

# Challenges of Peacebuilding

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UN is likely to be a key player in nation-building projects because of the international legitimacy it enjoys and the confidence the people of the nation-to-be-built repose in its bona fides. It would be involved in resurrecting failed states or building new ones as a consequence of the war against terrorism, humanitarian disaster, civil war or aspiration of the oppressed minorities to seek independent nationhood through the self-degeneration route-encouraged by international community's interventions in Kosovo and East Timor.

Peacebuilding has been the central concern of the transitional administrations and an inherent part of UN multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations in support, for the last 8-9 years. However, UN's efforts in peacebuilding in several countries such as East Timor, Kosovo and Burundi have not been particularly successful in spite of its earnestness. In case of Congo and Liberia, the jury is still out. It is relevant to look at the assessment of the current<sup>2</sup> situation in Timor-Leste by the *Economist* as an example of the effectiveness of UN peacebuilding efforts: "*hailed at Independence in 2002 as a success for UN midwifery, has since unravelled into near anarchy.... The UN's hordes of experts have made huge effort to nurture democracy and build strong institutions in Timor-Leste. But it still seems as if one stiff gust of wind could blow it all away*". If the UN's efforts, in a small country like East Timor, with a homogenous population of less than a million, could not establish a solid system capable of dealing with the problems; it calls for review of the UN's approach to peacebuilding,

"In Larger Freedom" Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "...roughly half of all countries that emerge from war lapse back into violence within five years". The question arises: why is it so?

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## Aim

This paper would examine the formidable challenges of peacebuilding and the deficiencies of the UN's approach to the task, which render its genuine efforts ineffective in several cases.

## Scope

We would go by the definition that peacebuilding is an attempt to reduce /eliminate causes of violent conflict in conflict-prone societies while concurrently laying the ground for self-sustaining peace. Stability and development. While analysing the factors we would be largely drawing upon, on the one hand, the experience of UNTAET, the most comprehensive UN peacebuilding effort, and on the other, of MONUC, which has been assisting a huge country, Congo, to erase its reputation as a classical failed state. The observations from these missions have been validated in the light of experiences of other UN missions. This paper would deal with only those factors, which the international community is in a position to address.

## Strategic Issues

### Concept or the Grand Design for the State

The first fundamental issue that needs to be addressed in any state-building effort is what kind of democracy should the nascent or failed state have. The UN system instinctively responds with two options at the macro level as: British or American. No thought is given to the fact that the British system, for instance, evolved over several centuries mainly as a product of its history, Christian values, Reformation, Age of Science and Industrialisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is assumed that since Britain and the US became great powers with these systems and are prosperous societies, these are the panacea for all countries. The experts of the UN system are not trained to examine whether the local factors might suggest a different kind of democracy, more suited to the nature and culture of the society and in consonance with its history and traditions. And since the democracies are not rooted in the local milieu, they are not always durable even if they are good. For instance, would western-style secular democracy be sustainable in Muslim states? Even Turkey has found it difficult in spite of the Ataturk laying its foundation as a modern state. Many countries of

the former British Empire in Asia and Africa adopted the Westminster parliamentary system but have failed its people.

The emphasis of the UN mission, while advising the host country's leadership regarding the new constitution, is on freedom of speech. Individual liberties and universal human rights, and not so much on good governance, as the advisers are most often from the advanced (western) countries. The constitution is drafted by the UN experts whose hi-fi presentations, full of sophisticated jargon, bewilder the local leadership into accepting their proposals while incorporating the minor modifications suggested by the latter. The local elite do not have the experience or confidence to contradict the UN experts. The few non-western experts are shy of engaging in a debate with the western experts because either their own country has not done too well for its people or if it has, then it has not had liberal democratic norms e.g. Singapore or South Korea.

In East Timor, for instance, the models of Singapore or South Korea were never considered. It would be worthwhile to find out whether common citizens of Singapore are happier to have become prosperous but with restricted freedoms or would have preferred fullest freedoms which would have retarded economic growth, job creation etc. It is safe to assume that the common man in a poor country wants good governance resulting in rapid improvement in law and order situation, provision of infrastructure, utilities and services and corruption-free administration. He is hardly concerned with freedoms of speech etc, which are important only to the elite. When the common man does not see improvement in his circumstances, even after the UN intervention and installation of a democratic government, discontent re-surfaces and the institutions established by the UN begin to unravel.

### **Economic Model for the State**

The other related fundamental issue on which the UN has to take a decision or advise the host country is the economic model: options being socially oriented market economy or laissez faire. If socially oriented, then to what extent? Most of the senior staff, majority of which are invariably from the advanced countries, advocate a system as close to laissez faire as possible. Underlying logic of their advocacy is that their countries have become

advanced because of virtual laissez faire hence that is the right system to follow, for instance. They staunchly advocate the 'user pays' principle if the issue is of building a road to, a small impoverished town and oppose provision of electricity or water at subsidised prices to the common man. (They are, perhaps, also concerned that if there is a large deficit in the country's budget, their countries, as donors, would have to provide the subsidy). As a result, there is resentment amongst the people who do not get the basic utilities because they cannot afford to pay its production cost/ market value.

In the modern world of television, the common man, even in the least developed countries, has come to regard access to these utilities as a fundamental right and not a privilege of only those who can afford. Moreover, the laissez faire system does not have a focus on creation of jobs, which is the biggest need of the people. Lack of jobs over a long period of time exhausts people's patience, fosters bitter resentment and leads to civil disorder. In the modern era of democracy, human rights and satellite TV - a newly created state is incapable of withstanding the severe strain this entails, unlike in the previous eras, as people resort to violent protests en masse in no time. For instance, even in Sierra Leone, which is considered a reasonable success story, the discontent of the people with unemployment, abuse of power and corruption is growing and if the post-election (August 2007) government does not provide tangible development, the country, according to the International Crisis Group, might revert to civil war.

## Elections

As elections are usually the exit strategy for the 'regular' Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) (as distinct from follow-on mission), they are usually held within 24 to 36 months of the cease-fire or peace agreement (in East Timor and Tajikistan after 24 months, Congo: scheduled after 36 months). Electoral campaigns within this short span of time exacerbate the tensions, accentuate the differences and undo whatever healing might have been achieved between/ amongst the parties and hence national reconciliation, which is one of the primary requirements for a durable peace, suffers seriously (e.g. in Cambodia). Furthermore, since most often elections are conducted on the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy i.e. winner- take- all, no side can afford

to lose the elections particularly not the government. In an under-developed country, all power and patronage belongs to the government - being even a leader of the opposition is meaningless. The stakes, therefore, are high for both sides.

Since the society has no traditions of sharing power and no institutions with which to limit it, one either has absolute power to use and abuse or one is subject to those who do. Power, and only power, brings security, besides wealth and patronage. Opposition parties have little chance of success in an election, as they are not only pitted against the mighty state apparatus controlled by the government party, but have little time to organise the party across the country or to learn the art of campaigning. Elections, organised by the government apparatus even when they are observed/monitored by the PKO or international community are, obviously, won by the government party. In the recent elections in Congo, the incumbent President deployed his handsomely paid bodyguards at all strategic places in the country and there were serious complaints of intimidation by his people. In spite of the presence of 17,600 peacekeepers, there was so much violence in the air that the Chief Election Commissioner had to travel in an APC to the TV station to announce the results. Running gun battles between President's men and Bemba's militia followed in the streets of Kinshasa for the next two days. In Cambodia, the elections were won by the opposition because the UNTAC was itself the Administration.

International support for the elections tends to be largely procedural in nature. It is not able to tackle the ways of the Establishment, which favour the government party. Complaints regarding electoral fraud malpractices are dealt with by the same state apparatus in the same high-handed manner (e.g. in Haiti after the elections in May 2000). There are many examples of the above -an illustrative one being the presidential and parliamentary elections in Tajikistan in November 1999 and February 2000 respectively. Electoral grievances seriously affect reconciliation. Unfairly conducted elections do not confer 'legitimacy' on the government without which chances of a durable peace are remote.

Often the first election is the last and the parties expect it to be so; that is why they use all possible means to win it. For instance in Congo, after winning the elections, the President has

already used, what has been termed disproportionate force by European diplomats, resulting in killing of 100 civilians in Bas-Congo and 600 soldiers / civilians in the face off with Bemba's supporters in Kinshasa in March 2007. Bemba is expected to go into exile as charges of sedition and treason have been levelled against him; thus decimating the opposition. Kabila is showing little inclination for reconciliation. Hence, the UN needs to act as the watchdog and ensure a freer and fair second election in the country.

### **Local Ownership of the New System**

The UN mission has two conflicting considerations while running the country (or virtually running the country as in the case of Liberia) as a trustee. On the one hand, it has to set up the institutions of the state in barely two years and hence, it needs to take decisions rapidly and implement quickly using international staff; on the other hand, it needs to involve the locals sufficiently to give them a sense of ownership of the new systems. In case of East Timor, the Timorese complained about their non-involvement in UNTAET's decision-making processes and public administration- employing them only as subordinate staff e.g. clerks, drivers, interpreters and guards. They did not feel a sense of ownership of what they inherited from UNTAET. In addition, they complained about other things: use of English, negligible transfer of skills, rise in prices, non- availability of jobs-particularly for the former militiamen, inadequate rehabilitation & re-construction, and dominance by Australia.

### **Operational Issues**

#### **Funding of the New State**

The UN mission manages to obtain promises of financial support for the fledgling country through a donor's conference sponsored by a major power. Though the donors promise a lot of funds, they milk a large part of them by providing their own experts at exorbitant remuneration for projects of their choice and adopt a 'doctrine of lapse' for funds not utilised in a financial year. In addition, a large number of donors insist that the contracts/ procurements for their projects go to contractors and vendors of their countries. Only one-third of the promised funds ever reach the bank account of the recipient state.

## Rule of Law System

Providing security to the people, their property and businesses by international policemen is a very difficult matter. Good policing requires good intelligence, which in turn requires reliable sources. It is not quite feasible for internationals to get the intelligence, even if they knew the local language, and that too when they are on a year's tenure, furthermore, it is extremely sensitive politically to carry out searches. Imagine the situation, if policemen from Europe or even from the sub-continent were carrying out house-to-house searches in East Timor. If a local dies or few are injured in the firing by the international police while controlling a violent mob, it provides an incendiary issue for an anti-UN political agitation! Naturally, the international policemen are reluctant to use their weapons even when they should.

The long-term measure of raising and training a local police force needs funds and time (certainly a few years). The state budget cannot afford to pay a decent salary to the policemen and the UN budget does not cater for this kind of expenditure. Finding the donors who would provide the funds, trainers and subsidise the salaries is very difficult and adds to the time frame. Then, there is the question of the judicial system and the penal code. Once again, which country's system or code is to be followed? To what extent the existing traditional (or common /community law) system is to be incorporated into the new system?

## Disarmament, Demobilisation and Rehabilitation (DDR)

Experience has shown that one of most important factors that determine whether 'peace-building' would succeed is DDR. By now it is accepted wisdom that if the militiaman is not given another gainful way of life, he would revert to extortion, robbery and murder. Since government, most often, is not able to deliver essential services and development to the people, disaffection becomes ripe in the society. The marginalised warlords then exploit the situation by re-calling their boys, disenchanted with the ineffective DDR process. Therefore, recurrence of violent conflict becomes a strong probability.

The UN mission faces formidable challenges in implementing an effective DDR programme. Firstly, the militias have to be assured that they would be secure once they are disarmed i.e.

there would be no reprisals or exploitation of their vulnerability by the government or the antagonistic faction(s). For this the mission has to rely on the good faith of the government because the peacekeeping force can provide security to a militiaman only at the assembly/quartering area but not when he leaves it. Most crucial issue, however, is to rehabilitate the ex-fighters into their society and provide them with gainful employment. This requires funds for imparting vocational training and, most importantly, creating jobs. Creating jobs is a long-term issue and a product of good economic management by the government. Lastly, the DDR process has to be funded by voluntary contributions of donor countries, which act according to their interests/priorities. Owing to all these difficulties and long fruition period, the top leadership of the mission is usually not inclined to spend a lot of its time on it. In some cases, the leadership does not realise its critical importance to sustainable peace.

### **Security Sector Reforms (SSR)**

Alongside the DDR process goes the SSR. The most crucial issue here is that unless the state's security forces are paid a decent salary, they would continue to make money through extortion, plunder and robbery. This is not to say that a decent salary can ensure that they would not resort to the above abuses, but the chances would decrease. In Congo, the government's integrated brigades are hardly paid. They continue to prey on the population and are the worst abusers of human rights. The main issue is where to get the funds for paying even the re-structured army. The state's budget cannot afford it. The mission has to persuade countries with strategic interests in the country /region to provide funds for the training and salaries, for a temporary period, for the new army. Even sympathetically-inclined donor governments find it difficult to help because their national legislation does not permit funding of armies in such cases.

### **Converting Militias into Political Parties**

This is another aspect which if neglected can endanger the peace process. Whereas the government has control of the state mechanism, the opposition militia neither, has that nor, the expertise for fighting an election effectively. This lack of confidence becomes another reason for the reluctance of the opposition in surrendering

its weapons. Moreover, if the opposition loses the election with the feeling that it did not get a fair chance, the peace might be jeopardised. So it is important to provide all the assistance e.g. training of its cadres in the democratic process and electioneering, funds and infrastructure, to the opposition to convert itself into a political party, like it was done in Mozambique.

### Conclusion

It cannot be over-emphasised that the pace of institutional change and traditional political practices in post-conflict societies are not amenable to rapid change. History matters and habits die hard. Democratic transitions are long-term projects which require adaptation to cultural and historical realities.

It would be evident that in addition to a short time-frame, a UN mission faces formidable challenges in building peace in a new or failed state. Most importantly, it lacks guidance from New York, member states and the Secretariat, regarding concepts and the systems which should broadly guide the mission. The major issues are: What kind of a democratic state is to be established? What kind of economic model and what kind of judicial and policing systems have to be adopted and how to effectively tackle DDR and SSR? On the issue of democracy, there is a need to arrive at the right mix between the modern liberal system of the West and local history and traditions. Most importantly, the democratic system must result in good governance.

The economic model must emphasise creation of jobs and basic utilities reaching the common man as soon as possible. The UN has yet not arrived at the most effective way of tackling DDR and SSR. Most recently in East Timor, post-UN peace and stability was rudely shaken mainly because of badly-handled DDR. In Congo, SSR is a serious cause for concern. Equally important is the feeling of ownership that the local leaders and intelligentsia must have regarding the system being created by the UN. The country's first elections in the post-conflict period should not be based on winner-take-all concept but some kind of proportional representation in the parliament and the government. An international intervention in case of an intra-state conflict must also extend to include national reconciliation, which is hardly mentioned in the mission's mandate. Overall, there is a need for a longer-term horizon for change and institutional framework to accommodate it.