



Dialogue on
Globalization

Asian Dialogue on the UN Peacebuilding Commission – Benefits and Challenges

Report of the Conference in Islamabad, June 6th 2006

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PRELIMINARY REMARK

This report sums up the conference "Asian Dialogue on the UN Peacebuilding Commission – Benefits and Challenges". In addition to the recommendations that were formulated during the conference, this report includes the author's own interpretations of the debates at the conference, which may not necessarily represent the views of all participants. The conference was held in Islamabad, Pakistan, on 6 June 2006 by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in cooperation with the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI).

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Summary

- In Asia, the establishment of the PBC was generally received as a positive contribution to the global governance of peace and security and welcomed as strengthening the UN. The PBC was greeted as an important test case for whether and how an intergovernmental body can be both effective and inclusive. The new multilateral structure was particularly welcomed because of its advisory and therefore non-interventionist nature. In this vein, it was also seen as an important new mechanism to prevent unilateralist interventions before, during, and after peacebuilding.
- The Asian point of view on the PBC seems to be influenced by a number of factors: *First*, since the military buildup across the Asian continent has not been accompanied by the development of multilateral peace and security structures, there is a demand for conflict prevention mechanisms. The PBC, however, due to its mandate will not be able to fill this gap. *Second*, there is ample leeway for Asian influence within the PBC, since that continent has eight countries on the Commission. Asian countries are the largest troop contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. The consequences of troop engagement and peacekeeping inform the interest of these countries in the PBC rather than the phenomenon of failed states in the neighborhood. *Third*, the obvious exception to this rule is Afghanistan, which was seen as a country that deserves the attention of the PBC also for the sake of regional stability. Nevertheless, for the time being this is not a realistic scenario given the resentment of the United States to cede influence over the reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- Once the Commission starts its work, the challenge ahead will be to square the heterogeneity of UN member states' interests with the requirements of efficacy and efficiency. Consensus among Asian countries cannot be taken for granted, which holds all the more true for the decision making process of the PBC as a whole. Given the huge agenda that the international community has set out for the PBC, a number of participants therefore cautioned against too high expectations for a new body that merely fulfills an advisory function.
- Moreover, the PBC will be operating by consensus. In the current climate at the UN, this means it will function in many cases in a defensive manner only. It seems to be more likely that the PBC may often not be able to address certain countries and issues rather than that its agenda will be dominated by the biggest UN member states. Preventive and conciliatory maneuvers already dominated member states' negotiations about the countries that will be on the PBC as well as who will chair it. This may just be another example of power politics as usual. On a more optimistic note, one can only hope that the UN's latest institutional offspring can rid itself from such member states' politics, which currently ails much of the UN's work. As participants of this regional conference have made clear, to give the PBC the chance to live up to its potential, this is exactly what those engaged in peace and security politics outside of New York are expecting.

Introduction

The United Nation's Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) was set up by a joint resolution of the UN Security Council and the General Assembly on 20 December 2005¹ to overcome the UN's institutional shortcoming in peacebuilding.

This day-long seminar was the first of a series of regional debates that the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) New York office helps organize throughout 2006. The discussion in Islamabad took place before the first meeting of the PBC on June 23, 2006. It was attended by some 25 Asian government representatives, policy analysts, as well as members of civil society organizations². Moreover, participants were coming from all the eight Asian countries – with the exception of Fiji - that are on the PBC.

The debate addressed three basic questions:

First, what is the PBC, and how do the architecture and the instruments of the Commission reflect the tasks it has to fulfill?

Second, what will be the role of the PBC from a regional perspective, particularly the interaction with existing frameworks for regional security?

Third, what will be the relationship between this UN peacebuilding body and civil society?

For each of these topics, participants formulated a number of key recommendations. These recommendations were summarized by the conference rapporteur, Ambassador Javid Husain from Pakistan.

Form and Function of the PBC

Participants shared a generally positive view about the establishment of the PBC and that it would be useful to fill the gap in the UN system between peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding. Assessing the architecture and the instruments of the PBC, participants formulated a number of expectations but also pointed to several of the Commission's structural shortcomings.

The composition of the PBC was seen by some participants as not sufficiently reflecting the importance of the Asian continent. Yet other discussants pointed out that 8 of the 31 countries are indeed Asian³. The underlying concern here seems to be that the agenda of the PBC may be dominated again by the permanent members of the UN Security Council, particularly the major western powers. Yet since the PBC can give advice only by consensus and with China also being a veto-wielding member of the Security Council, the politics about the PBC will turn out to be more complicated. As a Chinese participant explained, China supports the PBC but only in an advisory role; the non-intervention principle should be maintained. The PBC is a non-coercive body and while this may be seen as a weakness, it also bears a lot of potential. Ultimately, the quality of the advice it gives will be decisive for the 'soft power' that the PBC can wield.

One of the crucial tasks for the PBC will be to develop its own criteria when being called upon for advice: For instance, types and level of conflicts are often times a continuum. In many regions of the world, conflicts are always the result of the same factors, particularly poverty, ecological degradation, and terrorism. Yet the quest for the PBC would be to analyze how these belong to a specific region and to take into account the changing character of any given conflict. Despite all these particularities, it was considered desirable to develop some workable parameters for the conflicts that the PBC tackles. For instance, as a participant from Sri Lanka pointed out, the conflict in that country is characterized formally by a ceasefire. Nevertheless, as the ceasefire is violated by both parties, in reality a low-intensity war is lingering on.

Another crucial task for the PBC will be to address the question of coordination. In her video message to the conference, Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support Carolyn McAskie, who heads the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) within the UN Secretariat, stressed the need for coordination between UN peacebuilding efforts with that of the international financial institutions and other donors. Conference

¹ See General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/180

² For a list of participants see Appendix

³ Currently, Bangladesh, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are on the PBC.

participants in addition requested for more collaboration within UN efforts. For instance, the question was raised, if the PBC is to strengthen the rule of law, how does this play out in reality when different UN units have their own rule-of-law-unit?

Several participants pointed to the fact that the mandate for the PBC is limited to post-conflict peacebuilding. The prevention of conflict, although desirable, is currently not on the PBC's agenda. A realistic view on what the Commission can and cannot do given its structural and limitations are therefore advisable. It was seen as one of the PBC's gravest limitations that the resolutions for its establishment do not include any obligations for financial contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund. This fund will rely on voluntary contributions which are moreover limited to US\$ 250 million on a revolving basis. An informal agreement about the financing and the operationalization of this fund will be critical for the success of the PBC. Otherwise, it was feared that devising peacebuilding strategies based upon limited and unreliable funds undermine the credibility of the PBC's advice.

The debate concluded with the following recommendations:

- The PBC should not only address the 'easy' cases but should instead focus on the 'difficult' cases for peacebuilding;
- A definition of peace was needed that goes beyond the absence of conflict, and includes respect for human rights, economic reconstruction and development, alleviation of poverty, and social justice;
- Peacebuilding will have to balance the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and the need for humanitarian intervention and relief.
- Peacebuilding efforts should be carried out within an inclusive political framework that enjoys general support among the people of the country concerned. At the same time, the PBC will have to win the support and cooperation of that country's government.
- There is no substitute for UN peacebuilding efforts as no country alone enjoys the legitimacy of the UN. Peacebuilding efforts should be authorized solely by the UN.

The Role of the PBC from a Regional Perspective

The regional discussion on the PBC started out by requests from some participants that the PBC address the reconstruction of the war-torn societies in Afghanistan and Iraq. Successful peacebuilding in Afghanistan was seen as desirable for the obvious reason that it should bring more stability to the entire region. Yet the reference to Iraq also indicated that next to regional security there is also a strong motivation to use the PBC as a tool to strengthen multilateralism and to curb the influence of so-called 'coalitions of the willing.' It was pointed out by other participants, however, that the United States would be able to prevent that either Afghanistan or Iraq will be referred to the PBC.

The discussion also addressed the huge military build-up in Asia, which seems to be reminiscent of the confrontations of the Cold War. The regional multilateral peace and security architecture seems to be relatively weak by comparison, yet participants also pointed to some recent improvements. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has started to extend its regional security perspective by inviting Japan, China, Korea, as well as Australia and New Zealand. ASEAN regularly conducts dialogue meetings with other countries and organizations during its ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The PBC was supposed to supplement, not supplant, already existing efforts within these bodies.

Asian cooperation outside and inside the PBC was claimed as desirable by a number of participants. Moreover, it was suggested that Asia as a resource-rich continent should not only be visible by contributing soldiers to peacekeeping missions. As one concrete practical alternative to support the work of the PBC, it was suggested that Asian countries volunteer to contribute some of their highly trained staff to the PBC in the UN Secretariat.

The following recommendations emerged:

- The PBC should try to involve regional and sub-regional organizations when undertaking country-specific peacebuilding missions;
- The PBC should also have a dialogue with neighboring countries in undertaking such missions;
- It would be useful for the PBC to study region-specific sources and causes of conflict.

The Relationship between the PBC and Civil Society

The PBC has been conceptualized as an intergovernmental body and, consequently, the text of the UN resolutions that establish the PBC make only unspecific recommendations for the engagement of civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The seminar's debate reflected the ongoing division in interests: representatives from governments are more hesitant to allow civil society to partake, whereas NGOs point to the relevant role they play for peacebuilding, particularly on the ground.

During this debate it was suggested that the PBC should rally regional civil society groups already active in their region. Each of these groups already has its own mandate and it would be beneficial if their efforts could be coordinated. At the same time, there are also examples when non-regional actors can play a more productive role. For example, in the case of the Mindanao peace talks to resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines, the Organization of Islamic Countries effectively brokered a peace agreement because of its cultural, not regional, proximity.

This debate led to the following recommendations:

- The PBC should carefully take into account the realities on the ground when interacting with international and local NGOs;
- There is a need to strengthen the capacity of indigenous NGOs, and international donors should guide their aid for this purpose, bearing in mind the absorption capacity of local structures;
- Women NGOs can be particularly helpful for the PBC to access the population of the country that it assists in peacebuilding;
- The cooperation between the PBC and religious leaders / NGOs should be carefully assessed to prevent religious sentiments;
- The PBC should employ media and public hearings for its purpose;
- The private sector may become an important source of funds for peacebuilding support. However, the PBC will have to make sure that corporate interests do not dominate the agenda during the peacebuilding process.

Appendix: List of Participants

- 1) Mr. **Tor Achakazi**, Advisor to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan;
- 2) Ms. **Diosita T. Andot**, Special Consultant of OPAPP/Secretary Dureza, Philippines;
- 3) Mr. **Woogill Choi**, Professor, Sunmoon University, South Korea;
- 4) Mr. **Ramesh C. Chopra**, General (Retd.) India;
- 5) Mr. **Inamul Haque**, Chairman, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan;
- 6) Mr. **Armin Hasemann**, Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Islamabad Office, Pakistan;
- 7) Mr. **Javid Husain**, Ambassador (Retd.), Pakistan;
- 8) Mr. **Rifaat Hussain**, Executive Director, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka;
- 9) Mr. **Javed Jabbar**, Pakistan;
- 11) Mr. **Palith Kohona**, Secretary General, Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process, Sri Lanka;
- 12) Mr. **Volker Lehmann**, Policy Analyst, Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung New York Office, USA;
- 13) Mr. **Nguyen Quoc Loc**, Dean, Faculty of International Laws, Vietnam Institute for International Relations, Vietnam;
- 14) Mr. **Perapong Manakit**, Thailand;
- 15) Ms. **Shireen Mazari**, Director General, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan;
- 16) Mr. **C.S.R. Murthy**, Professor, Centre for International Politics, Organization&Disarmament, India;
- 17) Mr. **Reaz Rahman**, Advisor to Prime Minister, Bangladesh;
- 18) Mr. **Landry H. Subianto**, Assistant to the Special Staff of the President, Indonesia;
- 19) Ms. **Yulia Sugandi**, Programme Analyst, UNDP Indonesia;
- 20) Mr. **Nobuhiko Suto**, Professor, Tokai University, Japan;
- 21) Mr. **Pang Zongying**, Director Institute of Global Issues, China.

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