The Evolution of Peacebuilding: Improved Ideas and Institutions?

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Today’s ideas about peacebuilding (and related concepts such as post-conflict reconstruction, statebuilding, conflict mitigation, and stabilization) represent the outcome of 25 years of rapidly evolving thinking.

The study of peacebuilding really began with the dramatic increase in UN-mediated peace processes in the early 1990s. Over time, different notions of peacebuilding emerged, reflecting both successive experiences in peace operations and evolving scholarly ideas as they reacted to one another and perceived ‘lessons learned’ of international interventions.

This paper analyzes the evolution of ideas and institutions organized around peacebuilding from 1989-2014, divided into phases: (1) Multidimensional peacekeeping from the end of the Cold War through the 1990s; (2) Peacebuilding as statebuilding that emerged in the early 2000s; (3) The period around the creation of the Peacebuilding Architecture; and (4) Nationally-owned peacebuilding, moving away from large-scale international authorities in ways that recognize, but fail to adequately institutionalize, national decision-making, participatory processes, more agile funding, and local context and capacities.
I. 1989-99: Peacebuilding as Multidimensional peacekeeping

In the early 1990s, several long-running civil wars were settled peacefully through international facilitation or mediation, including in Namibia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cambodia, Mozambique and Guatemala. As a result, models for ‘peacemaking’ rose to prominence. However, mediation-focused approaches showed their limits in the face of frustrating failures of negotiated settlements in Angola, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia. In each of these cases, international actors invested significant time and resources in achieving an accord, only to see spoilers undermine them with a return to horrific violence.

In response, the international community began to look at ‘peace implementation’ and how to manage determined spoilers. Attention was paid to international monitoring and verification of peace agreements, focusing on how to garner the international political will, capacities and knowledge for more effective implementation.

Practice – rather than theory – drove the broadening of the peacebuilding concept. Within the UN Secretariat, peacebuilding activities largely fell under the term “multi-dimensional peacekeeping,” with civilian requirements expanding rapidly to include monitoring and advising peacekeeping with civilian requirements expanding rapidly to include monitoring and advising on political, human rights, civil affairs, electoral, disarmament and demobilization, humanitarian assistance and policing tasks.

Within development ministries and UN agencies, the practice of peacebuilding evolved in a slightly different manner. Peacebuilding was a term used in policy and project documents, but largely detached from any theory of change. Development agencies tended to presume that all development work in fragile countries constituted peacebuilding, and adaptation of activities to a conflict-focus was slow.

II. 1999-2005: Peacebuilding as Statebuilding

Beginning in 1999, the state assumed a more salient role in the theory and practice of peacebuilding, derived mainly from two major UN operations. In 1999, the UN assumed unprecedented executive authority in Kosovo and East Timor. It became the de facto state, revealing a need for new international civilian capacity to administer state functions during transitional periods. These experiences opened a debate that was hastened by the US-led war in Afghanistan from 2001 and the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003-04.

In policy circles, UN officials and Western donors began discussing the need for the institutionalization of enhanced civilian capacity. Indeed, at the beginning of the new millennium, it seemed plausible that the UN, regional organizations or ad hoc Western coalitions might directly administer an increasing number of foreign territories in the future. An array of scholars called for a heavier international hand in post-war peace operations.

One variant that emerged was a partial, rather than total, takeover of certain state functions. Seeing de facto trusteeships as a reality of contemporary international politics, Krasner argued for “shared sovereignty”, which would “involve the engagement of external actors in some of the domestic authority structures of the target state for an indefinite period.”

In contrast, others advocated a state-centric approach but eschewed a lead executive role for international institutions. Along with other statebuilding advocates, Ghani and Lockhart argued strongly for national state institutions and the state-led delivery of services as the bedrock for sustained peace and state legitimacy. Criticizing the tendency of international donors to bypass the state, they argued that international aid delivered without the state undermined state legitimacy rather than strengthening it.

Parallel research by economists highlighted the need for post-conflict states to have the capacity to raise and spend state revenues, to regulate natural
resources and to curb predatory behavior. In the early 2000s, researchers began calling attention to the role of poverty and natural resources. Other scholars combined these explanations with political factors such as forms and patterns of governance, state institutional capacity, and power-driven irrational leaders. Quantitative research also generated knowledge about the risk of conflict relapse and demonstrated that successful peacebuilding is enormously important for preventing wars around the globe.

This expansive theoretical framework was mirrored by a more ambitious role for international actors, and the expansion of national bureaucracies thereafter. The UK created a joint Defence-Development-Diplomatic Post-Conflict Unit (later "Stabilisation Unit") in 2004, while the US, Canada, and other states created similar offices in the early 2000s. Each of these governments also created specialized funds for conflict prevention or response. Unfortunately, these offices generally lacked the authority to coordinate or hold other government agencies accountable for more coordinated service delivery.

Various development organizations and ministries also enhanced their focus on armed conflict, creating offices dedicated to crisis or conflict issues. In 1997, the World Bank's board endorsed a policy on post-conflict countries and created a Post-Conflict Unit. In 2001, UNDP created its Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery, drawing new resources and attention to post-conflict situations.

At the United Nations Secretariat, four early innovations emerged to accommodate new statebuilding practices. First, peacekeeping mandates were broadened with new tasks, such as the extension of state authority, security and justice sector reform, national dialogue, natural resource administration, or electoral assistance. Second, there was a small enhancement of civilian capacities to match these new tasks, and several peace and development advisors were deployed to support UN Country Teams' conflict mitigation activities in non-mission contexts. However, with the exception of formed police units, these changes were incremental rather than transformative. Third, the Security Council began to authorize a growing number of field-based political missions without a military component. Consequently, the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) began to manage an increasing number of missions without any increase in its backstopping capacity. Fourth, integrated mission planning was developed to try to bring the agencies and funds, including the World Bank, into pre-mission planning for peace operations.

Finally, Member States created the Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) at the 2005 World Summit, with the establishment of an intergovernmental Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), a Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) inside the Secretariat, and a new Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). This happened at a moment when the 'peacebuilding as statebuilding' approach was prevalent in practice, but beginning to be questioned, partially due to the failure of the US occupation to stabilize Iraq.

III. 2005: The United Nations' Peacebuilding Architecture – A response to five gaps

The creation of the new PBA stemmed from a broad recognition of five gaps in concepts, policies, practice and capacities, driven by the vision of the 2004 High-level Panel (HLP) on Threats, Challenges and Change, which called for:

"...a single intergovernmental organ dedicated to peacebuilding, empowered to monitor and pay close attention to countries at risk, ensure concerted action by donors, agencies, programmes and financial institutions, and mobilize financial resources for sustainable peace."

These five gaps are essential analytic starting points for understanding the origins and assessing the performance of the PBA.
1. THE “CLOUT GAP”: THE NEED FOR POST PEACEKEEPING DIPLOMATIC ATTENTION

The creation of the PBA, and particularly the PBC, was a direct response to the diagnosis of the HLP that "When peacekeepers leave a country, it falls off the radar screen..." The PBC, whose membership encompasses representatives of the permanent Security Council members, the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, top donors, and troop-contributing countries, was designed to sustain high-level attention to peace consolidation by bringing together "all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding." Essentially, the PBC was supposed to be a high-level platform where Permanent Representatives would come together and use their "clout" to focus on peacebuilding needs and priorities.

2. THE "COHERENCE GAP": THE NEED FOR COHESION AND COORDINATION

International assistance was deeply fragmented, with divisions among well-resourced but conflict-insensitive international financial institutions, interest-driven bilateral actors, and the mandate-driven UN System. Inclusion of the World Bank and IMF in PBC meetings and deliberations was supposed to improve coordination. Within states, parallel fragmentation prevailed across defense, development and diplomatic ministries. For the UN, the functions of the new Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) included ensuring that "the Secretary-General is able to integrate system-wide peacebuilding policies and strategies, ... and provide cohesive support for field operations."

3. THE "CRITICAL FUNDING GAP": THE NEED FOR MORE AND QUICKER RESOURCES

A third principal function of the PBA was to fill a critical gap in mobilizing resources for peacebuilding. This gap manifested itself in three ways. First, there was the need to fill a "quick-funding" gap in resources between an early emergency phase of a conflict or its termination, and the longer-term development resources that require months or years to program and deliver. The timeframes of the World Bank and other UN agencies were seen as too slow to meet the needs of fast-moving peace processes on the ground. An agreement for a ceasefire required resources for cantoned combatants within weeks, not months or years.

This inadequacy of mechanisms to fund urgent post-conflict requirements existed in both non-mission and mission settings. Peacekeeping operations operate within narrow budgetary constraints so as to minimize unexpected expenditures for Member States. Their budget is largely limited to uniformed and civilian peacekeeping staff and the things they need to deploy and operate – i.e. it pays for people to operate, not for programmes. Conversely, bilateral donors, the World Bank and other UN actors are expected to cover the costs of programmes. Yet the priorities of the World Bank and of UN agencies remained focused on traditional sectors like health, education and humanitarian efforts. Peace priorities in the security, justice and governance sectors received increased development monies, but prevailing planning and disbursement mechanisms remained too slow for fast-moving post-conflict environments. The PBF was created partly to help meet these requirements for agile funding that UN agencies were not always able to fulfill.

Second, the PBC was created partly to fill a post-peacekeeping gap in funding. Through the donor conferences accompanying peace operations, donors and multilateral institutions pledge more resources during a peace operation (despite inadequate mechanisms for quick delivery). Yet when the troops of a peacekeeping mission depart, diplomatic attention and resources fall off. The PBC, with the participation of the World Bank and the IMF as observers, was envisioned as an avenue for leading and interested Member States to mobilize additional monies for post-peacekeeping recovery.
Third, it became clear that there was a need for quick and responsive funding in response to crises or otherwise urgent situations in fragile states, where armed conflict was possible and established channels for funding would be too time consuming. For instance, if an armed conflict were to unexpectedly break out or a fragile regime were to fall, the rapid deployment of resources would be necessary for peace initiatives, human rights monitoring or job programmes. The PBF was intended to fill this gap, mainly through its Immediate Response Facility.

4. THE “ANALYSIS GAP”: THE NEED FOR EARLY WARNING AND LESSONS LEARNED

Observers had lamented the absence of any single entity within the UN System that would systematically analyze potential conflicts and provide an early warning to the principal organs. Although DPA monitors political developments and advises the Secretary-General about potential violent conflicts on an ad hoc basis, its officials were not specialized in conflict analysis, and its functions did not include systematic scanning for potential hotspots. Furthermore, once a mandated mission departed, UN Country Teams were not customarily staffed to offer such political and security analysis. Consequently both the PBC and the PBSO contemplated an early warning role that has not transpired, not least because Member States were reluctant to have the UN play such a role.

More widely embraced was the need for a depository of lessons learned and best practices in peacebuilding. The HLP recommended that the PBSO analyse in-country planning activities, progress toward meeting goals, and best practices in peacebuilding. The Policy Planning Unit of DPA was not adequately staffed to play such a role at the time, and the Best Practices Unit of the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) focused exclusively on countries with peacekeeping operations. Upon its formation, the PBSO assigned a small number of staff to this function. However, a lack of sufficient capacity and other competing priorities rendered it ineffective. By 2010, the function was largely sidelined within the PBSO as it turned away from its policy priorities to focus on supporting the PBC and managing the PBF.

The PBC also formed a Working Group on Lessons Learned, which enhanced the knowledge of peacebuilding for officials within Permanent Missions and generated some fruitful exchanges with the governments on the PBC's agenda. However, it never yielded the repository envisioned for practitioners in the field, either within the UN System or among the myriad non-governmental and regional actors engaged in peacebuilding around the globe.

Finally, some Member States hoped that the PBA would refine and create consensus around a coherent definition of “peacebuilding”. Early discussions within the PBC and within the PBSO debated what the concept meant and whether these organizations should strive to forge a conceptual consensus that would extend throughout the UN System. There remains no consensus on what peacebuilding constitutes, on who performs peacebuilding or even on the basic time-frame for the engagement of the instruments of the PBA.

IV. 2009-2014: Nationally-owned peacebuilding

a. Evolving theory

By 2009, new trends in peacebuilding began to produce more variegated approaches. New voices from the global South, particularly through the g7+ and the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, demanded more nationally-owned processes. The troubled experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq called into question even temporary assumptions of executive state power by international military or civilian missions, and challenged top-down approaches inspired by liberalism and externally-driven models and capacities.
Especially in Africa, regional and sub-regional organizations considered expanding their civilian capacity for peacekeeping and peacebuilding, though admittedly with limited success. The Arab Spring instigated political transitions that often did not conform to specifically defined “peacekeeping” or “post-war peacebuilding” mandates. Yet these transitions required similar programs such as support for ad hoc processes of swift political reform, urgent reforms to security and justice systems, quick mediation and conflict prevention efforts, and quick-disbursing assistance. Thus the Arab Spring challenged peacebuilding institutions to adapt to these circumstances.

Reflections on peacebuilding after 2008 also took on a more critical posture, both through normative critiques of “liberal peacebuilding” and the mixed results that emerged from quantitative analyses. The critiques of liberal peacebuilding included resistance to the blueprint of democratization-cum-marketization and the “ideological interests of the principal organs that push it,” and to marginalization of local context, civil society, and affected people. These drew from negative outcomes in places like Liberia, Haiti, Guinea-Bissau, CAR, and of course Afghanistan and Iraq, but also from an examination of processes, motives, and perverse consequences for people in the affected societies. In 2011, Paris wrote, “Today, expressions of distrust, pessimism, and even cynicism about liberal peacebuilding have become common.”

Several findings stand out. First, an important shift concerned the rejection of broad international mandates and “blockbuster” international authorities. Citing experiences in Kosovo, Timor-Leste and Bosnia, recent scholarship shows no sign of the notion that the international exercise of executive authority, even on a transitional basis, is superior to national authorities.

Second, research also advocated a longer-term, supporting role for international missions or peacebuilding practitioners, rather than a brief, heavy-footprint and subsequent handoff to an elected government. The World Development Report 2011, which focused on fragile and conflict-affected states, found that international aid “needs to be sustained for a minimum of 15 years to support most long-term institutional transformations.” Although the WDR 2011 embraced some standardized approaches (security, justice and jobs, with inclusive governance), the role it envisioned for international advisers was one of support for national authorities.

Third, scholars echoed the positions of diplomats from the global South by advocating much more serious ownership and leadership of national actors in peacebuilding deliberations, decision-making and allocation of resources. Research also documented the inadequate consultation and empowerment of local peoples in peacebuilding efforts in their own communities. In multiple countries, Autesserre found that a common theme among peacebuilding project participants is that “expatriates impose their ideas in a manner both disrespectful and humiliating.” Local NGO staff interviewed by “The Listening Project” in Bosnia-Herzegovina suggested that “international agencies claim to be ‘partners’ with their beneficiaries or local organizations, but then behave as the owners/bosses.” Be it due to short timelines, bureaucratic incentives or willful ignorance, international actors remain the primary source of most peacebuilding plans and programs. The difficulty of incorporating local voices is, of course, complicated by the predatory and criminal behavior exercised by national governments, local authorities and rebels, often causes of violent conflict in the first place.

Fourth, research shows that accountability of external peacebuilding projects correlates with greater effectiveness and impact. Campbell (2014) finds that “downward” accountability of projects correlates with greater effectiveness, yet “upward” accountability of recipients to donors does not.
Fifth, early but still inconclusive scholarship suggests that national and global Southern civilian capacities could offer advantages over Northern counterparts. The WDR 2011 called for empowering national capacities in many realms. De Coning et al. argue that "Experts from the South may have more relevant experience ... because geographic, cultural and historic proximity can facilitate South-South capacity transfer." Other studies find preliminary but untested evidence that Southern countries bring comparative advantages to the table.

Sixth, increasing evidence emerged of the positive impact of gendered approaches and women’s participation in peacebuilding. For instance, women’s groups in Liberia and female negotiators in Northern Ireland strengthened and broadened the reach of final agreements. In places such as Burundi, Uganda, and Guatemala, the inclusion of provisions on women in agreements led to increased services for displaced victims of violence. In Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Burundi, women’s participation in peacebuilding facilitated the creation of specialized subnational police offices that produced notably increased attention to victims of sexual violence. However, references to women in peace agreements and in post-war constitutions remain insubstantial, and most peacebuilding continues to be gender-blind. Gains for women’s rights during periods of violent conflict and transition are subject to reversal, and their sustainability depends upon greater attention to the norms of masculinity and the role of men.

b. Evolving Practice
By 2009, multilateral organizations were engaged in a messy combination of large-scale peace operations and ambitious statebuilding tasks while struggling to simultaneously support and follow inclusive national processes. They sought to build better bureaucratic mechanisms for the funding and deployment of civilians, as well as more agile funding and deployment tools that build on local capacities, institutions and resources. In the age of counterterrorism, robust mandates for international peacekeepers and strong security components became necessities for international actors to operate. The growing tendency to deploy international peace operations to places where violent conflict and/or terrorism persisted, rather than to situations where peace agreements were in place, added to this pressure. Even in places like Mali and Somalia, international strategies have placed national authorities, with a nod to inclusivity, front and center. However, international practice continued to lack genuine "national-ownership."

The widely recognized failures of US-led efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq heralded a retreat from military roles in peacebuilding, but this was not entirely the case, especially in the South where militaries are an available tool for deployment in service of unconditional peace projects centered on development and infrastructure. Regional powers like India, Brazil and South Africa have long resisted expansionist approaches to peacebuilding and statebuilding. All of these developments underscored high-profile commitments to national ownership. International practice now reflects some notional longer-term commitments to national processes of peacebuilding. In recognition of the long-term character of peacebuilding, the UK and the Netherlands recently adopted 10-year commitments in specific peacebuilding programs. The Security Council has implicitly acknowledged this by authorizing peace operations for longer periods, so that they now often span three electoral cycles. However, many consider these longer-term commitments to be exceptional, experimental, inadequately funded and unreliable in light of budgetary constraints and shifting priorities.

The formation in 2008 of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, now comprising over 40 countries and major institutions, marked a shared commitment toward mutual accountability between traditional Western donors and some of
the fragile and conflict-affected countries that receive the most foreign aid. OECD countries have taken small steps to redress the power imbalance that has infused aid for many decades between donor and recipient. Although national plans and assessments are still too often drafted by international consultants, new processes require greater national participation in peacebuilding programming and prioritization.

At the UN, the Security Council’s 2008 request that led to the Secretary-General’s report “Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict” placed national ownership at the center of peacebuilding. The Council called for the SG “to provide advice on how the United Nations could better support national efforts to secure sustainable peace more rapidly and effectively.” The inclusion of troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and members elected from the General Assembly and ECOSOC in the PBC’s membership emblemizes a commitment to more representative bodies at a global level.

At the national level, the Peacebuilding Fund’s requirement that governments generate their own peacebuilding plans and priorities, usually in conjunction with a multi-constituency Joint Steering Committee, illustrates this principle. These developments also respond to the most sustained and strident scholarly critique of the dominant peacebuilding approaches over the past several years: that their liberal political and economic content does not benefit everyday people but rather advances Western economic and strategic interests.

The UN has recognized the challenge of improved civilian capacity but has not been able to address it adequately. Building on “Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict” and prior calls for greater civilian capacity, the Secretary-General created an advisory group in 2010 and subsequently a ’CivCap’ initiative that specifically sought to generate greater civilian capacity in peace and security. One of the central findings of these efforts was the importance of taking advantage of the global South for civilian technical assistance and advice for countries emerging from conflict. At the same time, countries from the global South have increasingly offered their skills to fragile and war-torn societies on the basis of proximity, language or culture. Western donors are also increasingly funding such efforts to achieve more cost-effective and context-appropriate peacebuilding outcomes.

In 2012-13, for instance, the United States allowed its 340-member standing Civilian Response Corps to lapse. Instead, it opted to hire civilians on an as-needed basis to deploy personnel whose backgrounds and skillsets were more suitable to support rather than replace national capacity.

In recent years, peacekeeping and peacebuilding entities have also sought to tailor their efforts to subnational contexts. They routinely conduct consultations at subnational levels in formulating plans with national authorities, including with civil society organizations. The PBF has also encouraged and funded projects that respond to specific subnational challenges. This contextualized approach responds partly to the criticism of liberal one-size-fits-all models that fail to account for subnational dynamics. Over the past decade, the World Bank has also expanded its use of participatory research methods that capture local needs and perceptions, as well as post-conflict funding models where elected local bodies determine how money shall be spent. Nevertheless, these efforts have not sufficed, partly due to the limited ability of large bureaucracies to develop and implement tailored programs for multiple localities in countries as large as the DRC or Somalia.”
V. Conclusions

In charting the evolution of ideas and institutions related to peacebuilding, this paper implicitly conveys a degree of learning over the past 25 years. Some early notions about peacebuilding have proven to be short-sighted, overly optimistic, insufficiently nuanced, and unrepresentative of global perspectives. Other ideas have proven valuable and durable. The rapid institutional evolution around peacebuilding reflects not just these ideas but also experiences on the ground, States’ interests, bureaucratic tendencies, and resource limitations.

Below are some of the challenges in filling the gaps identified in the early 2000s and in meeting the expectations of post-conflict societies.

The move away from large international-footprint peacebuilding has not congealed around a single vision of peacebuilding. Instead, in recent years there has been a recognition of the need for facilitative roles for international actors, humility, longer-term engagement, and variegated approaches that respond to different demands and contexts. Global stakeholders require genuine and plural national ownership processes, but also ways for local people to participate.

This standard is demanding. One key challenge remains the harmonization of external support for national ownership with international checks on abusive, exclusionary or corrupt national actors. It can be tricky for external actors to stand behind national processes and newly elected governments if the latter engage in self-defeating behavior. Clearer external expectations and a greater role for neighboring states and regional organizations might be productive in operationalizing “mutual accountability”.

Second, it is not easy for international bureaucracies to adapt and respond to local contexts in sensible and cost-effective ways. Bureaucracies require standardization and routine for efficiency and for rationalizing expenditures. Training imperatives and logistics demand some standardization, and contextual approaches on a case-to-case basis could paralyze a large bureaucracy and produce confusion. The effort to receive information from dozens of localities and convert it into coherent plans and programs is a monumental commitment of resources and a politically risky venture where conflict persists. Today, effective and participatory ways to elicit nuanced understandings of local realities are beneficial and necessary. However, an increasing portion of international peacebuilding efforts occur in high-risk environments. International actors need to help local actors create mechanisms for local participation that wary national governments can accept.

The UN System needs to examine how to work more effectively in countries where there is no mandated peace operation. These settings demand quick, jointly shared conflict analysis. The UN and partners have still not found effective ways to deploy civilians that understand their political role and adopt a capacity-building posture that supports national institutions.

Finally, international actors face new opportunities for encouraging and ensuring “inclusive peacebuilding.” Exclusionary behavior has proven to be a risk factor for conflict recurrence, and international actors must act deliberately yet delicately in dissuading post-transition authorities from excluding social groups that may resort to warfare.

The PBA has been at the forefront of supporting nationally-owned peacebuilding, with serious deficiencies as it navigates the challenges described. Peacebuilding success requires the entire UN System and its partners to find more effective ways to overcome these challenges in increasingly complex environments amidst demands from multiple constituencies.
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ENDNOTES

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ii Stedman 1997.

iii Caplan 2005


v Krasner 2004, p. 108


viii Richmond 2009, see also Richmond and Franks 2009, Campbell, Chandler and Sabaratnam 2011.

ix p.39


xi Autesserre 2014 p.99

xii Anderson et al 2012 p.27

xiii Deconig et al, 2013 p.136

xiv Kalil and Haman 2012:10; Chandran et al 2009.

xv Domingo et al 2013, p.12.

xvi Castillojo 2011, p.12.


xviii Richmond and Tellidis 2013, p. 7.