past experience with peacebuilding. Asia currently holds 8 of the 31 seats on the PBC, allowing it to exercise some authority when it comes to formulating the PBC's agenda, its strategies and policy initiatives.

With many countries in the Asian group belonging to the 'global south', Asia is in a position to better relate to situations of conflict within other developing nations, at times showing greater empathy for persisting problems than countries from the developed 'global north'. Peacebuilding experiences such as in the Philippines serve as an ample example of this. In the case of Mindanao, mediation attempts by Islamic countries under the auspices of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference [OIC] and the regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN] were effective in establishing initial peace agreements, based largely on an understanding of common values of the Muslim religion. Such efforts may be further explored, developed and applied within other regions of Asia, based on common experiences of economic and social development that form a groundwork for South-South cooperation.

In light of the above, recent trends in the regionalization of security policies has made the relationship between regional organizations and the UN more and more decisive. Already in 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali in his "Agenda for peace" stressed that greater involvement of regional organizations in strategies for conflict resolution could take pressure off the UN. At the same time, regional organisations are adapting their institutions in order to meet the current challenges of fragile states and civil war. Coordination and recruitment of human resources on a regional level resulted in initiatives such as the "White Helmets" program initiated by the Philippines. The main feature of this program is a volunteer corps providing humanitarian assistance to people suffering from emergency situations. The main idea behind this program is to provide an integrated solution for UN and other Peace Operations "under one roof" by combining the Blue (military/police) and White (other civilian) Helmets into one peacebuilding operation, adding greater value and substance to existing peace projects.

The amalgamation of training initiatives for peacebuilding operations is especially encouraged in order to prevent overlapping initiatives taken by separate divisions. Projects such as virtual training grounds would enable regional military and civilian training to be carried out on a large scale via virtual media. This would allow participants from all sectors to undergo simultaneous briefings on the local situation and culture of the conflicted society prior to deployment. The amalgamation of training facilities would also ensure the adequate use of available funds and thus reduce cost as well as ease the logistical haywire of bringing together different PKOs

into one regiment under the auspices of the UN. The transfer of technology and knowledge would play a key role in these operations, ensuring human resource development not only of military but also for civil personal.

At present, the composition of Asian PKO's dispatched for UN endeavours abroad, is still perceived to be unbalanced as they include only a small percentage of civilian personnel such as police officers, doctors or lawyers. Asian countries are implored by other troop contributing nations to re-evaluate this situation in an effort to increase human capacity contributions to post-conflict states. Civil forces could for example offer specialised training to a newly established police force and thus contribute to the establishment of legitimate security measures within the conflicted society. Trained legal personnel could assist with the legal aspects of creating a new and effective constitution, as well as with election monitoring. Recruitment for such operations may come from universities, government and NGO offices, public health institutes and from among retired members of military and police forces, depending on the specific expertise required. Gender and cultural issues should be taken into consideration when recruiting peacebuilders for a certain region. In order to effectively train peacebuilders in Asia, government ministries in each country should coordinate among themselves, as should universities offering relevant courses. Mission specific training prior to deployment would follow general training for the people involved. Further training initiatives also call for the establishment of a Young Professionals Programme, which would include training and dissemination of civilian expertise and assistance with the technical and logistical aspects of post-conflict reconstruction. A regional approach toward peacebuilding can help Asia, by drawing on its own experience, to become a rich pool for talents that can be used for peacebuilding missions universally..

Experience with the activities of the Japan's Self Defence Force [JSDF] in Iraq once again showed the importance of military-civilian cooperation for effective disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. By cooperating with civil agencies including the Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA] and International Organization for Migration [IOM], the JSDF could greatly enhance its operational effectiveness, especially when it came to grasping local communities' needs.

Financing of the above initiatives will be borne by individual countries. However, as the integration of programmes progresses, regional funds may be employed accordingly. When it comes to the financing of international peacebuilding missions, the PBSO plays a vital role in supporting the PBC in its everyday deliberations. The function of the PBSO as defined in the UN General Assembly resolution 60/694 from 23 February 2006, is to collect and analyze information on available financial resources for post-conflict countries; to advocate capacity building in mandated agencies or in other partners organizations where resources are inadequate or unavailable and to advise on best practices to ensure sustained financing for recovery, development and other peacebuilding activities. The PBSO is part of the Executive Office of the Secretary General and is in charge of the Peacebuilding Fund [PBF]. This Trust Fund established to support critical peacebuilding efforts in countries under review by the PBC, is perceived as a flexible funding mechanism which will play an important role in attracting additional financial resources. Peacebuilding requires longstanding efforts and commitment in order to effectively deal with conflict situations and to establish long lasting peace.

Engaging Civil Society

At present, no specific recommendations exist within the BPC mandate to regulate relations with civil society and non-governmental organisations [NGOs] in particular. A recent Security Council statement has, however, emphasised the importance of these relationships, highlighting the engagement of women's organisations and private sector organizations in conflicted societies. Local participation in peacebuilding does not only create legitimacy of peace operations but also fosters sustainability of peace efforts. Civil society involvement is particularly beneficial for the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs, which are essential for avoiding the resurgence of conflict.¹ It is crucial to recognize the importance of local ownership of strategies for rebuilding infrastructure and establishing legitimate governance structures. Local ownership helps to make these structures self-sustaining.

Local civil society organisations [CSOs] are in a position to mobilise individuals in peacebuilding activities, to draw upon local expertise for research and capacity-building activities and to deepen the understanding of peacebuilding challenges within conflict prone societies from a local perspective. Future cooperation between NGOs, CSOs and the PBC through the acknowledgement of these rights (?) are therefore seen as essential to legitimise each actor's operations as well as to avoid undermining present and future peace projects undertaken by the different actors.

The Japan Platform Programme as an example of projects by civil society organisations is striving to establish national consensus and legitimacy for work done within local communities. CSOs give a voice to the marginalized to express their concerns by:

- reducing the influence of forces promoting exclusionary policies or violence
- strengthening reconciliation by establishing grass root mechanisms to address past human atrocities and appealing to those who might try to restart conflict,
- monitoring peace operations carried out by international forces, and thus ensuring that national and international actors are held accountable,
- assisting in building national consensus on the design of post conflict structures and programmes,
- preparing local communities to receive back into society former soldiers, refugees and internally displaced persons.

Difficulties may arise from the politicization of peacebuilding processes, which endangers those who are willing to work for the building of peace. Problems might also stem from a lack of sensitivity for human rights issues in general. Thirdly, difficulties may come from international NGOs that fail to work closely with local civil society partners to create more opportunities for local voices to be heard. Challenges faced from within Japan pertain to that of fund raising, where peacebuilding has to compete with relief operations and development activities.

¹ Security council, in presidential statement, cites critical importance of peacebuilding, need to prevent countries' 'relapsing into conflict' Press Release SC/839526/05/2005
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/sc8395.doc.htm>

There also exists an indifference among Japanese people toward issues of justice or the rule of law. Thirdly, there is an apparent lack of understanding among donors and ordinary citizens for what peacebuilding is. A possible solution for these problems would be to include collective efforts to sponsor events to raise public awareness and integrate with other organisations working for the building of peace.

Post-conflict situations require capacity to assist public administrations which often include poorly qualified and underpaid civil servants. In countries with insufficient human capacity, ongoing external support is necessary and the exit strategy must be carefully considered. A critical element for peacebuilding would be the capacity development of multiple stakeholders on the regional and the national level including government institutions, parliament, civil society and the media. NGO, CSOs and the PBC have come to agree that elections are not only a one-off activity but need to be backed by long-term investment in democratic and parliamentary development.

Additionally, local civil society organisations may be able to provide a valuable link between the PBC and local populations both in terms of identifying local priorities in peacebuilding and the transmission of information needed for coordinated peacebuilding strategies. This ultimately contributes to a global comparative analysis of peacebuilding operations which would be scientific and policy-oriented and directed towards current and future operations. The ultimate goal of this capacity-building should be the promotion of self-supporting national authorities and thus the evolution of international assistance from peace support to long-term peace development. Finally, the exchange of ideas on peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives involving established scholars as well as younger academics deepens the understanding of the conflict resolution process making policies more relevant to the conflicted environment.

South-South cooperation has a great scope for further expansion in the area of peacebuilding. Also, many countries in the Asian region have emerged as donors and have become actively engaged in development assistance. Countries that have gone through peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction on their own have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can be shared for the benefit of other developing countries.

Recommendations

In view of the above, the following recommendations are made.

Suggestions of peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities to the SC and GA need to be taken seriously if the PBC is to succeed. Future initiatives may include giving the PBC more backbone to generate greater output in terms of international assistance for establishing successful long-term peace in post-conflict countries. PBC advice such as pre-emptive military action within nation-states' borders in order to prevent a relapse to war may be regarded by some as a necessity. By others, however, it may be seen as an infringement of sovereignty. Such reservations would lead to a lack of international legitimacy, resulting in inaction rather than action - in stark contrast to the PBC's initial mandate.

Also, future Asian peacebuilding endeavours need to move towards an integration of efforts, more specifically of peacekeeping forces. A three level-two dimensions approach may be envisaged: Starting from the integration of national peacekeeping forces, regional and then international forces would be integrated, with the two dimensions referring to the incorporation of civilian and military personnel under the same command. Accordingly, logistical and financial difficulties may be reduced as initiatives such as these would allow for a more effective use of funds. The integration of troops into regional formations rather than national ones could assist the UN in coordinating peace missions in a more effective way instead of having to coordinate groups of peacekeepers from different parts of the world by itself.

Future endeavours to create a rapid response mission for the Asian region with the ability of mobilizing troops and civilian personnel at a moment's notice, making immediate post-conflict assistance possible, need to be encouraged. It is often found that once a peace agreement has been reached between conflicting parties, the elapsing time between the signing of the agreement and the arrival of the first peacekeeping forces is susceptible to relapsing conflict between opposing parties, ultimately threatening to disband progress already achieved.

Finally, the re-emergence of conflicts may often be linked to problems with constrained peacebuilding operations. For example, if time and money allocated to a peacebuilding mission is too limited, vital infrastructural transformations may not have been effectively put in place prior to the extraction of external forces, enhancing the possibility for a re-emergence of conflict within a short period. Too often the international community would look for a quick solution to a complex situation, leaving conflicted societies worse off than when initially approached. In particular, donor fatigue needs to be addressed as international actors often fail to recognize the need for ongoing support after an initial establishment of a peace settlement followed by democratic elections. Media attention also plays a vital role by indirectly influencing donor parties and ultimately slowing down the response rate of peacebuilding operations. Peacebuilding should be a long term activity aimed specifically at addressing the root causes of conflicts in order to build a platform for long-term peace.