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The UN's new "Sustaining Peace" Agenda: A Policy Breakthrough in the Making

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United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres' much anticipated [Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#) was recently released, in the lead-up to the U.N. General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace to be held April 24-25 2018 in New York, in accordance with the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council "peacebuilding resolutions" ([A/RES/70/262](#) and [S/RES/ 2282](#)). Breaking new ground conceptually, these April 2016 resolutions focused on sustaining peace "at all stages of conflict and in all its dimensions" and on the imperative to prevent "the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict", in response to worrying trends such as the spike in violent conflict worldwide and unparalleled levels of forced displacement. The Secretary-General, in turn, has sought to forge a more coherent vision and to offer new tools and approaches to help the U.N. system better support both Member States and civil society in building more just and peaceful societies.

Especially if its recommendations are skillfully rolled out, the Secretary-General's Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace can be the start of a policy breakthrough that contributes, over time, to significant positive change in how the U.N. approaches, manages, innovates, and resources its peacebuilding work. The Secretary-General's team, led by the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and U.N. Development Program (UNDP), has moved the needle toward forging a new consensus among the world body's 193 Member States. In particular, the Report advances a more integrated and coherent framework for global conflict management in four concrete ways:

First, it elevates the role of civil society (including women's and youth groups), the private sector, and regional organizations in sustaining peace. Rather than just paying lip service to these less visible peacebuilding actors, the Secretary-General offers examples of productive U.N. partnerships with them through new platforms (e.g., the U.N. Global Compact's Business for Peace network) and tools (e.g., the Joint UN-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations' [DPKO] new community-engagement framework) that harness their capabilities and financial resources to create or sustain peace. And it stresses the need to scale-up these innovations not only in U.N. peace operations but across of the U.N.'s resident country teams.

Second, the Report highlights recent advances in joint assessment, planning, and programming, including the tripartite U.N., World Bank, and European Union Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment in Liberia, the UNDP-DPKO Global Focal Point for police, justice, and corrections, and the field focused UNDP-DPA Peace and Development Advisers. Importantly, the Secretary-General also calls for ensuring that the U.N. Country Team can handle peacebuilding priorities that will fall in its lap when a peacekeeping mission draws down, and for triple-hatted support across development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding entities for the deputy heads of peace operations who are now routinely responsible for all three areas of activity, but with scattered or uneven support.

Third, the Secretary-General buttresses the case for "more predictable and sustained financing" for civilian-led peacebuilding, against the backdrop of declining development assistance to conflict-affected countries as a share of global aid (from 40% in 2005 to 28% in 2015). He astutely underscores the billions in potential savings from effective conflict prevention, while calling for a "quantum leap" in un-earmarked and multi-year contributions to the U.N.'s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). However, despite the recent progress in now allocating—as one positive illustration—approximately \$250 million annually from UN peacekeeping missions' assessed budgets for mandated peacebuilding programmatic activities, this amount (alongside proposed PBF and other funding stream increases) is still insufficient given the scale of the challenge—and compared to the annual peacekeeping budget, which continues to hover around \$7.5B per annum. With the Trump Administration once again calling for severe cuts in the U.S. financial contribution to the U.N. (including a proposed 37 percent cut to peacekeeping from FY'17 enacted levels and the complete defunding of UNDP, UNICEF, and other agencies), it is critical that both old and new donors prepare to step-in and fill the potential gap.

Fourth and finally, the Report stresses up front that the UN development system and development practitioners in general are central to conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Given continued worries about "the securitization of development", it strikes a balance between development and security tools and approaches in efforts to build a durable, just peace and to prevent the outbreak of deadly violence, reflecting the [U.N.'s evolution in this complex space](#) since the end of the Cold War.

The Report will also accelerate efforts to put into practice—across the U.N.'s development programs, funds, and agencies—proposals recently introduced in the more comprehensive United Nations-World Bank conflict prevention study, *Pathways for Peace*, including its emphasis on improving upstream and downstream peacebuilding programming to restore citizens' confidence in state leadership.

Missing Elements: Striving for Broader Peace & Security Management and Institutional Reforms

U.N. Member States have opted to slow down adoption of the Secretary-General's proposed, mutually reinforcing 2017 reforms for the peace and security pillar of the secretariat, development system, and management system ([what a co-author and I recently referred to](#) as track I *operational* reforms, as opposed to more ambitious track II institutional reform and track III Security Council expansion). Fortunately, the Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace adds a sense of urgency, by stepping up political pressure on international policy-makers to support the Secretary-General's operational reform package too. If successful on these "track I" reforms in 2018, the Secretariat's 38th Floor can shift attention to nurturing the multi-stakeholder coalitions necessary to push through more ambitious institutional (including Security Council) innovations in the run-up to the U.N.'s 75th anniversary in 2020. A revitalized and renovated world body would help to ensure that U.N. conflict management capabilities stay relevant to global efforts to counter violent extremism and stabilize conflict-ravaged societies.

For instance, the Peacebuilding Commission's recent flexibility and innovation toward advancing intergovernmental coherence on regional issues (Great Lakes, Sahel) and select countries merits the praise exhibited in the Secretary-General's Report. But with an eye towards the expected 2020 UN Summit, serious consideration should be given—far beyond the S-G's current operational recommendations—to elevating this Security Council-General Assembly advisory body into a more authoritative Council with significant new coordination and resource mobilization competencies, and having it replace the all-but-defunct Trusteeship Council as recommended by the [Albright-Gambari Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance](#). The proposed Peacebuilding Council could learn from the 2005/6 upgrade of the Human Rights Commission into a Council with a new Universal Periodic Review mechanism that could, in effect, inform a newly agreed preventive action tool. This would equip the PBC to better help countries counter violent extremism and prevent the recurrence of conflict so essential to effective stabilization and sustaining peace.

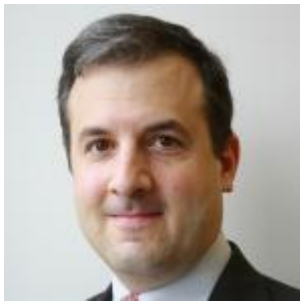
The Report of the Secretary-General is also missing at least one major new *flagship reform initiative* with the potential to capture the imagination of both governments and global civil society. At the start of Secretary-General Guterres' first year in office, there was talk of some kind of new "U.N. Prevention Platform" (perhaps absorbed, in part, by his promising new High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation introduced in mid-2017). One forward-leaning idea discussed at a [recent sustaining peace experts dialogue](#) is to develop a new roster and regular training for around fifty top-flight mediators and experienced diplomats in the latest negotiation techniques, who can step in at short notice as U.N. Special Envoys and provide leadership for a new, rapid-response U.N. Civilian Response Capability of up to five hundred personnel. The need for such capability is clear from the lengthy recruitment cycles of months to years needed to field more than a handful of new U.N. personnel for even the most urgent of field-related tasks. A backup system enrolling up to 2000 U.N. system staff (including from the international financial institutions, as well as a select number of municipal administrators, engineers, lawyers, and others with specialized skills) could also receive training as

part of a major reserve component of this new set of capacities that would operate nimbly alongside Blue Berets and U.N. Police.

In sum, by placing *preventive action* and *post-conflict peacebuilding* on par with *peacemaking* and *peacekeeping*, the concept of and report on sustaining peace by the Secretary-General has laid the groundwork for an important policy-breakthrough, empowering civilians with new tools, better management practices, and hopefully new financial resources to contribute to a more integrated and coherent framework for global conflict management. With this progress has come expanded possibilities and political pressures for more ambitious, overdue peace and security management and institutional reforms. By positioning this April's High-Level Event on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace as a springboard for forging a strong consensus on a renewed, innovated, and reformed U.N. peace and security architecture by 2020, the world body will be better equipped to help fragile and war-torn nations and their citizens avert future deadly violence and build a more durable and just peace.

Photo Credit: [Juan Cristobal Zulueta](#)

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