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# Learning to Build Peace?

United Nations Peacebuilding and  
Organizational Learning:  
Developing a Research Framework

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## About the Authors

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## Summary

While there is an increasing number of articles and studies identifying lessons from the record of UN peacebuilding operations, it is striking how little we know about the UN's very capacity for organizational learning on peacebuilding, and about learning in international organizations in general. This pilot study seeks to lay the foundations for an in-depth investigation of the UN's record on organizational learning.

Our study is motivated by both a research and a policy imperative. On the *research* front, studying organizational learning within the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy contributes to opening up the "black box" of international organizations. So far, mainstream work in the discipline of International Relations (IR) has produced surprisingly few studies on the everyday workings of international organizations, let alone their ability to learn. Studying organizational learning calls for an interdisciplinary approach bringing together IR (including peace and conflict studies), public management and the sociology of organizations. This has the potential of advancing conceptual debates within the discipline of International Relations.

On the *policy* front, organizational learning provides the missing link that is needed to address a key challenge pointed out by the Brahimi Report: the need to reconcile "the temporary nature of specific operations with the evident permanence of peacekeeping and other peace operations activities as core functions of the United Nations". In other words, organizational learning is one answer to the question of how to "bring together the imperative of ad hoc missions with the persisting reality of permanent engagement". Continuous efforts to learn within and across missions can offer an important antidote to the ad-hocism that characterizes the day-to-day operations of peacebuilding. This has also been realized by the UN Secretariat, which (supported by a number of key member states) has started to intensify its efforts to promote organizational learning on peacebuilding (for example through the Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit and other recent reform efforts promoted by Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping). Also, member states have tasked the new Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) with identifying lessons learned. While the need for learning ranks increasingly high on the agenda of officials within the UN system, this realization

*It is striking how little we know about the UN's very capacity for organizational learning on peacebuilding, and about learning in international organizations in general.*

*Organizational learning can be the missing link to „bring together the imperative of ad hoc missions with the persisting reality of permanent engagement” in peacebuilding.*

stands in stark contrast to the dearth of knowledge within the UN about its track record on organizational learning.

The study proceeds in four steps. The *first* step surveys the relevant literature from different disciplines and concludes that peace research, International Relations (IR) and organization theory do not offer ready-made frameworks for the analysis of organizational learning in international organizations. Building on existing research, we identify key elements of a new framework starting with a definition of the key term, organizational learning: We define organizational learning “as a process of cognitive change through the questioning of the means and/or ends of addressing problems. The process manifests itself in the development and implementation of new rules and routines guiding the organization’s actions.”

In a *second* step, we survey the evolution of the “infrastructure of learning” in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy over the past 15 years. We hold that a number of factors (lack of will both within member states and the UN Secretariat as well as the lack of resources and conducive incentive structures) contributed to the very slow recognition of the UN’s learning needs. Major crises (such as the soul-searching after Rwanda and Srebrenica) plus the Brahimi Report in 2000 provided a certain momentum that brought the need to build up the UN’s learning capacity higher on the agenda. Still, a lot of work remains to be done.

In a third step, we take a look at the experience of five UN missions (UNMIBH in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone, UNTAET in East Timor, UNAMA in Afghanistan and UNAMI in Iraq) from a learning perspective. The goal of these case examples is to inductively distil factors that affect (encourage/hinder) learning processes.

In a *fourth* step, we bring the results from the case examples together with factors gained deductively from the theoretical literature in order to present a list of variables that need to be considered in a future in-depth study. This list of factors includes power, organizational culture, leadership, human capital, staff mobility, knowledge management systems, as well as access to external knowledge. Outlining an agenda for future research, we present a draft model of the learning process that includes (1) knowledge acquisition, (2) advocacy/decision-making, and (3) institutionalization. We also discuss the substantial methodological challenges future in-depth studies will need to overcome. We suggest that future in-depth research concentrate on a single focal organization, e.g. the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy around DPKO or the peacebuilding bureaucracies in the US or the

*A three-step model of learning:*

- (1) knowledge acquisition*
- (2) advocacy/decision-making*
- (3) institutionalization*

UK. Only once we have a number of in-depth single case studies can we undertake credible cross-case comparisons. Second, we suggest to “zoom in” on a number of select “focal issues” from the three areas of security, governance, and welfare (*Sicherheit, Herrschaft, Wohlfahrt*) as well as the area of cross-cutting problems such as coordination of disparate actors. In doing so, further research can cover a broad range of peacebuilding tasks while at the same time putting a premium on in-depth analysis. Tracking processes of learning on concrete issues over a longer time-span allows us to draw more informed conclusions than simply focusing on different peacebuilding missions as the unit of analysis.

The current state of research should prevent us from rushing to policy recommendations. For example, we need additional research in order to make detailed recommendations on options for improving the knowledge management system within the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy. Further down the road, this knowledge-practice transfer is a highly desirable goal – and one that can count on great interest on the part of the policymakers and officials in the UN system as our interviews during the pilot project underlined.

We conclude that given what the often invoked international community has achieved so far in the area of peacebuilding, modesty and self-reflection are in order. At the same time, this is a call to intensify our efforts at “learning to learn”. As Ernst Haas, the pioneer of the study of organizational learning in international organizations, put it: “There is never a final lesson to be learned.” Haas’ dictum holds true for both researchers and policymakers.

*„There is never a final lesson  
to be learned.”*

*– Ernst Haas*

## Abbreviations

ACABQ	Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (UN)
ASG	Assistant Secretary-General
BSU	Boundary-spanning unit(s)
CIVPOL	Civilian police
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPA	Department of Political Affairs (UN)
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN)
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
ECHA	Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (UN)
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (UN)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECPS	Executive Committee on Peace and Security (UN)
EISAS	ECPS Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
EU	European Union
FC	Force Commander
GA	General Assembly (UN)
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator (OCHA)
ICG	International Crisis Group
IFOR	Implementation Force (in Bosnia and Herzegovina)
IMPP	Integrated Mission Planning Process
IMTF	Integrated Mission Task Force
INGO	International non-governmental organization
INTERFET	International Force for East Timor
IPTF	International Police Task Force (part of UNMIBH)
IO	International organization
IR	International Relations as a discipline
JMAC	Joint Mission Assessment Cell (in UN peacebuilding missions)
KM	Knowledge Management
LLU	Lessons Learned Unit (DPKO)
MILOB	Military Observer
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN)
OHR	Office of the High Representative (in Bosnia and Herzegovina)
OL	Organizational learning
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PBPS	Peacekeeping Best Practices Section (UN DPKO)
PBPU	Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit (UN DPKO)
PBC	Peacebuilding Commission (UN)
PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office (UN)
PC	Police Commander
PMSS	Personnel Management and Support Service (UN DPKO)
RC	Resident Coordinator (UNDP)
SC	Security Council (UN)
SFOR	Stabilization Force (in Bosnia and Herzegovina)
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq
UNAMET	United Nations Mission to East Timor
UNAMSIL	United Nations Assistance Mission to Sierra Leone
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIOSIL	United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone
UNMIBH	United Nations Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina
UNMIL	United Nations Mission to Liberia
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNOHCI	United Nations Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
UNOTIL	United Nations Office in Timor-Leste
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force (in Bosnia and Herzegovina)
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
UNTAES	United Nations Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group (in Namibia)
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
USG	Under-Secretary-General
WFP	World Food Programme



# 1 Introduction

Historians might well look back on the year 2006 as a decisive year in the history of the United Nations' peacebuilding operations. In mid-2006, the UN Peacebuilding Commission became operational, giving formal recognition to the central importance of peacebuilding for the world body. At the same time, the number of personnel deployed in what are officially still called "peacekeeping" missions reached new record highs. Already starting from an all-time high of 85.000 at the beginning of the year, it hit the 100.000 mark in the fall of 2006. With the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations predicting a rise to about 140.000 soldiers in the year 2007, there seems to be no end to growth.<sup>1</sup>

The year 2006 also offered a number of stark reminders of the difficulties and trappings of the complex and intrusive peacebuilding operations that have come to dominate the UN peace and security agenda. East Timor, which had been widely regarded as a success story, reverted to violence. This forced the return of international forces and raised questions about the UN having prematurely shifted attention and resources away from the country before a real stabilization was achieved.<sup>2</sup> The situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) proved to be shaky during the elections, and observers raised pointed questions about what the achievable medium-term strategic objectives of external involvement could and should be. In Afghanistan, the UN mission faced a rapidly deteriorating security environment. As the UN Secretary-General emphasized in his report to the Security Council, the country "finds itself in the midst of a new crisis. A third of the country is racked by violent insurgency. The situation [...] is unlikely to improve in the near future and the prospect of further deterioration cannot be excluded."<sup>3</sup> In Kosovo, the "most intensive mission ever, receiving more international money, staff and effort per local person than any mission before or since"<sup>4</sup>, the security situation was better but prospects of moving towards settlement looked bleak. In October 2006 UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari expressed his increasing frustration: "Even if we sat at the negotiation table for the rest of my life, I don't think the parties would move in the negotiations."<sup>5</sup> In Lebanon, many observers voiced grave doubts as to whether the revamped UNIFIL mission had a chance of succeeding. And this is all without even mentioning the situations in Iraq and Darfur.

In light of these developments, it is not surprising that in both political and academic discussions, serious doubts about the viability of peacebuilding missions have been raised. In both the United Kingdom and the US, there is a rising domestic backlash against military engagement abroad. In Germany, it will probably take the first instance of German mass casualties for a thorough national debate on how and why "our

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<sup>1</sup> Johnstone (2006a); UN DPKO (2006).

<sup>2</sup> ICG (2006).

<sup>3</sup> UN Secretary-General (2006).

<sup>4</sup> King and Mason (2006: X). Kosovo received twenty-five times as much money and fifty times as many troops on a per capita basis than Afghanistan.

<sup>5</sup> Deutsche Presseagentur (2006).

freedom needs to be defended in the Hindukush”<sup>6</sup>, the Congo and Lebanon. In the academic debate, Michael Barnett attacks the Western peacebuilding agenda that in his view seeks to create an “ideal society” defined by the rule of law, markets and democracy. Castigating “liberal peacebuilders” for doing “more harm than good”, he takes the lack of institutional and cultural prerequisites for liberal statehood as a starting point to lay out his counter-vision of “building a republican peace”.<sup>7</sup> Along similar lines, David Chandler castigates the often-invoked international community for not clearly recognizing the inherent limits and contradictions of the “neo-Wilsonian ideals of exporting democracy”<sup>8</sup>. Taking the same critique even further, William Bain argues that it is sheer “folly” to think the West is capable of running other peoples’ states and societies by means of a benevolent despotism called “transitional administration”.<sup>9</sup> At the other end of the debate, authors such as Iain King and Whit Mason draw opposite conclusions from the undeniable problems on the ground. They agree that we need a fundamental re-thinking of both our “institutional infrastructure and strategic approach.”<sup>10</sup> But rather than abandoning complex and intrusive peacebuilding missions, they call for increased resources: “Remedying the deep-rooted problems of post-conflict societies requires more robust instruments and longer time horizons [...]”.<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, there is considerable disagreement over *which* lessons to draw from the mixed track record of peacebuilding for future strategy. The purpose of this study is not to take sides in this debate. Rather, we take a step back and investigate the UN’s capacity for drawing and applying lessons in the first place. While there are an increasing number of articles and studies offering lessons learned, all too often the UN appears poised to reinvent the wheel and repeat its own mistakes. This observation is at least as old as the early calls from over ten years ago for an institutional capacity for learning – which makes it all the more surprising how little we know about the UN’s capacity for organizational learning on peacebuilding, and about learning in international organizations in general.

This pilot study seeks to lay the foundations for an in-depth investigation of the UN’s record on organizational learning. Our study is motivated by both a research and a policy imperative. On the *research* front, studying organizational learning within the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy contributes to opening up the “black box” of international organizations. So far, mainstream work in the discipline of International Relations (IR) has produced surprisingly few studies on the everyday workings of international organizations, let alone their ability to learn. Studying organizational learning also calls for an interdisciplinary approach bringing together IR (including peace and conflict studies), public management and the sociology of organizations. This has the potential of advancing conceptual debates within the discipline of International Relations.

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<sup>6</sup> As stated by then-German Minister of Defense, Peter Struck, in 2001 to justify the post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan.

<sup>7</sup> Barnett (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Chandler (2006).

<sup>9</sup> Bain (2006).

<sup>10</sup> King and Mason (2006: X).

<sup>11</sup> King and Mason (2006: X).

On the *policy* front, organizational learning provides the missing link that is needed to address a key challenge pointed out by the Brahimi Report: the need to reconcile “the temporary nature of specific operations with the evident permanence of peacekeeping and other peace operations activities as core functions of the United Nations”<sup>12</sup>. In other words, organizational learning is one answer to the question of how to “bring together the imperative of ad hoc missions with the persisting reality of permanent engagement”<sup>13</sup>. Continuous efforts to learn within and across missions can offer an important antidote to the ad-hocism that characterizes the day-to-day operations of peacebuilding. This has also been realized by the UN Secretariat, which (supported by a number of key member states) has started to intensify its efforts to promote organizational learning on peacebuilding (for example through the Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit and other recent reform efforts promoted by Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping). Also, member states have tasked the new Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) with identifying lessons learned. While the need for learning ranks increasingly high on the agenda of officials within the UN system, this realization stands in stark contrast to the dearth of knowledge within the UN about its track record on organizational learning.<sup>14</sup>

A note of caution is in order: As a first cut at the issue, this pilot study can only aspire to lay the foundations for further in-depth research on organizational learning within the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy. We chose our research design for this pilot study accordingly. The current state of the research does not allow for a testing of hypotheses. Rather, our retroductive research design uses both deduction (from the theoretical literature) and induction (from the empirical record) in order to distil different factors that influence learning. Furthermore, it is important to point out that our goal is *not* to gather the ten crucial lessons learned on peacebuilding. Rather, we take a step back to analyze the UN’s very capacity to draw these lessons with a view to identifying the factors that promote or hinder organizational learning.

Our study proceeds in four steps. First, we present a brief survey of the relevant literature with the goal of developing a framework for the analysis of organizational learning. We start with the literature on peacebuilding operations, continue with a look at the broader literature on International Relations (IR) and international organizations before moving to organizational theory in sociology, public management and business administration. We conclude that none of the relevant disciplines offers a ready-made framework for our purposes. We thus take the first step toward developing our own conceptual framework by providing a definition of organizational learning to guide our subsequent empirical explorations. We also briefly discuss methodological issues informing our choice of on a research design using retroduction (chapter 2). Second, we survey the development of the UN’s “infrastructure for learning” on peacebuilding over the course of the past 15 years (chapter 3). Third, we portray examples of learning in five different missions: UNMIBH in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone, UNTAET in East Timor, UNAMA in Afghanistan and UNAMI in Iraq (chapter 4). Finally, we present

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations (2000: XIII).

<sup>13</sup> Thakur (2006: 44).

<sup>14</sup> This is a view shared by all of the UN officials we interviewed in New York in April 2006.

conclusions for both a research and a policy agenda. Drawing on the literature reviewed in chapter 2 and our own empirical findings, the research agenda presents the initial attempt to draft a model of the learning process and an overview of the factors that influence learning. The policy agenda focuses on the crucial issues the UN needs to take into account when trying to improve its infrastructure of learning as well as its learning record (chapter 5).

## 2 Conceptual Foundations: In Search of a Framework

In the first part of this chapter we present a brief survey of the three areas of research that could inform the study of organizational learning on peacebuilding: the literature on multidimensional peacebuilding missions; the literature on international institutions and organizations within the discipline of International Relations (IR); and organization theory and the approaches of organizational learning (OL) within this theory. Rather than providing an exhaustive overview of these very extensive areas of research, we review the literature with the goal of identifying building blocks for a research framework that could be applied to organizational learning on peacebuilding in the UN. In the second part, we present a crucial starting point for such a framework: a definition of organizational learning in international organizations.

Before embarking on these two steps, a brief clarification of our use of the term “peacebuilding” is in order.

### 2.1 Terminological primer: What is peacebuilding?

Our study operates in an area marked by significant terminological proliferation and confusion. Therefore it is essential to clearly define the terms used in this study. We take “multidimensional peacebuilding” (short: peacebuilding) missions to include both civilian and military personnel mandated to consolidate peace and prevent a recurrence of fighting in a country emerging from war. “Transitional administration” is a special case of peacebuilding, while “peace operation” is a more general term comprising diplomatic peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and peacebuilding (Schneckener, 2005; Paris, 2004: 38). A number of different tasks are associated with peacebuilding that can be clustered in the areas of security, governance and welfare (*Sicherheit, Herrschaft, Wohlfahrt*).<sup>15</sup>

It is important to note that this more recent understanding of peacebuilding goes far beyond what the term described in the early 1990s. Within the UN context, peacebuilding often referred to diplomatic missions and mediation efforts spearheaded within the UN Secretariat by the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). Today, the two remaining “peacebuilding support offices” in Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic, described by DPA as “forward platforms for preventive diplomacy”, pay tribute to this legacy.<sup>16</sup>

In the late 1990s, peacebuilding increasingly became the term of choice for multidimensional and increasingly intrusive missions with the goal of stabilizing societies and states. In the UN context, the term peacebuilding clearly won the competition against the terms “state-building” and “nation-building”, which many regard as less politically acceptable because they convey greater intrusiveness and a

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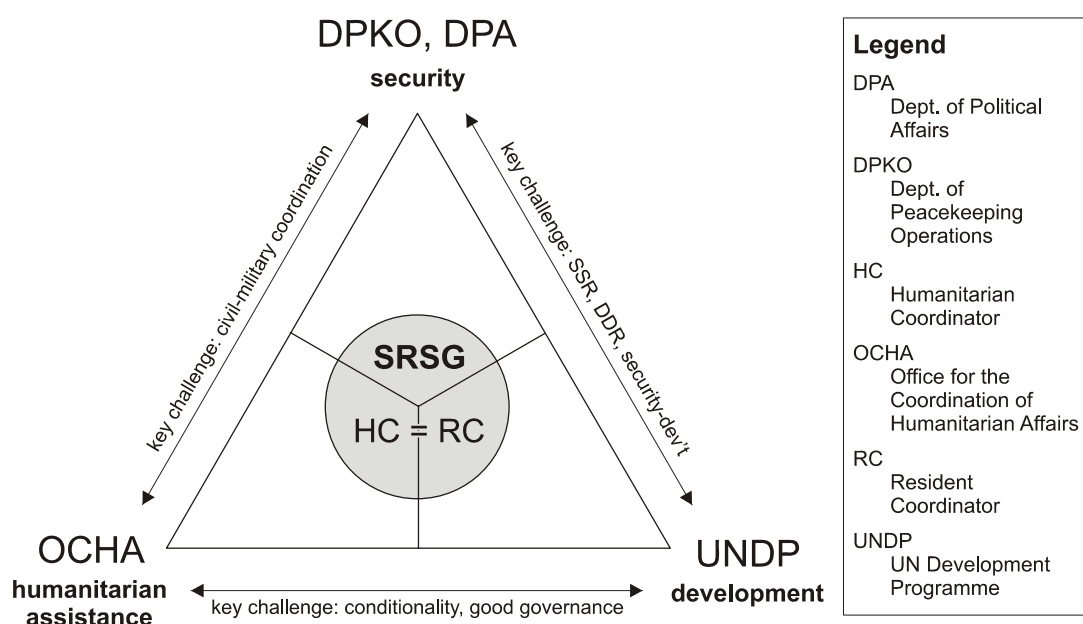
<sup>15</sup> See Schneckener and Weinlich (2005); Kühne (2005); CSIS (2002).

<sup>16</sup> The term “peacebuilding support office” for DPA field offices in war-torn countries must not be confused with the new Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) that was established at headquarters in 2006 together with the Peacebuilding Commission. With regard to “peacebuilding” as such, the historical discussion in chapter 3 sometimes makes use of the old definition when describing the diplomatic peacebuilding activities by the Department of Political Affairs.

broader political mandate.<sup>17</sup> Our use of the term is not based on any political or normative judgment. Rather, we regard the level of intrusiveness of each peacebuilding mission as an open empirical question.

The “peacebuilding triangle” (see Figure 1) illustrates the multidimensional nature of UN peacebuilding operations. The triangle distinguishes three areas that are each serviced by different branches of the UN system: security, humanitarian assistance, and development. The security angle (which comprises both military and police components) is mostly run by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in cooperation

## The UN Peacebuilding Triangle



Source: Interview with Nicole Ruder, New York, 24 April 2006

Figure 1: The UN Peacebuilding Triangle

with the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). In some missions without a UN military component, DPA takes the lead. The humanitarian assistance angle is coordinated by the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The development angle is most often run by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in conjunction with a host of other agencies. NGOs and other private contractors play roles in all three areas.<sup>18</sup> All these different players operate according to their own logic and principles, leading to a massive challenge of coordination in all peacebuilding missions. At the heart of this

<sup>17</sup> Some members of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change that presented its report *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* in December 2004 (United Nations, 2004b) would have preferred the term “state-building”. While they regarded the term “state-building” as more to the point, they ended up favoring the term “peacebuilding” for the very reason that it was more acceptable politically. Interview, New York, 25 April 2006.

<sup>18</sup> In the field, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSR) has the lead on security issues. The Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and the Resident Coordinator (RC) are mostly the same person to allow for better coordination of the humanitarian and development pillars. See chapter 3.3 for a more detailed description of the different parts of the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy.

triangle (at the intersection of security, humanitarian assistance and development) is the overall goal of building up a society and a state with stable institutions true to the ideals of “good governance”. This makes coordination an even more difficult and crucial task.

With this terminological primer in mind, we move into the first part of this chapter, a brief survey of the relevant literature for the study of organizational learning on peacebuilding. We start with an overview of the empirical research on peacebuilding operations. We then move on to the more conceptual literature on international organizations and IR theory in general before taking a look at the literature in organizational theory (or better: organizational theories), which is fed by the sociology of organizations, public management and business administration.

## **2.2 Research on UN peacebuilding operations**

In recent years, in accordance with developments in UN practice, research has increasingly moved from a focus on traditional peacekeeping to a focus on peacebuilding.<sup>19</sup>

One strand of this research has focused on the normative and legal basis for multidimensional peacebuilding missions – especially those that de facto and/or de jure take over large parts of the governance functions in a territory.<sup>20</sup> Since our study is not concerned with the overall normative questions related to complex peacebuilding, this strand of research is only relevant to the extent that it highlights concrete problems of accountability in multidimensional peacebuilding missions.<sup>21</sup> A large number of smaller studies focus on individual missions<sup>22</sup> or certain aspects of peacebuilding (e. g. security-sector reform).<sup>23</sup> In the context of our project, these studies will be helpful as background material for analyzing learning in different issue areas.

Among the analyses aiming at a more comprehensive look at the peacebuilding record, five recent book-length studies stand out. The works by Simon Chesterman (2004), Richard Caplan (2005a) and James Dobbins et al. (2005) all build on multi-year research projects on transitional administration as a special form of multidimensional peacebuilding.<sup>24</sup> These studies identify many of the crucial tasks and areas associated with peacebuilding: public order/internal security, civil administration, economic reconstruction, political institution-building, judicial reconstruction and dealing with the past. They also point to some of the cross-cutting challenges such as effectiveness, exit strategies and the overall inconsistencies between liberal ends and illiberal means. Another important work is the book by Roland Paris (2004) who, based on his reading of

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<sup>19</sup> For a good overview see Schneekener (2005) and Kühne (2005), and also Ferdowsi and Matthies (2003); Cousens and Kumar (2001). Likewise, the seminal volume by Crocker, Hampson and Aall (2001) on international conflict management in its latest edition devotes more than a half dozen chapters to peacebuilding. For a critique of peacebuilding research see Paris (2000).

<sup>20</sup> For a recent contribution see Bain (2006).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Caplan (2005b).

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Rubin (2006); Rathmell (2005); Philpott (2006); Knaus and Martin (2003); Jones (2006).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, the latest special issue of *International Peacekeeping* on security-sector reform edited by Brzoska and Law (2006); on law and public order cf. Jones et al. (2005).

<sup>24</sup> See Chesterman (2004) distilling the results of a project by the International Peace Academy; Dobbins et al. (2005) presenting the results of a RAND study; and Caplan (2005a) which builds on an earlier Adelphi Paper (Caplan, 2002).

the peacebuilding record in 11 cases, advances his prescription of a particular policy mix putting a premium on building institutions: “institutionalization before liberalization” (IBL). The most comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of UN peacebuilding operations is the recent *Making War and Building Peace* by Michael Doyle and Nicolas Sambanis.<sup>25</sup> Doyle and Sambanis’ main assertion is that “while the UN is very poor at ‘war’, imposing a settlement by force, [it] can be very good at ‘peace’, mediating and implementing a comprehensively negotiated peace.”<sup>26</sup> They regard international capacities, local capacities and level of hostility as the key factors for the success of peacebuilding missions.

These five major studies exhibit two traits that are characteristic of the broader research on peacebuilding. First, these studies analyze UN peacebuilding missions without opening up the “black box” of the UN Secretariat and agencies to take a close look at the workings of the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy. The absence of theoretically informed and empirically rich studies of the different organizations involved in UN peacebuilding is a striking gap in the literature.<sup>27</sup> Second, these studies do not focus on issues of organizational learning. While there are a few anecdotal observations such as Chesterman’s conclusion that learning “has not [...] been one of the strengths of the United Nations. A senior Secretariat official describes this as an unwritten rule that ‘no wheel shall go un-reinvented’”<sup>28</sup>, we lack any systematic analysis of the gathering and application of lessons learned within the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy.<sup>29</sup>

We now turn to the general literature on IR/IOs as well as organizational theory/organizational learning in order to gather building blocks for a conceptual framework that allows us to analyze organizational learning in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy.

### **2.3 Research on international organizations and IR theory**

The past 25 years in particular have seen a flourishing of research on international institutions within the discipline of International Relations (IR). At the same time, however, there has been a growing disconnect between mainstream research on international relations, research on international organizations and research on the UN. Today, there is a rich and theoretically diverse body of literature dealing with the creation, functioning and effects of international institutions.<sup>30</sup> Much of the focus of the

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<sup>25</sup> Doyle and Sambanis (2006), building on Doyle and Sambanis (2000).

<sup>26</sup> Doyle and Sambanis (2006: 5).

<sup>27</sup> Notable exceptions are the study by Durch et al. (2003) on the implementation of the Brahimi Report and the recent article by Ian Johnstone, Benjamin Tortolani and Richard Gowan (2006). The new *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations* also promises to be an important source for facts on peacebuilding missions (Johnstone, 2006). On the UN secretariat in general, see Dicke (1994); Fröhlich (2005) and Benner (2006).

<sup>28</sup> Chesterman (2004: 256). A former senior UN official made a similar observation in an interview in Cambridge, MA, 2005-11-04.

<sup>29</sup> The only exception is a recent study by Rainer Breul (2005) which presents a first cut at the issue. Breul’s study is a diploma thesis at the University of Constance. Breul focuses on a single mode of organizational learning where crisis is the single important ‘trigger’. The study by Julian Junk (2006), also a diploma thesis at the University of Constance, is another attempt at bringing together the literature on peacebuilding with that on public administration. In this context see also the articles by Irving (2006) and Lipson (2002).

<sup>30</sup> For a general overview see Simmons and Martin (2002) and Sprinz (2003), a good overview on the UN is given in Gareis and Varwick (2003) and Weiss (2004).



past quarter century has been on international regimes and (more recently) on networks and partnerships in global governance. Formal international organizations, which in the first decades after 1945 were at the heart of research as a “manifestation of what was ‘new’ about post-war international relations”<sup>31</sup>, have been sidelined in theoretically interested work. International organizations as everyday international bureaucracies were, as the late Susan Strange observed, a “great yawn”.<sup>32</sup> Excellent overviews of the study of international organizations notwithstanding,<sup>33</sup> there have been very few theory-driven studies of international organizations and the UN in particular. It is only recently that international organizations are being re-discovered as important players in world politics “because they have agency, agenda-setting influence and potentially important socializing influences.”<sup>34</sup>

The following review of the three main strands of theorizing in international relations (neo-realism, rationalist institutionalism, and sociological/constructivist institutionalism<sup>35</sup>) shows that only one approach holds significant promise as a basis for our study that aims to open up the “black box” international organization.<sup>36</sup>

*Neo-realists* do not allow for the independent importance of international organizations in the first place. Therefore, in the eyes of neo-realists, any efforts to open the “black box” IO are futile – why spend time analyzing an organization that does not have any relevance in its own right?

*Rationalist institutionalists* mainly concentrate on the question of why states set up international organizations to begin with, rather than how they work after their creation. Therefore, a lot of rationalist institutionalists’ work is either concerned with why states create or act through international organizations<sup>37</sup>, or with the rational design of international organizations.<sup>38</sup> Principal-agent theory as a sub-field of rationalist institutionalism has mostly focused on the interests and strategies of the principal actors, in this case states, and what states can do to control agents (international organizations/bureaucracies). As a recent overview article aptly observes, principal-agent-theory driven work “contains a remarkably thin view of agent behaviour.”<sup>39</sup> As a consequence, principal-agent theorists have made very few direct claims about agent behaviour, which in our context is the behaviour of international bureaucracies. More than 20 years ago, Oliver Williamson coined the memorable phrase that agents are “self-

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<sup>31</sup> Simmons and Martin (2002: 193).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Barnett and Finnemore (2004: VIII).

<sup>33</sup> See Rittberger, Zangl and Staisch (2003) and also Martin and Simmons (2002).

<sup>34</sup> Simmons and Martin (2002: 198).

<sup>35</sup> Here we follow the early distinction by Keohane (1993) who differentiates between a rationalistic and a reflectivist approach to the study of international institutions. The former is inferred from economics, the latter deduced from sociology. The broader assumptions of sociological institutionalism include the importance of impersonal social forces as well as the impact of cultural practices, norms, and values that are not derived from calculations of interests (Hall and Taylor, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> Contrary to other rationalist IR theories, liberalism as the one major IR theory missing from this discussion does not take states but groups within states as its central unit of analysis (Zangl and Zürn, 2003). Consequently, results of international politics are explained by constellations of interests of the different dominant groups within states (Moravcsik, 1997). However, this additional level of analysis does not help to open up the black box of IOs, and therefore, to explain learning processes within the UN bureaucracy.

<sup>37</sup> Abbott and Snidal (1998).

<sup>38</sup> Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal (2001).

<sup>39</sup> Hawkins and Jacoby (2006: 277).

interest seeking with guile.”<sup>40</sup> However, subsequent principal-agent-theory inspired research has not fleshed out or tested this assertion. Hawkins and Jacoby (2006: 279) are the first principal-agent theorists to claim that “IOs matter not only because states have designed rules to resolve problems, but because those IOs are themselves independent actors and interact strategically with states and others.” However, the tools they propose (associating leverage of IOs with situations in which only a small pool of agents exists and high costs are associated with the creation of agents) contribute very little to the analysis of long-term processes such as organizational learning.

Only approaches based on *sociological institutionalism*<sup>41</sup> state the explicit goal of analyzing the workings of IOs as international bureaucracies.<sup>42</sup> Amid growing interest among sociological institutionalists in the study of international organizations as bureaucracies,<sup>43</sup> the recent work of Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore stands out. Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 3) assert the autonomy of international organizations by means of different sources of authority:

“We ground our analysis on the fact that IOs are bureaucracies. Bureaucracy is a distinctive social form of authority with its own internal logic and behavioural proclivities. It is because of their authority that bureaucracies have autonomy and the ability to change the world around them. Bureaucracies exercise power in the world through their ability to make impersonal rules.”

Only by assuming that international organizations have autonomy, albeit limited, can we allow for processes of organizational learning to take place. Without autonomy, the capacity for learning is not present.

Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 16) argue that “to understand how international organizations work, we found ourselves turning to theories of organization rather than theories of international politics. We were not the first to do this.” In fact, while Barnett and Finnemore certainly are not the first, the list of their predecessors is rather short.<sup>44</sup> Among them, the work by Ernst Haas (1990) on learning in international organizations also stands out. While Haas’ work is an inspiration and one obvious starting point for our proposed project, there are two caveats: first, his work remained largely typological – Haas in the end did not fully open up the black box IO by tracing learning processes in depth; secondly, his understanding of learning processes is very much based on the importance of consensually held scientific knowledge on environmental problems, which is much less applicable to the field of peacebuilding since there is no equivalent “science of peacebuilding”.

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<sup>40</sup> Williamson (1985: 30) quoted in Hawkins and Jacoby (2006: 277).

<sup>41</sup> For the purposes of this study we assume that the terms sociological and constructivist institutionalism are exchangeable.

<sup>42</sup> According to Keohane (1993), the adherents of sociological institutionalism have neither the coherence nor the self-confidence of rationalists. Since the time of his writing, it is fair to say that at least the latter problem has improved.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Liese and Weinlich (2006); Bauer (2006); Mathiason (forthcoming, 2007). This research builds on older studies of international organizations as bureaucracies, for example Cox and Jacobsen (1971). See also the recent studies by Fröhlich (2005); Weaver and Leiteritz (2005); Nielson, Tierney and Weaver (2006).

<sup>44</sup> One example is Ness and Brechin (1988). Another interesting attempt is Ansell and Weber (1999) although their piece is much less focused on international organizations per se. There are a number of studies on learning within the EU context, see for example Jachtenfuchs (1996).

## 2.4 Organizational learning theory and organization theory

In our search for a framework to analyze learning within IOs we now turn to research on organizational learning (OL), a subfield of organization theory.<sup>45</sup> Any hopes to find ready-made “plug & play” frameworks for the analysis of learning in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy are bound to be disappointed. While organization theory features a wealth of interesting and creative approaches, it does not offer tested models tailored to the analysis of learning in international bureaucracies.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the field of organizational learning is characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity. In the words of two leading contributors to this literature:

“Research in organizational learning has suffered from conceptions that were excessively broad, encompassing nearly all organizational change, from ontological complaints that organizations cannot learn, and from various other maladies that arise from insufficient agreement among those working in the area on key concepts and problems.”<sup>46</sup>

Second, much of the literature on organizational learning focuses on business organizations, often relying on quasi-Darwinian market forces as explanatory factors while critically under-emphasizing the political factors in organizational processes. The analogy does not hold; international organizations rarely operate in a market-like environment where they are likely to go out of business based on the forces of supply and demand.<sup>47</sup>

While it does not offer a tailor-made framework for the purposes of our study, we rely on elements of the current literature on OL for two purposes: as building blocks for our heuristic model of learning, and to deduce hypotheses on the key factors that affect learning (chapter 5.1).

To this end, we draw on parts of the more recent literature on OL which clearly demarcates itself from earlier approaches on two fronts: on the one hand, the traditional understanding of organizations as closed systems in the 1970s gave way to a more open concept that allowed for the interaction between an organization and its environment; on the other hand, the new scholarly recognition of such interaction remained limited to a one-way relation, namely, that the institutional environment determines the organization’s goals and the instruments to reach them. On the contrary, more recent approaches see the organization and its environment as mutually constitutive.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For overviews of the field, see Berthoin Antal et al. (2001) and Easterby-Smith and Lyles (2003). We have reviewed but do not include in this overview the approaches on the “learning organization” in management. For a stimulating critique of these approaches, see Kühl (2000).

<sup>46</sup> Cohen and Sproull (1991: Editor’s Introduction).

<sup>47</sup> John Bolton, at the time US Ambassador to the United Nations, implied the opposite when stating: “Americans [...] look at [the UN] as a competitor in the marketplace for global problem-solving, and if it’s successful at solving problems, they’ll be inclined to use it. If it’s not successful at solving problems, they’ll say, ‘Are there other institutions?’” Quoted in Lynch (2005).

<sup>48</sup> Meyer and Scott (1992); Scott and Meyer (1994); Breul (2005); Dingwerth and Campe (2005). This is in line with sociological institutionalists considering structure and agency as mutual constitutive, cf. Wendt (1987); Barnett and Finnemore (2004); Ulbert (2003).

In conceptualizing the learning process, we have found further approaches from organization theory, policy analysis and administrative science to be useful. This includes the bounded rationality tradition,<sup>49</sup> the “garbage can”,<sup>50</sup> “muddling through” and “multiple streams”<sup>51</sup> models as well as the concept of “organized hypocrisy”<sup>52</sup>. These models deal with decision-making in bureaucracies and can therefore inform our analysis of factors influencing the process of organizational learning.

## **2.5 Organizational learning defined**

The brief overview of the three research fields most relevant for our subject – peace operations research, International Relations and organization theory – has demonstrated that we can neither draw on tailored and tested frameworks<sup>53</sup> nor on empirically rich studies on organizational learning and peacebuilding. Research into organizational learning in international organizations therefore needs to develop its own model, building on different elements from the available literature. As a first step toward this end, in the remainder of this chapter we develop our definition of the key term “organizational learning” in the context of international organizations.

There is no generally accepted definition of organizational learning. Organizational learning is at present more akin to a widely applied metaphor than to the bedrock of a well developed research paradigm.<sup>54</sup> This reflects both the level of fragmentation of OL research and the inherent complexity of the learning process itself. Transferring the concept of learning from the individual level to an organization adds to the challenges of clearly defining and operationalizing the concept.

Our definition of organizational learning needs to meet two criteria. First, its basic elements must allow for operationalization, rather than remaining at the level of a metaphor. Second, to the broadest extent possible, we aim at building on concepts already in use instead of creating additional ones. By doing so, we strive to ensure maximum compatibility of our research with the few other projects in this area and make use of potential synergies.<sup>55</sup>

In line with the majority of recent research on organizational learning, we reject both simple behavioural stimulus-response models and models that analyze organizations as closed systems independent of their environment.<sup>56</sup> We hold that:

1. organizational learning is a *collective process* driven by groups of individuals;<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> March and Simon (1958).

<sup>50</sup> Cohen, March and Olsen (1972/1988); March and Olsen (1976). Lipson (2004) applies the concept to peace operations.

<sup>51</sup> Kingdon (1984).

<sup>52</sup> See Lipson (2002) for an application to the area of peacekeeping.

<sup>53</sup> March and Olsen (1988); Levitt and March (1988); Hedberg (1981); Huber (1991).

<sup>54</sup> Argyris and Schön (1978); Klimecki, Laßleben and Riexinger-Li (1994).

<sup>55</sup> In particular, we are working closely with the related projects on the planning and management of peacebuilding operations undertaken at the University of Konstanz. Earlier research by the project team has been published by Blume (2004), Breul (2005) and Junk (2006).

<sup>56</sup> For example, Cyert and March (1963).

<sup>57</sup> We take it as a given that individuals in an organization learn – however, learning becomes only consequential at the group and organizational levels: “The significance that work groups [...] have in

2. organizational learning is a process with a *strong cognitive dimension*,<sup>58</sup> in which
3. the organization *interacts with its environment* and that this
4. manifests itself in the *development of new rules and routines*.

We therefore define organizational learning as *a process of cognitive change through the questioning of the means and/or ends of addressing problems. The process manifests itself in the development and implementation of new rules and routines*<sup>59</sup> *guiding the organization's actions.* Note that we speak of learning only if the negotiations about these new rules and routines are significantly based on knowledge. A change of rules and routines that occurs solely due to a change in power relations is not included in our definition of organizational learning.

Our definition combines the knowledge-based approach of Haas (1990) with that of Barnett and Finnemore (2004) who focus on the importance of rules as the basic modus operandi of international bureaucracies.

## **2.6 A word on methodology**

Any mind striving for parsimonious research designs testing clearly delineated causal hypotheses must feel a sense of desperation after reviewing the state of the research on organizational learning in the peacebuilding bureaucracy. For one thing, organizational learning is a complex process that is not directly observable. For another, there are no established frameworks for the analysis of learning, let alone robust and testable causal hypotheses on what influences processes of organizational learning. Therefore, given the present state of research, organizational learning is still more akin to a metaphor than a clearly specified scientific concept usable for empirical research.

What some might see as a reason for despair, others might simply regard as a strong reminder for the need to be modest on what a first cut at the issue can achieve – as well as to choose a methodology that fits the current state of the research. To combine insights to be translated from other disciplines with empirical observations on our particular object of inquiry – organizational learning in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy – we found a retroductive research design to be best suited.<sup>60</sup> Retroduction means that the researcher develops a preliminary model through the use of analogies and deduction from theories from related fields that fit the observation that is to be explained. A first set of preliminary hypotheses is drawn from the model and “fitted” to the empirical reality, i.e. tested to which extent it fits the actual field of research. This testing is not to be confused with the testing of causal hypotheses but must rather be seen as a much earlier step to develop or adapt such hypotheses. With the help of such empirical work new variables might be found, others refined or even rejected. After several

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organizations means that knowledge acquisition by individuals is an indispensable, but usually insufficient, component of organizational learning” (Maier, Prange and von Rosenstiel, 2001). Our detailed examination of the learning processes within the UN therefore starts at the group level.

<sup>58</sup> Klimecki, Laßleben and Thomae (1999).

<sup>59</sup> According to Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 18), “bureaucratic rules are the standard operating procedures that allow the organization to respond more effectively and predictably to environmental demands.” Change of rules generally applies to a broad continuum from operational procedures to grand doctrines.

<sup>60</sup> Schimmelfennig (1995: 21).

repetitions of theoretical deduction and empirical induction in a spiral process of theory development, the candidate hypotheses will be generated with these new and refined variables.

This study seeks to lay the foundations for the application of a longer process of retroduction in future in-depth research. In terms of theory-building, our present study needs to content itself with a modest first step: to identify possible factors that influence learning from related disciplines and empirical research. These factors can later be refined and worked into hypotheses.

With this in mind, we now turn our attention to the empirical picture. We first analyze the evolution of what we call the “infrastructure of learning” in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy, and then look into instances of learning in five peacebuilding operations. In chapter 5 we will return to broader conceptual issues and present a first cut at a model of the learning process as well as an overview of the different factors that we distilled by means of both deduction from the relevant literature and induction from our empirical work.

### 3 Evolution of the Learning Infrastructure in the UN Peacebuilding Bureaucracy

“Much has been written in the last few years on post-conflict peacebuilding. If even a small portion of that knowledge were translated into practice, some of the serial failures of international assistance to countries emerging from conflict might have been avoided.”<sup>61</sup>

This chapter presents a brief overview of the development of the infrastructure of learning in the UN’s peacebuilding bureaucracy. The *peacebuilding bureaucracy* means those parts of the Secretariat that are regularly and officially tasked with managing peacebuilding operations. The *infrastructure of learning* comprises functional units and institutional mechanisms dealing with the promotion of learning, e. g. the collection of lessons and best practices and their mainstreaming into future operations.

To our knowledge, this is the first attempt to analyze the evolution of the infrastructure of learning. The limits of such a first-time undertaking based on secondary sources and officially available documents are clear. A full-fledged historical analysis is outside the remit of this study. It would require in-depth oral history with the key individuals and an analysis of internal documents that are not publicly available, in particular since 2000, as the renewed surge in peacebuilding activity has produced a multitude of new actors and fora. The primary purpose of this chapter is to provide the basic context on how the infrastructure of learning evolved. In this first cut, we can only hint at a number of factors that are likely to have influenced this development, such as leadership, supporting countries, crises, and structural factors.

Taking the initial appearance of the term “post-conflict peace-building” in UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace* (1992) as a starting point, section 3.1 recounts the development of the secretariat’s capacity for organizational learning throughout the 1990s. Despite a number of initiatives during these years, real progress was made only following the Brahimi Report (2000). Section 3.2 summarizes its recommendations on learning and their subsequent (non-)implementation. Finally, in section 3.3, we present a snapshot of the current learning infrastructure as it presents itself in mid-2006. As much as possible, we take into account the new Peacebuilding Support Office that was just established in order to strengthen the work of the new Peacebuilding Commission.

#### 3.1 The slow recognition of the UN’s learning needs in the 1990s

“... the United Nations did not have in place, as of the end of 1993, proper arrangements for institutional memory [or] to learn from recent experience in peacekeeping.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Necla Tschirgi quoted in Cutillo (2006: Preface).

<sup>62</sup> From a report prepared by the UN’s Office of Internal Oversight Services (UN Secretary-General: para. 16).

When Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali submitted his *Agenda for Peace* to heads of state in June 1992, his prime concerns were with issues of policy, not management.<sup>63</sup> His call for a larger role of the United Nations in conflict prevention, peace-making, and “post-conflict peace-building” was aimed at decision-makers in member state capitals and embassies. However, with the exception of the need for additional early warning and preventive diplomacy capabilities, Boutros-Ghali did not spell out any consequences for the UN bureaucracy of such an expanded role. Member states provided the requested resources for early warning which led to the establishment of the *Department of Political Affairs* (DPA). Having created the *Department of Peacekeeping Operations* (DPKO) just four months earlier,<sup>64</sup> the Secretary-General did not seek any further changes in this area. “The established principles and practices of peacekeeping,” he wrote in an optimistic tone, “have responded flexibly to new demands of recent years.”<sup>65</sup>

As it turned out, this belief in flexible adaptation by muddling through was misplaced. The result was (as the Office of Internal Oversight Services noted in 1995) a lack of strategic capacity and the complete absence of an institutional infrastructure for learning. This added to the overall lack of coherence in the evolving area of peacekeeping and peacebuilding, a field that was very much in flux during the 1990s and therefore in dire need of capacity for analysis and learning. While the key departments, mainly DPA and DPKO, wasted too much time on turf fights, adequate capabilities for planning, analysis and learning were hardly forthcoming anywhere in the bureaucracy. A first small step in this direction was taken in DPKO in the mid-1990s.

#### *A first, small step: the establishment of DPKO’s Lessons Learned Unit*

When Kofi Annan took over the *Department of Peacekeeping Operations* in March 1993, the explosion of demand for peacekeeping had begun to take a toll on the Secretariat. In the previous year alone, there had been a fivefold increase in troops and a twofold increase in missions.<sup>66</sup> Just three days after leaving his post and moving to DPA, Annan’s predecessor Marrack Goulding told an academic audience at the University of Oxford that “the departments concerned [...] need to be strengthened if they are to have the planning and command and control capability to support operations on the scale currently deployed.”<sup>67</sup>

This slowly but steadily growing awareness led Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali to give more attention to pressing management issues. In his June 1993 implementation report on the *Agenda for Peace* Boutros-Ghali called for an in-depth investigation of the start-up phase of peacekeeping operations, a request granted by the General Assembly.<sup>68</sup> This

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<sup>63</sup> On the role of the *Agenda for Peace* for peacekeeping generally, see Johnstone, Tortolani and Gowan (2006: 59-60).

<sup>64</sup> See Boutros-Ghali (1992: para. 51-52); the General Assembly’s response (UN General Assembly, 1992); and the Secretary-General’s implementation report (Boutros-Ghali, 1993). DPKO was created in February 1992 with Marrack Goulding as its first Under-Secretary-General. In March 1993, Goulding moved on to head the newly created DPA as Kofi Annan took over DPKO.

<sup>65</sup> Boutros-Ghali (1992: para. 50).

<sup>66</sup> UN Secretary-General (1997a: 13-14).

<sup>67</sup> Goulding (1993: 470). The speech was in the same year published in *International Affairs*.

<sup>68</sup> UN Secretary-General (1994: para. 4).



independent investigation became the driving force for establishing the first embryonic elements of a learning infrastructure within DPKO. The investigation produced a progress report in 1994 and a final report in 1995.<sup>69</sup> In terms of learning, the “progress report [made] clear [that] the United Nations did not have in place, as of the end of 1993, proper arrangements for institutional memory [or] to learn from recent experience in peace-keeping.”<sup>70</sup>

In March 1994, the Mission Planning Service in DPKO began to test a first “lessons learned mechanism” aimed at the systematic collection of end-of-mission assessments by senior mission staff.<sup>71</sup> The Secretariat stepped up its call for more resources over the course of the year. In doing so, it took advantage of the explicit show of support for the investigation’s progress report from both the General Assembly and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. The latter, in particular, strongly supported better analysis and planning capabilities within DPKO.<sup>72</sup> In a November 1994 report on the command and control of peacekeeping operations to the Special Committee, the Secretary-General pushed for budget increases to fund a broad range of planning and analysis tasks at DPKO, including a Lessons Learned Unit.<sup>73</sup>

In 1995, as the final report of the independent evaluation mandated in 1993 was issued, new resources were finally forthcoming.<sup>74</sup> In April 1995, DPKO’s Lessons Learned Unit was established as part of the Planning Division, Office of Planning and Support, with only two positions: a Head of Unit and one research assistant. However small and understaffed, the unit was the first of its kind in the UN’s peacebuilding bureaucracy.

#### *The late 90s: stalemate in the battle for resources*

During the second half of the 1990s, the general context for peacekeeping changed. After the failures of Rwanda and Srebrenica, demand for UN operations began to fall and the previous enthusiasm within the organization gave way to self-doubt and soul-searching. Developing countries pushed through a decision to send home all military personnel that (for the most part Western) governments had provided to the Department free of charge to offset staffing shortages. In this context, there was not much progress to be made for the learning infrastructure at DPKO.

From its inception in 1995 until about 2001, DPKO’s Lessons Learned Unit was for the most part sustained by voluntary contributions. Up to 1997, for example, a trust fund provided up to four additional posts as well as other resources to the unit, mostly paid for by the Ford Foundation and the governments of Sweden and Germany.<sup>75</sup> In the first one-and-a-half years of its existence (until its first serious funding crisis), the unit issued a total of five reports: three on field missions (UNOSOM in Somalia, UNAMIR in

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<sup>69</sup> UN Secretary-General (1994); UN Secretary-General (1995).

<sup>70</sup> UN Secretary-General (1995: para. 16).

<sup>71</sup> UN Secretary-General (1995: para. 17). The exercise was obviously not very successful, as the same task is again being undertaken since late 2005 by the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section.

<sup>72</sup> UN General Assembly (1995); UN Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations (1994: para. 73).

<sup>73</sup> Boutros-Ghali (1994: para. 15-16).

<sup>74</sup> Boutros-Ghali (1995); UN Secretary-General (1995).

<sup>75</sup> UN Secretary-General (1997b: para. 15); UN Secretary-General (1997a: para. 29, p. 63).

Rwanda, UNMIH in Haiti), one on “multidisciplinary peacekeeping” in general, and one on the implementation of lessons learned.<sup>76</sup>

As Kofi Annan took office as Secretary-General in 1997, donors indicated they would not foot the bill indefinitely for what the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) had, in 1995, called a core task of the strategic management of peace operations. As part of a larger package of funding requests, the Secretary-General asked for the replacement of the four donor-funded posts with three posts from the peacekeeping budget.<sup>77</sup> In July 1997, despite Annan’s explicit call to fund DPKO at a level “that reflects the Department’s real personnel requirements”,<sup>78</sup> member states denied most of his requests but encouraged resubmission of a budget proposal specifically for the Lessons Learned Unit. The Secretary-General did just that, only to get permission to redeploy up to three existing staff to the unit but not to create any new posts.<sup>79</sup>

By March 1998, two of the three authorized posts for the Lessons Learned Unit had been redeployed within DPKO from the Mission Planning Service, leaving the unit with a total of four regular staff, plus changing resources from external donors. In trying to elevate their standing, both the Lessons Learned and the equally under-funded Policy and Analysis Unit were reassigned from the Office of Mission Support to the Office of the Under-Secretary-General.<sup>80</sup> Subsequently, the two units were merged to form the *Policy Analysis and Lessons Learned Unit*, with a total of 17 posts by 1999, most of which were still funded by external donors.<sup>81</sup>

Not surprisingly, given this resource base, the unit continued struggling to fulfil its purpose. Throughout 1999 and 2000, member states and external observers alike criticized DPKO for its failure to better incorporate past “experiences [...] into peacekeeping policy and planning than has been the case to date.”<sup>82</sup> The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations observed that the unit had failed to “develop guidelines and standard operating procedures, as well as [to promote] the sharing of best practices among missions.”<sup>83</sup>

While the efforts to build up a learning infrastructure at DPKO stalled in the late 90s, the Department of Political Affairs only made very slow progress on this front despite the growth in responsibilities attributed to it by Annan’s 1997 program of reform.<sup>84</sup> Alongside a push for better funding of its conflict prevention functions, DPA undertook a number of efforts to strengthen strategic planning and coordination. In 1998, under the tenure of Kieran Prendergast, the DPA established a *Policy Planning Unit* along with a *Conflict Prevention Team*, both of which were to provide policy guidance on preventive

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<sup>76</sup> UN Secretary-General (1997b: para. 8); United Nations (1995); United Nations (1996).

<sup>77</sup> UN Secretary-General (1997a: para. 30).

<sup>78</sup> Annan (1997: para. 118).

<sup>79</sup> UN ACABQ (1997: para. 21); UN Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations (1997); UN General Assembly (1997a); UN Secretary-General (1997b); UN General Assembly (1997b).

<sup>80</sup> UN Secretary-General (1998: para. 8, 9-11, 37); UN ACABQ (1998: para. 3).

<sup>81</sup> UN Secretary-General (1999: para. 5.17).

<sup>82</sup> UN Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations (2000: para. 42); Interview with DPKO official, 2006-04-24.

<sup>83</sup> UN Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations (2000: para. 43).

<sup>84</sup> Annan (1997: 40).

action.<sup>85</sup> Until today, however, the Policy Planning Unit has not been able to set up a lessons learned capacity even for its core business.<sup>86</sup>

Also in 1998, DPA made plans for a small *Peacebuilding Unit* tasked to “assist mission planning and support for peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding support offices, special political missions and peacemaking/diplomatic activities. It would also build and maintain a peacebuilding information system and establish contacts for the department with academic institutions and research centers.”<sup>87</sup> The unit which was guided by the definition of peacebuilding as preventive diplomacy prevalent at the time suffered much the same fate as DPKO’s Lessons Learned Unit: after being denied regular funding in 1999, the idea remained dormant until the Brahimi Report reanimated the project in 2000. To improve coordination at the inter-departmental level, Kofi Annan’s reforms introduced an *Executive Committee for Peace and Security* (ECPS) including all Under-Secretaries-General and some of the Assistant-Secretaries-General working on issues of peace and security, chaired by the head of DPA. Without any stable funding for even a small secretariat and hamstrung by inter-departmental feuding, the Secretary-General found the ECPS, four years later, still “not living up to its full potential.”<sup>88</sup>

### **3.2 The Brahimi Report and beyond: Learning at the center of management reforms in peacebuilding**

“The work of DPKO’s existing Lessons Learned Unit does not seem to have had a great deal of impact on peace operations practice, and the compilation of lessons learned seems to occur mostly after a mission has ended.”<sup>89</sup>

“Under the current practices there is no process for elevating certain practices to ‘best practices’ and subsequently incorporating them both in the field and at headquarters ...”<sup>90</sup>

Following years of stagnation in the number of peacebuilding operations and decline in field personnel and DPKO support staff alike, a new and rapid surge in demand for UN peace operations began in June 1999. Quite unexpectedly, member states called for some of the largest and most ambitious missions to be deployed to Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – missions that were much more complex and intrusive than most of what the UN had been engaged in before. To avert a renewed overstretch of DPKO’s support capacities<sup>91</sup> and avoid repetition of the UN’s mistakes in handling the situations in Rwanda 1994 and Srebrenica 1995, the Secretary-General convened a high-level panel to suggest improvements to the management of UN peace operations. The panel produced what became known as the “Brahimi Report”,

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<sup>85</sup> UN Secretary-General (2001b: para. 73).

<sup>86</sup> Interview with UN official, 2006-04-25.

<sup>87</sup> Durch et al. (2003: 57).

<sup>88</sup> UN Secretary-General (2001a: para. 298).

<sup>89</sup> Brahimi Report, United Nations (2000: para. 229).

<sup>90</sup> Dahrendorf (2003: para. viii).

<sup>91</sup> Dahrendorf (2003: para. 14).

named after the panel's chairman, former Algerian foreign minister and UN Under-Secretary-General Lakhdar Brahimi.

The panel did not come up with entirely new concepts. This was not necessary as one of the main intentions was to distill once more the numerous ideas that had been proposed in previous years but failed to attract sufficient funding and political will on the part of the member states. On a conceptual level, the report officially broadened the notion of peacebuilding to bring it closer to the realities of post-conflict state-building: "to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war." The following list of tasks is both comprehensive and intrusive, from electoral assistance and human rights education up to the "training and restructuring of local police, and judicial and penal reform."<sup>92</sup> Among the operational suggestions in the Brahimi Report were three initiatives to improve the learning infrastructure in the peacebuilding bureaucracy.<sup>93</sup> These were: (1) a new "strategic analysis" capacity at DPA for the assessment and evaluation of peacebuilding activities, (2) the introduction of *Integrated Mission Task Forces* to oversee field operations, and (3) revitalizing DPKO's *Policy Analysis and Lessons Learned Unit*.

These three proposals encountered a similar fate as the panel's overall recommendations. They were only partly met with support from the member states. The eminence of the panelists and the strong support of the Secretary-General provided the necessary momentum to secure much-needed funding to implement at least key elements of the recommendations, including the creation of 191 new posts for DPKO.<sup>94</sup> But for the most part the history of the implementation of the recommendations demonstrated "that the doctrinal lessons of the Brahimi Report will only be learnt when reinforced by realities on the ground."<sup>95</sup>

The three recommendations relating to the infrastructure of learning are a case in point: the first recommendation failed, the second was implemented with mixed success, and the third has, after some time, led to considerable activity to promote organizational learning at DPKO. In the following sections, each will be treated in turn.

#### *Creating a strategic analysis capacity at DPA: The EISAS and PBU disaster*

"[T]o strengthen the permanent capacity of the UN to develop peacebuilding strategies and to implement programs in support of those strategies,"<sup>96</sup> the Brahimi Report advocated that an *ECPS Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat* (EISAS) be established to support the Executive Committee for Peace and Security (ECPS).<sup>97</sup> The new body was to pull together a number of disparate policy and analysis units scattered throughout the secretariat, including the policy analysis part of DPKO's recently merged

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<sup>92</sup> United Nations (2000: para. 13).

<sup>93</sup> On the general relevance of the Brahimi report for UN peacekeeping see, among others, Johnstone, Tortolani and Gowan (2006: 62); Durch et al. (2003); Malone and Thakur (2001); Cockayne and Malone (2005).

<sup>94</sup> Durch et al. (2003: 3-5).

<sup>95</sup> Johnstone, Tortolani and Gowan (2006: 66).

<sup>96</sup> United Nations (2000: para. 44-46).

<sup>97</sup> UN Secretary-General (2000: para. 42-58).

Policy Analysis and Lessons Learned Unit, its Situation Centre, and DPA's Policy Planning Unit. The plans for EISAS also included the creation of a new *Peacebuilding Unit* (PBU).<sup>98</sup>

Facing instant opposition from member states who felt that too strong an early warning and "intelligence" capacity of the United Nations might compromise their sovereignty,<sup>99</sup> the Secretary-General pulled back and requested a much smaller version of EISAS and a separate Peacebuilding Unit to be established as part of DPA.<sup>100</sup> In May 2002, the request was finally denied. According to well-placed observers, the PBU's failure must be regarded as collateral damage from the political storm that had broken out over the EISAS concept.<sup>101</sup>

### *Integrated Mission Task Forces*

As a second proposal relevant to the learning infrastructure, the Brahimi panel proposed the establishment of *Integrated Mission Task Forces* (IMTFs) as a management tool to bring all actors relevant for the recently introduced "integrated missions" together at the headquarters level. An IMTF would be assembled for every specific multidimensional peace operation to coordinate its planning and management at a relatively high level of seniority. Starting well ahead of a formal mandate of the Security Council and operating throughout the life cycle of its mission, the group would play the role of a crucial hub through which all information and decisions would flow. Its inclusiveness and decision-making authority would go a long way to improve the implementation of past lessons learned. Ideally, the IMTFs would also help to coordinate the collection of lessons learned during and the end of missions.<sup>102</sup>

After five years, the result is mixed at best. According to one recent study, IMTFs "have been established on only a limited number of missions and they performed below expectations."<sup>103</sup> In more detail, according to another assessment, they "succeeded in resolving technical issues of day-to-day coordination and policy differences" but, "there was still an overall incoherence in the international response mechanism".<sup>104</sup> In particular, observers point to a persistent lack of cohesiveness among the UN agencies, between the UN agencies and a number of regional organizations, and between these entities and some of the major powers involved in the process.

While the IMTF doctrine has been revised, refined, and adapted for each UN mission since its first application in the planning of UNAMA for Afghanistan in 2001/02 (see section 4.4, below), a fundamental tension persists: while representatives from the political, humanitarian and development agencies on the ground feel that DPKO planners fail to adequately take their local experience and perspectives into account, DPKO staff complain that UN country teams often "are unwilling to adapt to the new

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<sup>98</sup> United Nations (2000: para. 243a).

<sup>99</sup> UN ACABQ (2000: para. 21); Chesterman (2006: 154).

<sup>100</sup> UN Secretary-General (2001a: para. 301).

<sup>101</sup> Durch et al. (2003: 87-88).

<sup>102</sup> United Nations (2000: para. 200ff.).

<sup>103</sup> Cutillo (2006: 20).

<sup>104</sup> Eide et al. (2005: 12).

realities.”<sup>105</sup> Lacking effective integration with processes of learning, a study team found that even in 2005, mission design in the cases of Liberia and Sudan reflected “the inclinations and predilections of senior mission management, with little if any substantive reference to best practices, concepts of integration or modern management practices.”<sup>106</sup> They conclude that the IMTF process has been undermined by a lack of clear reporting lines and decision-making leverage, that it has not been sufficiently country focused, and that it had only provided a very loose form of integration.<sup>107</sup>

#### *The further development of DPKO’s Lessons Learned Unit*

Having been appointed on 1 October 2000 with an explicit determination to implement the Brahimi Panel’s recommendations and “professionalize” DPKO’s organizational culture, the new Under-Secretary-General Jean-Marie Guéhenno made “change management” one of his personal priorities.<sup>108</sup> Instead of following the Brahimi panel’s recommendation to move the Policy Analysis and Lessons Learned Unit into the Office of Operations – internally considered the most understaffed, bureaucratic and change-resistant part of DPKO<sup>109</sup> – he kept the unit as part of his immediate office.<sup>110</sup> As member states finally provided new resources for the department in 2001, the unit was strengthened and once more renamed into *Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit* (PBPU).

However, despite the additional staff and funding, it took more than two years and several changes in personnel to improve the standing of the unit. In 2003, while one external study still complained about the lack of an effective learning capacity at the department,<sup>111</sup> the appointment of David Harland as head of the unit led to a turnaround. A Harvard-educated career UN official who, in 1999, drafted the organization’s damning report on the Srebrenica massacre, Harland could build on a broad range of previous assignments in various departments and in the Bosnia and East Timor operations. Nonetheless, it took another two years until a plan to systematically collect end-of-mission reports and other lessons learned was put into practice.<sup>112</sup>

#### *The High Level Panel and the 2005 Summit*

In 2005, the *High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* again took up the need for an institutional home for the cross-cutting task of peacebuilding. In the meantime, the topic had been prominently featured in the recommendations of two critical reviews of the UN’s record in peacebuilding.<sup>113</sup> Together with the proposal of an intergovernmental *Peacebuilding Commission* to coordinate sustained peacebuilding activities by the UN, a *Peacebuilding Support Office* became part of the Secretary-General’s subsequent report *In*

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<sup>105</sup> Eide et al. (2005: 19).

<sup>106</sup> Eide et al. (2005: 19).

<sup>107</sup> Eide et al. (2005: 23); similarly Durch et al. (2003: 47-50).

<sup>108</sup> Guéhenno (2002); Interview with DPKO official and external experts, New York, 2006-04-25..26.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with DPKO official, New York, 2006-04-24.

<sup>110</sup> United Nations (2000: para. 233e); UN Secretary-General (2000: para. 48).

<sup>111</sup> Dahrendorf (2003: para. viii);

<sup>112</sup> Durch et al. (2003: 41); Johnstone (2006b: 11); Porter (1999); Interviews with DPKO officials, 2006-04-24..26.

<sup>113</sup> Durch et al. (2003: 102); Dahrendorf (2003: para. vi).

*Larger Freedom.* After the endorsement of heads of state at the 2005 World Summit, both bodies were mandated in December of that year.<sup>114</sup>

Issues of learning, however, did not come up in the High-Level Panel report, nor did the state of DPKO's support infrastructure for peacebuilding operations. This might prove a crucial omission given the renewed surge in demand for new operations that is set to increase the number of troops by nearly 50% in 2006 (including a 17,000-strong Darfur mission). The strain of having planned for new deployments in East Timor, Lebanon and Sudan alone in the month of August 2006 is already showing, and prompting new questions whether the infrastructure and procedures available at DPKO are up to the number and size of operations requested by member states.<sup>115</sup>

### **3.3 A snapshot of the current infrastructure for learning**

At the time of this writing in the autumn of 2006 during the final months of Kofi Annan's tenure as Secretary-General the Secretariat and DPKO in particular remain under significant restructuring and change. In many ways, the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy remains a moving target for analysts. In the following, we present a snapshot of the peacebuilding bureaucracy, as of mid-2006.

In organizing the complex array of departments, agencies, field offices, and intergovernmental bodies for the purpose of an analysis of organizational learning, we distinguish between three levels of operation facing different kinds of internal logics and external constraints: the *intergovernmental level* (Security Council and General Assembly with the respective committees, the governing bodies of the various specialized agencies, member state representatives); the *headquarters level* (UN Secretariat and the secretariats of the various specialized agencies); and the *field level* (peacebuilding missions; see Figure 2 on page 32). In the following discussion, we focus on the UN bureaucracy at the headquarters and field levels. We also discuss on how this peacebuilding bureaucracy interacts with bodies at the intergovernmental level and how it interfaces with non-state actors such as NGOs and think-tanks.<sup>116</sup>

#### *The learning infrastructure within the peacebuilding bureaucracy*

Under the political mandate of the Security Council, formal authority over peacebuilding operations rests with the Secretary-General. Through the Under-Secretary-General heading the *Department of Peacekeeping Operations* (DPKO), field leadership on the ground is delegated to *Special Representatives of the Secretary-General* (SRSGs). Still, the Secretary-General's Executive Office may be involved in the political aspects of higher profile operations. In particular during the start-up and transition phases of a mission, this includes mandate negotiations, marshalling troops and resources, and defining the mission's relationship to the host country and other interested parties.

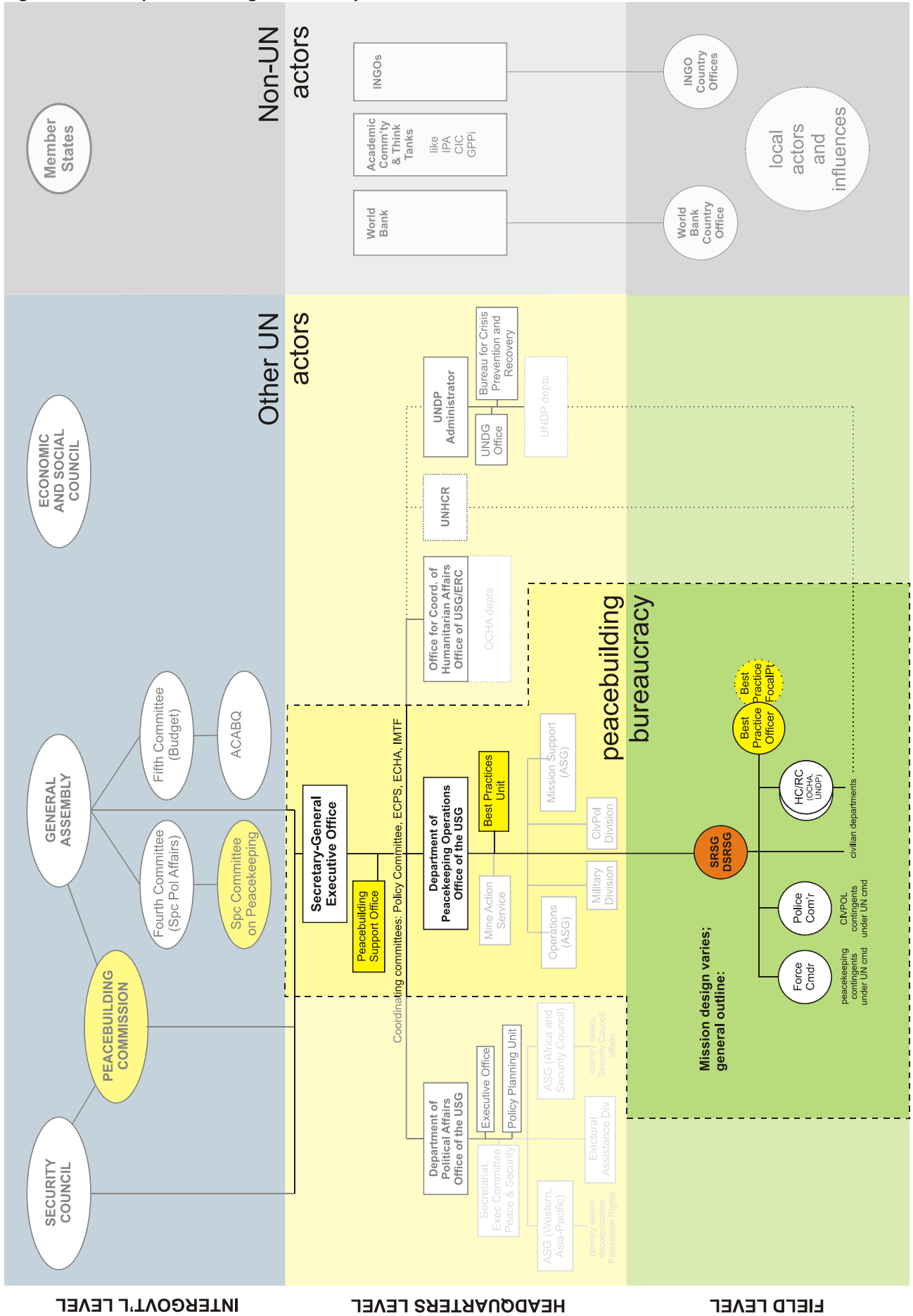
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<sup>114</sup> United Nations (2004b); Annan (2005); UN General Assembly (2005); UN Security Council (2005).

<sup>115</sup> Turner (2006).

<sup>116</sup> Much of the following is based on UN DPKO (2003) and Cutillo (2006).

Figure 2: The UN peacebuilding bureaucracy



Sources: Public UN Documents (www.un.org); UN DPKO (2003), Handbook on Multidimensional Peace Operations; Interviews with UN officials, New York, 2006-04-24..26.



DPKO is in charge of planning, logistical support, and day-to-day operational management of peacebuilding missions. The department's senior officers are also the key points of contact at the headquarters for mission leadership in the field. Even as the *Department of Political Affairs* (DPA) is directing a few smaller operations without military or police components, DPKO's experience and expertise in the logistics of peace operations as well as the organizational muscle provided by a much larger staff give the department de-facto primacy on most operational issues.<sup>117</sup>

Other departments and agencies such as the UN family's humanitarian and development actors frequently contribute their particular operational strengths to specific missions but until now are usually not involved in the overall planning and management of operations.<sup>118</sup> However, a number of inter-departmental and inter-agency committees are supposed to integrate their perspectives into the planning and management process. Each of these suffers from its individual shortcomings: the Executive Committee for Peace and Security (ECPS, see section 3.1 above) meets on the level of Under-Secretaries-General, mostly confining it to general questions not specific to any mission, and is being led by the head of DPA, not DPKO. The Secretary-General's Policy Committee, in contrast, is much less hamstrung by departmental or agency politics but is limited in membership to the Secretariat itself. On a mission level, Integrated Mission Task Forces (see section 3.2 above) are often perceived in other departments as dominated by DPKO.<sup>119</sup> Meanwhile, the new Peacebuilding Support Office is only beginning to find its role as we write.

Mirroring this distribution of authority in the strategic management of peacebuilding, the promotion of organizational learning remains largely with DPKO's *Peacekeeping Best Practices Section* (PBPS). Like the department, the unit has taken the initiative on wider issues of *peacebuilding* even though its formal authority remains restricted to *peacekeeping* as such.<sup>120</sup> The Department of Political Affairs, being even more stripped of resources than DPKO, never received the necessary funding to set up a Peacebuilding Unit, while its Policy Planning Unit does not have any lessons learned capacity even for the department's core tasks.<sup>121</sup> UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), in contrast, is better resourced but concentrates on the specific tasks its field offices are engaged in. While collecting best practices and lessons learned on, for example, UNDP's electoral assistance work, the BCPR has rarely engaged in learning support for peacebuilding more generally.<sup>122</sup>

The Peacebuilding Best Practices Section at DPKO collects reports and best practice proposals from mission staff with the assistance of Best Practice Officers or Focal Points in each field mission.<sup>123</sup> In addition, the section conducts its own studies (often with the

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<sup>117</sup> In 2006, this included the mission to Iraq (UNAMI, see section 4.5), among others. Larger missions, even those staffed primarily by DPA and not including a UN security presence, are generally run by DPKO. Examples include UNAMA (Afghanistan, see section 4.4), UNOTIL (Timor-Leste, the successor to DPKO's UNTAET operation discussed in section 4.3) and UNIOSIL (Sierra Leone, the successor to DPKO's UNAMSIL, see section 4.2).

<sup>118</sup> Cutillo (2006: 21).

<sup>119</sup> Eide et al. (2005: 19).

<sup>120</sup> Interview with DPKO official, New York, 2006-04-25.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with DPA official, New York, 2006-04-25.

<sup>122</sup> Cutillo (2006: 24).

<sup>123</sup> As of early 2006, only four of the current 14 peace operations under DPKO's management have been

help of external consultants), either on missions or with regard to cross-cutting themes that are relevant to many current or anticipated missions. On issues that transcend the departmental experience or authority of DPKO, resulting policy decisions are made by inter-departmental fora to ensure input and ownership of other relevant departments.<sup>124</sup> Among the recent initiatives by PBPS to support organizational learning on peacebuilding are its *Knowledge Management Team* and the *Guidance Project*, both introduced in late 2005. The Guidance project is tasked to establish a comprehensive body of reviewed and/or changed rules on the full range of peacebuilding tasks. The KM team is expected to improve, in quantity and quality, the gathering of lessons learned and best practices from field reports. Concrete learning initiatives within this framework are expected to be operational in early 2007.<sup>125</sup>

Another innovation with potentially significant impact is the newly created *Peacebuilding Support Office* (PBSO) which is tasked, among other things, to “gather and analyze information relating to [...] best practices with respect to cross-cutting peacebuilding issues.”<sup>126</sup> As the small office was only becoming operational in the summer of 2006, it remains to be seen how its learning role will fare in relation to its coordination and support tasks vis-à-vis the Peacebuilding Commission. In any case, the office is designed to coordinate general rather than mission-specific peacebuilding policy and to concentrate on issues of sustainability rather than immediate crisis management.

The first Assistant-Secretary-General to head the PBSO, Carolyn MacAskie of Canada, was a senior choice for the position. While she brings experience from within headquarters as well as from running the field operation in Burundi to the job,<sup>127</sup> some hold that the position requires more experience with knowledge management. The fact that the current head of the PBSO has an inclination to get involved in current operational issues instead of focusing on knowledge work has only emboldened skeptics working to sideline the PBSO. Ideally, the PBSO with its institutional position as part of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and not beholden to the internal logic of any one department involved in peacebuilding activities is well suited to play a coordinating role in knowledge management.<sup>128</sup> It remains unclear whether it can evolve into this role.

On the ground, the capacity for learning is still very much defined by the resources and personal leadership of mission management. DPKO is a field-driven department and the influence of headquarters to promote the collection of lessons learned is limited or at least at the mercy of those responsible for running the mission on the ground. The effectiveness of improvements in the organizational infrastructure of learning, like the recently introduced Best Practice Officers or Focal Points, is hampered by the fundamental problem of coordination. The rhetorical and doctrinal move toward “integrated

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assigned a single full-time Best Practice Officer. In the other missions, one person has been designated Best Practice Focal Points in addition to their other responsibilities (Interview with DPKO staff, New York, 2006-04-26).

<sup>124</sup> Interview with DPKO staff, New York, 2006-04-25.

<sup>125</sup> Interviews with DPKO staff, 2006-04-24..25.

<sup>126</sup> UN Security Council (2005).

<sup>127</sup> United Nations (2006).

<sup>128</sup> Interviews with various UN staff and outside experts, New York, 2006-04-24..2006-04-26.

missions” under the leadership of SRSGs who would enjoy line authority not only over peacekeepers, police forces, and other DPKO-supplied components but also over the field offices of other UN agencies involved, has not yet been effectively implemented. As a consequence, any inter-agency sharing of lessons learned or best practices depends on personal networks and initiative, while the official infrastructure of learning covers only the core tasks and components under DPKO’s authority.

Being far removed from their understaffed and overworked operations desks in New York, mission leadership usually enjoys an exceptional extent of freedom from interference by headquarters. A quite different organizational culture in field missions, based on different recruiting practices and the demands of the tasks themselves, often adds to the disjoint between headquarters and field. As a consequence, it might be easier to learn for individual missions, but harder to institutionalize best practices across missions or into headquarters doctrine.

#### *Influences of the political and institutional environment*

Within the UN system, there are two important sets of constraining or enabling actors for organizational learning in the peacebuilding bureaucracy: on the *intergovernmental level*, the principal organs on peace, security and development (Security Council, GA), and their relevant subsidiary bodies (Budget Committee, Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, Peacebuilding Commission) enable or constrain the freedom of action of the peacebuilding bureaucracy with regard to learning and rule change. On the *headquarters and field levels*, other bureaucratic actors within the UN system – mainly DPA, OCHA, UNHCR, UNHCHR, and UNDP – operate under their own mandates and governance arrangements on certain aspects of peacebuilding. While cooperating with DPKO as part of the “integrated missions” doctrine, these organizations also cater to different sets of demands and keep their own learning and evaluation structures.

External to the United Nations as such, the World Bank, NGOs, major governments, and think-tanks each play a role for the peacebuilding bureaucracy and its learning capability. The particular features of these roles, in many cases vital for particular learning processes at headquarters or in the field, are hard to generalize without further detailed research. Examples include the considerable and sustained budgetary support to DPKO’s learning unit from several European governments such as Sweden and Germany as well as charitable foundations such as the Ford Foundation. The governments of Norway and the UK, among others, have funded numerous external studies and conferences in close connection to the UN secretariat and with the explicit purpose of compensating for the limited internal resources for such evaluation work. Another such example is the recently introduced “Senior Mission Leaders Course”, conducted by the German *Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze (ZIF)* together with DPKO and other member state agencies. Think-tanks close to the Secretariat like the *International Peace Academy*, the *Center for International Cooperation* at New York University or the *Henry L. Stimson Center* have been instrumental in providing intellectual support for many of the

advances made in recent years – not least in providing much of the research staff for the Brahimi and High-Level panels.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Malone and Nitzschke (2004).

## 4 Case examples: Learning in Five UN Peacebuilding Operations

The case examples in this chapter portray instances of learning in five different missions: UNMIBH in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone, UNTAET in East Timor, UNAMA in Afghanistan and UNAMI in Iraq. In line with the general lack of empirical literature on organizational learning at the UN, this is a first cut at analyzing UN field missions from the perspective of learning. Based on a re-reading of secondary sources on these five missions, the purpose of these case examples is to inductively inform our discussion of factors that influence learning in the peacebuilding bureaucracy. In our retroductive research design (see section 2.6), these empirical observations complement the factors to be identified from organizational theory. Our case examples are therefore *not* full-fledged comparative case studies. Their observations do not bear statistical significance, nor can we generalize from their results. Their primary purpose is to provide empirical flesh to the bones of theoretically deduced factors of learning.

Based on publicly available secondary sources and given the study's resource constraints, we selected instances of learning opportunistically, based on easily accessible information. Our five case examples have been selected for their variance in time (see Figure 3) as well as breadth and intrusiveness of the mandate. The post-Dayton mission to *Bosnia and Herzegovina* and its core component, the *International Police Task Force* (UNMIBH/IPTF, section 4.1) is an example of an early multidimensional peace operation that had only a narrow mandate and no enforcement powers, established at a time of low awareness for institutional learning at the UN. The multidimensional peace operation to *Sierra Leone* (UNAMSIL, section 4.2) and the transitional administration

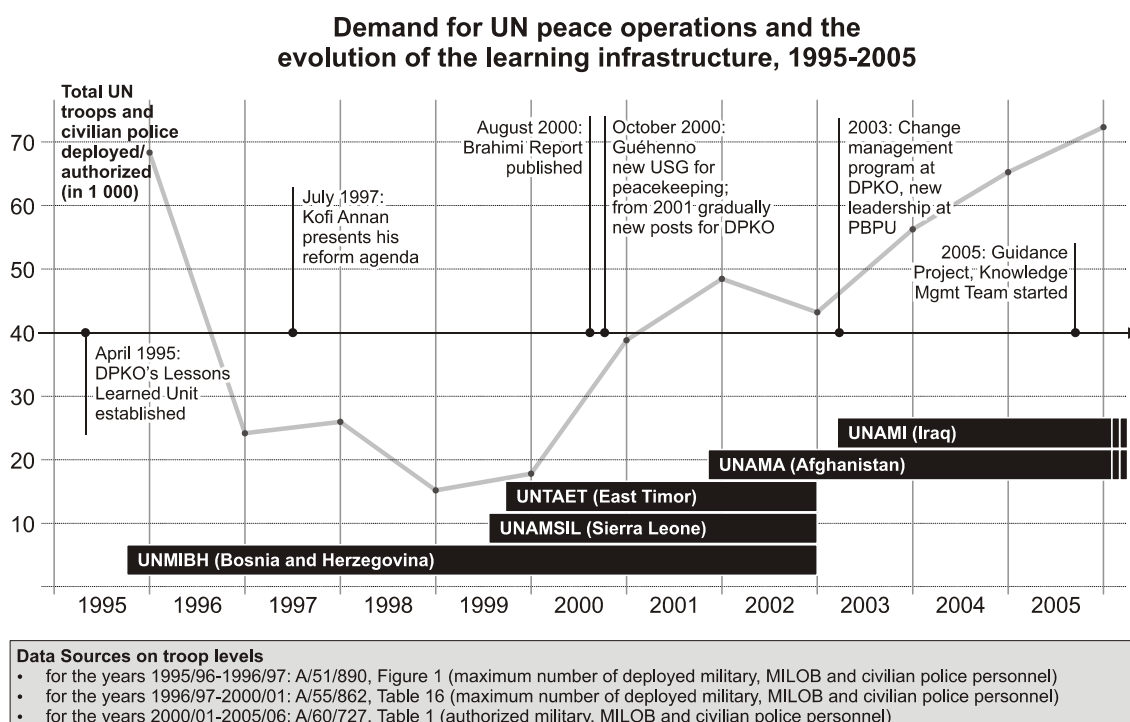


Figure 3: Demand for peace operations and the evolution of the learning infrastructure, 1995-2005

mission in *East Timor* (UNTAET, section 4.3) were both set up in 1999.<sup>130</sup> Their mandates and levels of authority differed significantly, as did the resource endowment and the level of political attention by member states, at least at the beginning. The 2002 mission to *Afghanistan* (UNAMA, section 4.4) comes in the wake of the Brahimi Report and with the personal involvement of Lakhdar Brahimi. Its mandate covers a lot of different areas but it lacks a military component and the mission has little formal authority. Finally, the political and humanitarian operation in *Iraq* since 2003 (UNAMI, section 4.5) represents the lowest extent of authority and mandate in our set of examples. Run by the Department of Political Affairs instead of DPKO, UNAMI is technically not even a multidimensional peace operation because it lacks a military component. Nonetheless, its unusual features make the mission particularly interesting in light of our goal to survey as many variables and as much variance as possible.<sup>131</sup>

Surveying these five case examples, our guiding questions focused on three particular ways we expected learning to play a role: How did learning from previous experience or external knowledge (not) influence the mandate and mission planning (inter-mission learning)? How did the mission learn from its own experiences throughout its “life cycle” (intra-mission learning)? How were lessons captured and learned at the end of the mission?

#### **4.1 UNMIBH in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1995-2002**

Different from many later and much more complex missions undertaken by the United Nations in post-conflict situations, the mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>132</sup> (UNMIBH) was neither entrusted with a comprehensive set of tasks nor with a leading role in the transition to peace. Most tasks undertaken to implement the US-brokered Dayton Accords that ended the war in Bosnia were carried out by NATO, the OSCE and the Office of the High Representative (OHR). Therefore, the UN mission’s responsibilities were limited to monitoring of, and assistance to, local police and law enforcement authorities, as well as civil affairs support and de-mining activities.

Having this portfolio imposed on the UN by the US-led negotiators at Dayton left the actual mission between a rock and a hard place, with little room to maneuver and nowhere to turn: the available resources and narrow scope of the mandate left it ill equipped to perform its expected tasks. More specifically, on the one hand, the Security Council failed to supply adequate enforcement powers and material supplies even for its limited mandate while on the other hand, UNMIBH found itself neglected by UN headquarters which had more appealing priorities than a US-imposed mission that further stretched resources at a time of ongoing financial wrangling with the US.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Both mark important changes in the UN’s peace operations practice, see Johnstone (2006b: 2-3). On the – admittedly blurred – difference between multidimensional peacebuilding and transitional administration see, for example, Schneckener (2005).

<sup>131</sup> Another reason for including UNAMI is our original plan to later compare the UN’s learning record with that of the US and the UK.

<sup>132</sup> Subsequently Bosnia, for the sake of brevity.

<sup>133</sup> ICG (2002a: 4); Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 21).

UNMIBH and the civilian police component at its core, called the *International Police Task Force (IPTF)*, stands as a prime example of what is generally considered to have gone wrong in the planning and management of UN peace operations throughout the 1990s. Rather than building UNMIBH's civilian police strategy on the successful legacy of Namibia (UNTAG, 1989-90) or learning from the mistakes made in Cambodia (UNTAC, 1992-93), the UN largely repeated the latter mission's poor planning, slow deployment, recruitment of underqualified staff during the initial phase, lack of resources and poor coordination.<sup>134</sup> A similar case of a lesson previously identified but not applied is the failure of UNMIBH not to deploy civilian police without a "full legal reform package."<sup>135</sup>

#### **United Nations Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH)**

MANDATE: UNSCR 1035 (1995-12-21)

START OF PLANNING: 1995-11-30

FULL DEPLOYMENT: mid-1996

#### STRENGTH:

- 5 military liaison officers (authorized)
- up to 2,047 civilian police
- up to 395 international civilian staff
- up to 1,174 local staff

#### KEY TASKS:

- police monitoring and assistance, later restructuring
- civil affairs and elections support
- demining coordination
- judicial and penal reform (after expansion of mandate by resolution 1184 in 1998)

#### FIELD LEADERSHIP (SRSG):

12/1995 – 11/1996 Iqbal Riza (Pakistan)  
 01/1997 – 01/1998 Kai Eide (Norway)  
 02/1998 – 07/1999 E. Rehn (Finland)  
 08/1999 – 12/2002 J.P. Klein (U.S.)

Sources: UN DPI (2003); Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 8, 24).

Possible reasons for the dismal showing in Bosnia include powerful political constraints on DPKO and mission leadership alike but also include issues of bureaucratic politics (e.g., with the issue of coordination in the field) and the previous complete lack of organizational infrastructure for learning at DPKO (which was only being built up in a very limited way when the *Lessons Learned Unit* was created in 1995). We can therefore observe a learning gap with respect to applying lessons from previous operations. In addition, lessons from the Bosnia mission itself were not very successfully transferred to later deployments until the Brahimi panel in 2000 systematically collected best practices and provided a political impetus for change.

At the same time, however, we found a substantial degree of learning within the mission, even across individual short-term deployments with a correspondingly high turnover and despite bad resource endowments – even for UN standards. While the few examples surveyed indicate that learning within field missions is tightly constrained by structural conditions, such as Security Council politics and bureaucratic impediments to inter-agency cooperation, in some instances real progress was made as illustrated by the formulation of general "democratic policing guidelines" and the introduction of Selection Assistance Teams for prospective staff assessments. Evidence surveyed

<sup>134</sup> Chappell and Evans (1999: 193-196); Dziedzic and Bair (1998).

<sup>135</sup> Chappell and Evans (1999: 268-269), Hills (1998), Doyle and Sambanis (2006). Legal and judicial reform was somewhat ambiguously part of the mandate, but not applied in practice until 1998 when Security Council resolution 1184 specifically expanded UNMIBH's mandate and the Secretary-General selected a forceful SRSG as the fourth head of UNMIBH in as many years, the American ex-general Jacques Paul Klein. See ICG (1999).

indicates that strong personal leadership in the field, the absence of bureaucratic competition and unity of effort between field leadership and DPKO headquarters are factors that can support learning.

*Previous lessons not learned: Mandate and mission design*

Examples of the failure to learn from previous experience indicate some of the obstacles encountered by UNMIBH planners and mission leadership. For example, a core weakness of the IPTF concept and mandate as criticized by outside experts and IPTF leadership alike was its so-called “enforcement gap”, the lack of enforcement powers in the face of anticipated obstruction by the Dayton “parties”, i.e. the Serb, Croat and Bosnian Muslim institutions.<sup>136</sup> While the problem was openly discussed and acknowledged, European pressure to avoid further Western casualties potentially resulting from robust enforcement action in Bosnia led to a pre-decision at Dayton not to strengthen the IPTF’s mandate or resources.<sup>137</sup> At the UN headquarters, where the Cambodia experience would have further underlined the need to address the enforcement gap, no change in mandate or mission design was effected in the process of translating Annex 11 of the Dayton agreement into Security Council resolution 1035. Whether this is due to intransigence on the part of Security Council members, the failure of senior Secretariat officials to raise the issue forcefully with them or simply a lack of time (the Council vote came just seven days after the signing of the Dayton Agreement) remains unclear.

What is clear is that the whole planning process at the UN fell short of the standards required for a mission of the size and complexity given by the mandate, ignoring almost all the lessons identified after Cambodia. The UN’s pre-deployment assessment mission to Bosnia in late 1995 did not even include a single police officer who could have supplied the professional experience necessary for a thorough needs assessment. The force structure planned at HQ resulted from a simple mirroring of Bosnian police deployment at a rule-of-thumb ratio of 1 monitor per 30 police – only to be changed to a more practical structure right away by the incoming first police commissioner.<sup>138</sup>

Similarly, the planning process suggests negligence in applying lessons from previous missions on the part of DPKO as well: in ensuring a handover of existing equipment from the civilian police component of the outgoing peacekeeping operation UNPROFOR to the new mission, it took UNMIBH and the IPTF six or seven months of time-consuming procedures on the grounds to get even basic logistical requirements in order. Not only had all essential equipment such as radios and vehicles been given to NATO’s *Implementation Force* (IFOR), no arrangements for the medical care of UNMIBH personnel had been made beyond emergency medical evacuation.<sup>139</sup> For several months, IPTF had to secure medical treatment for its staff through negotiations with individual IFOR contingents.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 7-8).

<sup>137</sup> So stated by Pauline Neville-Jones, the British delegate at Dayton, see ICG (2002a: 10).

<sup>138</sup> Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 9).

<sup>139</sup> Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 8-9, 24).

<sup>140</sup> Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 10-11).



The record on intra-mission learning looks more favorable than retaining and applying lessons from past missions. Three examples of intra-mission learning show which factors might support or constrain such learning within field operations or between headquarters and field staff over the course of a mission.

The first example concerns the deployment of mission staff, a recurrent problem throughout UN peace operations. Mandated in December 1995, the mission began to deploy within weeks but managed only to get a fraction of its strength into operation by early February when its first big challenge was scheduled: the transfer of some Sarajevo suburbs from Serbian to Bosnian-Croatian territorial jurisdiction. Even the IPTF Commissioner and his Deputy were to arrive only by mid-February. Moreover, the staff deployed was, to a large extent, unfit to serve as planned due to a lack of English or driving skills and/or a lack of familiarization with “democratic” ways of policing.<sup>141</sup> Although the structural constraints leading to the slow deployment, even at the top levels, were beyond the mission leadership’s power, DPKO reacted to the recurrence of the problem with a succession of minor improvements, such as the subsequent introduction of a small civilian police unit at DPKO and rosters of (more or less) readily deployable civilian and police experts. However, already in the first year of deployment, a new staff selection process for IPTF was introduced in collaboration with DPKO consisting of sending “selection assistance teams” to contributing countries and testing critical skills of would-be police monitors there. In doing so, the UN saved money and boosted the effectiveness of those finally deployed. The source of this useful innovation was most likely a combination of external suggestions made during a conference bringing together academics and practitioners from the UN in December 1995 in Singapore, the recurrent frustration in the field and the preparedness for change on the part of DPKO management.<sup>142</sup>

The second example of intra-mission learning relates to the problem of inter-agency coordination in the field. UNMIBH was one of the first UN peace operations that had to coordinate not only with humanitarian agencies but also with a wide range of other military and political actors engaged more broadly in peacebuilding. Not surprisingly, in light of the lack of directly applicable past examples for such coordination, there was not a single instance of formal contact between the Office of the High Representative, IFOR, UNMIBH and the other agencies working in the country until several months into the mission. Only then, weekly “principals’ meetings” were introduced at the invitation of the High Representative as the highest-ranking individual on the ground tasked with the coordination of the international community’s efforts.<sup>143</sup> The recurrent complaints on the lack of substantive coordination for years to come, however, show the limited effects of this formal “solution” to the fundamental problem.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 12-13).

<sup>142</sup> Chappell and Evans (1999: 202, 199-201); Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 24-25).

<sup>143</sup> Dziedzic and Bair (1998: 8).

<sup>144</sup> See, for example, Cousens (2001).

A third example of intra-mission learning concerns what is arguably the single most important achievement of the mission, namely the formulation of general guidelines of “democratic policing”. While the mandate called for “democratic standards of policing” to be the benchmark of IPTF’s monitoring, assistance and training activities, neither the mandate nor UN doctrine or any other sources provided a definition of such standards. The initial compilation of workable guidelines by the first IPTF Commissioner Fitzgerald is an example of intra-mission learning. Further missions also made use of these guidelines, making them an example of inter-mission learning.<sup>145</sup>

#### *Official lessons identified from UNMIBH*

Unfortunately, there is no official evaluation or lessons learned study on the Bosnia mission, probably due to the lack of adequate staffing and funds at the DPKO’s Lessons Learned Unit before 2001.<sup>146</sup> However, we can identify a number of lessons that the UN has taken away from UNMIBH. Most importantly, Bosnia is often remembered as the key case in which the full range of problems of coordination between UN and non-UN agencies on the ground became obvious.<sup>147</sup> With regard to civilian police, it was already in the first year of the mission that DPKO worked with the Canadian government’s Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to develop common training guidelines for civilian police monitors.<sup>148</sup> The negative experience with the lack of legal and judicial reform until 1998 reinforced the key conceptual lesson of the civilian police operation in Cambodia: the need to provide a “full package” of legal, judicial and penal assistance on top of reforming the police in post-conflict countries. Although the lesson of introducing a “full justice package” has been implemented in all multidimensional peace operations with either direct executive powers (Kosovo and East Timor) or substantive roles in state-building (Sierra Leone, Afghanistan), it remains far from clear how to take on such far-reaching reforms. While the lesson as such has been learned, the issue remains on the UN’s agenda for the Brahimi report and beyond.<sup>149</sup>

In contrast, it is not as clear what lesson the UN has taken away from the debate on the mandate’s “enforcement gap.” On the one hand, troop-contributing countries and members of the Security Council saw enforcement powers for civilian police monitors, much like the negotiators at Dayton did, as ineffective and leading to “mission creep”. In this case, the potential for civilian police officers to get themselves into trouble and subsequently have to be rescued by military peacekeepers was thought to be high. On the other hand, numerous outside observers regarded the enforcement gap as the source of many of the IPTF’s problems. According to British military analyst Alice Hills, UN officials shared the latter view, leading to a stronger mandate for KFOR’s and later the European Union’s civilian police components in Kosovo.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Dziejdzic and Bair (1998: 18).

<sup>146</sup> See chapter 3; Interview with DPKO official, New York, 2006-04-25.

<sup>147</sup> Dahrendorf (2003: 28).

<sup>148</sup> Chappell and Evans (1999: 263).

<sup>149</sup> Chappell and Evans (1999: 268); Durch et al. (2003: 29).

<sup>150</sup> Challenges Project (2006: para. 24).

## 4.2 UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone, 1999-2005

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)<sup>151</sup> was the single largest<sup>152</sup> UN peace operation to date. Its chief mission was to assist the Sierra Leonean government and the other parties to the conflict to implement the Lomé Peace Agreement and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program from October 1999 to December 2005.<sup>153</sup> In February 2000, with Resolution 1289, UNAMSIL started to exercise “transitional administration-like powers”<sup>154</sup> in many executive areas such as police reform, DDR, justice sector reform, etc. in order to bring some stability to the country. Nonetheless, the extent of these powers were much different from the missions in Kosovo (UNMIK) and East Timor (UNTAET) in that the Security Council did not explicitly authorize the UN to take

over the administration of Sierra Leone. But the situation on the ground demanded that the only capable actors to do so assume some form of basic law and order functions.<sup>155</sup>

UNAMSIL entered the UN’s institutional memory as a mission that started with one of the UN’s major humiliations – the disarmament and capture of over 500 military personnel as hostages by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in May 2000. In its early phase, the mission “nearly imploded under fire as a result of poor planning, under-equipped and ill-trained military personnel, inadequate communication, weak command and control [...] and determined local spoilers [...]”<sup>156</sup> As two prominent observers point out, the initial crisis of the Sierra Leone mission “was a sad commentary on lessons learned, those not learned, and those forgotten over five decades of peacekeeping.”<sup>157</sup>

At the same time, the Sierra Leone experience shows that a severe crisis can lead to learning and that external evaluations (in this case the Eisele assessment mission) can significantly contribute to intra-mission learning. This learning led to a relative stabilization of both the mission and the country. However, it is not an easy task, in hindsight, to pin down which lessons were learned – or not learned – at the

### United Nations Assistance Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)

MANDATE: UNSCR 1270 (1999-10-22)

FULL DEPLOYMENT: January 2000

STRENGTH: max. (March 2002) 17,368

#### KEY TASKS:

- Monitor cease-fire and support peacebuilding environment
- Capacity building for the army and police
- Reintegration of ex-combatants
- Restoration of government control over diamond mining
- Consolidation of state authority
- Progress toward ending the conflict in Liberia

#### FIELD LEADERSHIP (SRSG):

12/2003 – 12/2005: D.N. Mwakawago (TZ)

07/2003 – 12/2003: Alan Doss (UK)

12/1999 – 07/2003: O. Adeniji (Nigeria)

Sources: Johnstone (2006a); UN DPI (2005).

<sup>151</sup> For an overview on the general context in Sierra Leone see Hirsch (2003); Pham (2005); Reno (2001).

<sup>152</sup> In terms of military personnel.

<sup>153</sup> UN DPI (2005).

<sup>154</sup> Chesterman (2004: 83)

<sup>155</sup> Chesterman (2004: 83-86).

<sup>156</sup> Malone and Thakur (2001: 11).

<sup>157</sup> Malone and Thakur (2001: 11).

intergovernmental level as opposed to the bureaucratic level. This is because drawing lessons learned from past missions often includes assuming responsibility of previous failures or miscalculations – a rare occurrence at the UN whether the politics of blame avoidance often carries the day. In the case of Sierra Leone, the “UN exposed one of its least attractive pathologies – the tendency of the Secretariat and key members to engage in mutual recrimination whenever violence occurs in distant lands.”<sup>158</sup>

The discussion within and outside the UN on lessons learned from Sierra Leone reflects this tendency. In addition, it reflects how learning on the bureaucratic level is often intertwined with learning on the intergovernmental level. Issues over the design of the mission demonstrate this interconnectedness.

### *Issues of Design and Duration: Political Failure and Learning*

The development of the mission’s mandate and resource endowment is a textbook example of learning triggered by crisis. The original design of UNAMSIL was based on the premise that it would do no more than assist the peace enforcement mission already deployed in Sierra Leone by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). However, it soon turned out that the ECOWAS mission would be terminated and that the United Nations had to take over.<sup>159</sup> Thus, the initial design of UNAMSIL was not appropriate for the tasks on the ground. Observers point out that the Security Council knew the risks, and that some of the P5 (including Britain) deliberately kept it from adopting a more robust and realistic role for the mission.<sup>160</sup> As in the case of East Timor, the Security Council had failed to tailor the mission’s mandate and resources to the situation on the ground. Unlike the case of East Timor, however, the improvisation on the ground was not enough to solve the problem of a weak mandate and a lack of resources. As a consequence, the early UNAMSIL mission failed for the same reasons as UNOSOM II in Somalia: a lack of a clear mandate, a lack of resources, and a lack of political will to provide the conditions for a successful termination of the mission.<sup>161</sup>

It took a severe crisis for political premises to be revisited. Britain in particular changed its mind and finally took a lead role in the Security Council, pushing for a more robust mandate and better resources. As a UN evaluation points out: “Troop contributors and key members of the Security Council rallied behind the mission, bringing pressure to bear on the rebels and their external supporters. The results were remarkable.”<sup>162</sup> Following the adjustment of the mission design, the situation in Sierra Leone could finally be stabilized and elections could be held.

Another example of a mission design readjustment, this time on the administrative level, relates to the timing of the exit from Sierra Leone. After pertinent statements from the UN,<sup>163</sup> many external observers feared that the UN would cut down its engagement

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<sup>158</sup> Malone and Thakur (2001: 11).

<sup>159</sup> United Nations (2003b: 5).

<sup>160</sup> Kühne (2003: 731).

<sup>161</sup> Chesterman (2004: 87).

<sup>162</sup> United Nations (2003b: 5).

<sup>163</sup> See, for example, United Nations (2002: para. 42).

soon after the elections.<sup>164</sup> However, due to a still fragile security situation, external observers did not consider that to be a good moment for withdrawal.<sup>165</sup> Apparently, the Secretary General shared this opinion and persuaded the Security Council to extend the mandate several times until December 2005.<sup>166</sup> Finally, UNAMSIL was succeeded by the *United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone* (UNIOSIL).

In addition, the Peacekeeping Best Practice Unit (PBPU) asserts that one reason for the extension of UNAMSIL beyond the elections was the lessons learned from earlier missions “where elections marked the end of the UN peacekeeping engagement whether or not they indeed led to long-term stability. Most obvious was the lesson from neighboring Liberia where the UN had overseen an election that led to Charles Taylor assuming power, who had little intention of respecting principles of democratic governance.”<sup>167</sup>

#### *Inter-agency coordination within the mission*

In the case of the Sierra Leone mission, it was an external evaluation of the situation in the field that provided the ground for intra-mission learning. Set up in June 2000, the so-called Eisele Mission (led by former Assistant-Secretary-General for Operations Support in DPKO, Lt.Gen. Manfred Eisele) was the UN bureaucracy’s reaction to the hostage crisis and the organizational problems that were considered to have contributed to this misfortune. The assessment revealed that adequate information flow within the UN mission was – inter alia – inhibited by a lack of internal coordination and cooperation. The Eisele Mission produced a number of recommendations addressing the deficiencies. While not all recommendations have been implemented, new coordination mechanisms within the mission were subsequently established.

The two key changes from the Eisele Mission created high-level focal points for the two core pillars of the mission. A new Deputy SRSG (DSRSG) for Operations and Management in charge of the civil-military interface including the “translation of political aims into military operations” resolved serious command-and-control problems with the military mission component.<sup>168</sup> The appointment of the second DSRSG for Governance and Stabilization helped to address the coordination problem between the mission and the development and humanitarian actors in the field whose conflicting priorities had led to a set of serious tensions that undermined the mission’s objectives as a whole. The “double-hatting” of a DSRSG as both Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator helped to ease this tension and helped to bring the peacekeeping, humanitarian, and development components into a single chain of command. Based on similar experiences in Haiti and elsewhere, this integration of development and humanitarian functions with the peacekeeping operation became “best practice” through the Brahimi Report<sup>169</sup> and is regarded as a critical step towards better inter-agency

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<sup>164</sup> See ICG (2001a); Paris (2004).

<sup>165</sup> Paris (2004: 225).

<sup>166</sup> United Nations (2003a); ICG (2003c: 5); ICG (2004b: 17); UN Secretary-General (2005).

<sup>167</sup> United Nations (2003b: 12).

<sup>168</sup> United Nations (2003b: 70-75).

<sup>169</sup> United Nations (2000).

coordination by most observers.<sup>170</sup> The Eisele Mission also emphasized a more general insight on the part of DPKO about the need for better coordination on three levels: the level of the decision-making entities and the Secretariat (strategic planning); the level of the military and political mission headquarters (operational planning); and at the subordinate field level headquarters (tactical planning).<sup>171</sup> This is a general lesson also taken up and promoted by the Brahimi report that was about to be written right at the time when UNAMSIL hit rock bottom in mid-2000. Sierra Leone made it clear that all UN missions that go beyond low-risk monitoring tasks can only have a chance of being successful if they integrate the various tasks at hand (military, policing, civil administration etc.) As a consequence, the Sierra Leone experience added further momentum to the Brahimi Report's insistence on implementing the "integrated mission taskforce" concept.<sup>172</sup>

#### *Institutionalizing cooperation and coordination with international political actors*

In addition to the cleavage between UNAMSIL and the humanitarian community, the position of the UK as the key security actor in Sierra Leone after the hostage crisis proved problematic. Applying a previous lesson learned on the need for institutionalizing cooperation helped to ease this tension.

The UN mission and the UK had different approaches to resolving the conflict. Whereas the UN supported a further round of negotiations after the RUF broke the agreements of the Lomé Peace Accord, the British were convinced that the conflict could only be ended by a defeat of the RUF. Thus, international actors ran the risk of following two strategies at the same time.<sup>173</sup> External observers pointed out that "the former Yugoslavia and Somalia provided clear examples that strategic coherence is fundamental to success."<sup>174</sup> Applying this lesson, the UN and the UK resorted to an established coordination mechanism: the Contact Group on Sierra Leone.<sup>175</sup> The Group had been established in 1998, and in both Freetown and New York it facilitated the coordination among the key actors.<sup>176</sup> Even though the UN initially had difficulties in accepting that it was relying on the British mission to control the Sierra Leonean territory, coordination and harmonization could finally be achieved.

The Lessons Learned Report of the Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit points to two important factors that made the coordination possible: the institutionalization of the cooperation through the Contact Group, and the lead role of the UK in focusing the Security Council's attention to the crisis in Sierra Leone.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> United Nations (2003b: 73f); Griffin (2003: 209).

<sup>171</sup> United Nations (2003b: 72).

<sup>172</sup> Malone and Thakur (2001: 13); Durch et al. (2003); Eide et al. (2005).

<sup>173</sup> ICG (2001b: ii).

<sup>174</sup> ICG (2001b: 24).

<sup>175</sup> The Contact Group on Sierra Leone was set up as a forum for the key international actors, i.e. the UN, UK, representatives from ECOWAS, donors and troop contributing countries (TCCs). The Group's aim was to facilitate information sharing and to develop a coordinated strategy based on common objectives and priorities. (PBPU 2003: 6).

<sup>176</sup> United Nations (2003b: 6).

<sup>177</sup> United Nations (2003b: 6).

### 4.3 UNTAET in East Timor, 1999-2002

On many counts, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was a seminal experience for the UN.<sup>178</sup> Recent developments notwithstanding, many observers regard it as one of the most successful UN missions. The mission in East Timor not only marked the first instance of the UN fully taking over a country by way of transitional administration, but the organization also assumed these responsibilities under exceptionally favorable conditions.<sup>179</sup>

UNTAET was based on a strong and clear mandate from a united Security Council. While the memories of the violence and destruction committed by pro-Indonesian militias were still fresh, at the time the mission was deployed, East Timor was a relatively safe place. The military vacuum that appeared after Indonesia's withdrawal was filled by the well-functioning Australian-led International Force for East Timor (INTERFET). The political power vacuum, in turn, was filled by the (relatively) homogenous pro-independence movement rallying around the national icon, Xanana Gusmão. The largest part of the Timorese population approved of the UN mission. Compared to other missions, UNTAET was generously endowed with financial resources and profited from the strong leadership of the mission's head, Sergio Vieira de Mello.<sup>180</sup>

At the same time, the transitional administration in East Timor faced a number of political challenges, including the prevention of a humanitarian crisis, the restoration of law and order, the development of functioning state institutions, and the organization and overseeing of elections. In addition, even though the mission was generally welcomed in the country, it was soon forced to struggle with local elites demanding a greater degree of influence.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, apart from the very recent experiences in Kosovo, the UN had no model for setting up a full-scale transitional administration.

Not least due to this mixture of favorable circumstances and political challenges, UNTAET is a very rich source for analyzing the learning process – with a number of

#### United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET)

MANDATE: UNSCR 1272 (1999-10-25), following the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET, mandated by Res. 1264) and the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET, mandated by Res. 1254 in June 1999)

START OF PLANNING: September 1999

STRENGTH: (max. in March 2002)

- military: 9,150
- civilian police: 1,640
- civilian: 2,500

KEY TASKS:

- security
- law and order
- establish an effective administration
- development of public services
- coordination of humanitarian relief
- capacity building for economic development

FIELD LEADERSHIP (SRSG):

10/1999 – 05/2002: Sergio Vieira de Mello (Brazil)

Sources: Johnstone (2006a); UNAMET (1999); UN DPI (2002).

<sup>178</sup> Harland (2005: 2); Suhrke (2001: 14). For general introductions into the East Timor mission see: Ahmed (2005); Beauvais (2001); Chopra (2000); Chopra (2002); Chesterman (2002a); Paris (2004: ch. 11).

<sup>179</sup> Ahmed (2005: 165)

<sup>180</sup> Ahmed (2005: 165); Harland (2005: 2).

<sup>181</sup> Ahmed (2005: 165).

examples of success and failure. More so than with previous missions, there are thorough internal and external assessments of the mission, most prominently the internal study by David Harland and the study by Dahrendorf et al. The richest material on the UN's learning record can be found during the first year of the mission, which was characterized by much improvisation and a trial and error approach.<sup>182</sup> Analyzing the material, we could observe some palpable factors that influenced learning either in a negative or in a positive fashion. On the negative side we found a lack of planning time and capacity, misinterpretation of the situation on the ground, and path dependency set off by the deployment of the same personnel, which led to a misapplication of the Kosovo model. Furthermore, we found bureaucratic turf fights as a major hindrance to inter-mission learning. On the positive side, external pressure from local leaders and donor governments as well as the replacement of personnel could be identified as factors that led to intra-mission learning.

The discussion on how to judge the UN's record in East Timor is ongoing and the deterioration of the country's situation in mid-2006 has triggered a reassessment of lessons learned e.g. on the right exit strategy.

#### *Kosovo as blueprint for UNTAET: Lessons misapplied*

In terms of mission design, UNTAET clearly underlines the dangers of too easily applying lessons learned, or in this case the mission design from previous missions, using a one-size-fits-all approach. Applying lessons learned should involve checking whether the lessons fit within the new context. The case of East Timor shows that the process is fraught with many difficulties. The most striking example illustrating these difficulties is the use of the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK)<sup>183</sup> as a model for the design of UNTAET.

At the time of planning for UNTAET, it seemed reasonable to the key personnel of DPKO to design the mission in East Timor on the basis of the Kosovo model. In doing so, DPKO officials turned to its, thus far, "most relevant experience in pacifying territory."<sup>184</sup> Moreover, at the time, Kosovo was considered within the UN as the "state of the art" of peacebuilding (even though UNMIK was launched only three months before the deployment to East Timor).<sup>185</sup> Taking UNMIK as a model for the design of UNTAET can thus be interpreted as an intentional act of applying lessons learned from the Kosovo experience. In addition to this premeditated choice, there were reasons of circumstance and convenience that prompted the application of the Kosovo blueprint to East Timor: time and planning capacity were sparse.<sup>186</sup> Consequently, DPKO recruited individuals from within the UN that had previously been involved in the planning and

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<sup>182</sup> Harland (2005: 2f).

<sup>183</sup> UNMIK was launched only three months earlier than UNTAET.

<sup>184</sup> Chesterman (2004: 63).

<sup>185</sup> Suhrke (2001: 7).

<sup>186</sup> The planning of such an extensive mission would have needed half a year; however, it had to be concluded with in only a month (Suhrke, 2001: 14).



start up of UNMIK.<sup>187</sup> This led to the strategy of taking “the Kosovo model and reconfigure it to fit East Timor.”<sup>188</sup>

However, the UN failed to adapt the Kosovo blueprint to the specific situation of East Timor. One key reason for this was that DPKO assumed it was entering an area of potential conflict. Although with the benefit of hindsight we know that it was not the case, against the background of the post-referendum violence in 1999, it is understandable that the UN assumed that East Timor was on the edge of conflict.<sup>189</sup> Based on this assumption, DPKO developed its position concerning whether or not to give the National Council of Timor Resistance (CNRT) a formal role in the planning process. With its negative experiences with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in mind, the DPKO decided to thump the neutrality principle and opt against the early recognition of the CNRT.<sup>190</sup> In doing so, however, it did not take into account the distinct nature of the CNRT. With only a tiny minority of pro-Indonesian forces left in East Timor, the CNRT was no longer just one of several parties in the conflict, but rather represented – as the referendum showed – the position of the vast majority of the East Timorese people. As a consequence, the UN created a sense of local alienation and a considerable lack of ownership from the onset of the mission.

A further lesson from the UN’s experience with the KLA was that power should be centralized at the mission. The consequent concentration of power at the level of UNTAET and the Special Representative reinforced the lack of local ownership.<sup>191</sup>

*From neglecting ownership to co-government: intra-mission learning due to external pressure*

The East Timor mission also exhibits examples of intra-mission learning, triggered by external pressure. The example of DPKO’s rule change with respect to ownership indicates that the completion of the learning process by implementing a lesson learned during a mission may be supported by the replacement of personnel and institutional change.

The lack of ownership discussed above was not only a result of the misapplication of the Kosovo blueprint, but reflected also the convictions of the majority of DPKO staff. The department wanted the Timorese to take on a low profile in the transitional administration. The reasons for this position were manifold. Firstly, it was the persistence of the political logic that had been underlying the negotiations preceding independence. In these negotiations, the Timorese had been granted only informal influence for fear of them derailing the talks by continuously opposing the Indonesian military.<sup>192</sup> Secondly, the DPKO considered a low Timorese profile necessary to avoid deepening the perceived divisions in the Timorese society, to keep the doors open for refugees from West Timor, and to be accountable to Security Council concerns that Indonesia not be further weakened. Thirdly, the DPKO assumed – contrary to other

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<sup>187</sup> Chesterman (2004: 63); Beauvais (2001: 1101); Chopra (2000: 27).

<sup>188</sup> Suhrke (2001: 7).

<sup>189</sup> Chesterman (2004: 63).

<sup>190</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003b: para. 27).

<sup>191</sup> Chesterman (2004: 64).

<sup>192</sup> Suhrke (2001: 4).

actors on the ground such as the World Bank and UNDP – that East Timor lacked the resources necessary to rebuild an administration. It therefore insisted that a “Timorization” of the administration would only be possible after elections were held and a civil service established.<sup>193</sup>

However, DPKO faced increasing pressure for a “Timorization” of the transitional administration. This pressure mounted daily, to the point where resistance became too costly. The pressure came not only from the Timorese leadership that demanded they be allowed to participate, but also from within the UN system itself – especially from donors who recognized the importance of including Timorese in the transitional administration, in order to propel capacity building.<sup>194</sup>

This continuous external pressure led to a crucial change in DPKO thinking. The lack of ownership was successively reduced over the course of the mission. Inclusion was mainly achieved through the devolution of power after a turn-over of personnel and the creation of a steering committee with considerable local presentation. Within the first two years of the mission, the UN adopted a co-government approach marking a clear shift from its earlier approach of non-inclusion.<sup>195</sup>

#### *Inter-mission learning between successive missions: bureaucratic obstacles*

The example of how bureaucratic infighting can hinder inter-mission learning between successive UN missions is best illustrated in East Timor’s case by the turf fights between DPA and DPKO. The clash over whether DPA or DPKO has the lead on East Timor had serious consequences for the mission’s learning capacity.

DPKO failed to learn from DPA’s local and technical expertise because of inter-agency rivalry. This non-learning contributed to a number of the earlier-discussed problems of the mission, chiefly the issue of local ownership.<sup>196</sup>

DPA had been the lead agency for UNAMET,<sup>197</sup> which was tasked with conducting a popular consultation in August 1999 in order to determine whether the people of East Timor would accept independence from Indonesia.<sup>198</sup> According to a number of outside observers, over the course of UNAMET, DPA developed remarkable local expertise. That turned DPA into the “the custodian of the Secretariat’s knowledge about East Timor, both at headquarters and in the field [...]”<sup>199</sup> Consequently, DPA assumed that it would also be at the head of the successor mission, UNTAET. However, as the situation after the referendum deteriorated into full-scale violence, an international military intervention became inevitable. With the military component becoming dominant, DPKO claimed the mission. The Secretary-General settled the dispute by giving DPKO

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<sup>193</sup> Suhrke (2001: 6-14).

<sup>194</sup> Suhrke (2001: 11).

<sup>195</sup> Chesterman (2004: 139); Beauvais (2001: 1101).

<sup>196</sup> Harland (2005: 3).

<sup>197</sup> UN Security Council (1999).

<sup>198</sup> UNAMET (1999).

<sup>199</sup> Suhrke (2001: 6).

the lead but determined that the planning team should draw personnel from both departments.<sup>200</sup>

However, Dahrendorf et. al. cite DPA members of the planning team who claim the expression planning *team* “was in fact a misnomer”. These DPA officials assert that “DPKO did not allow us to formally put DPA people on the planning team. We met informally... and created an inter-agency-coordination-process.”<sup>201</sup> As a consequence of the DPKO’s unwillingness to cooperate with the DPA, the knowledge deficit<sup>202</sup> – a problem all missions struggle with at their beginning stages – was aggravated.<sup>203</sup> It is fair to assume that this undermined the UN’s collective learning capacity on issues such as local ownership and weakened its ability to adapt lessons from other missions to local circumstances in East Timor.

### *Official lessons learned from East Timor*

As a comprehensive external assessment points out, “UNTAET provides lessons in both good and bad practice.”<sup>204</sup> Lessons learned in good practice were mainly related to intra-mission learning. With respect to inter-mission learning, the UN’s reliance on the Kosovo blueprint proved to be fraught with difficulties.<sup>205</sup> While the very act of transferring the experience from one mission to another is a laudable attempt at learning, previously gained knowledge was often transferred in a one-size-fits-all manner leading to suboptimal outcomes.

On a more general note, the Harland report produced by the Peacekeeping Best Practice Unit shows that the UN is capable of reflecting critically on its missions and drawing general lessons from its successes and failures. The first positive lesson is that the initial priorities of the mission (security, law and order, conditions for economic growth, and functioning governance institutions) were confirmed and judged by DPKO as replicable. Second, the UN was successful in getting local support for the mission. This was due to a “substantial humanitarian, rehabilitation and service delivery” on the side of UN agencies and its partners, which is the third positive lesson. Finally, the last lesson concerns the value of including non-UN actors such as the IMF or the governments of Australia, New Zealand, and Portugal.<sup>206</sup>

At the same time, with his report, David Harland also tries to provide a basis for the UN to learn from failure. Here, two of his lessons are of particular importance. Firstly, the knowledge deficit during the planning phase of the mission – a problem in all the missions – was unnecessarily broadened by institutional rivalry between the DPA and

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<sup>200</sup> Suhrke (2001: 6).

<sup>201</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003a: para. 21).

<sup>202</sup> “There is a ‘knowledge deficit’ that is one of the repeating dilemmas of United Nations work in post-conflict countries – the most important decisions are those ones take at the beginning, when everything is fluid, but at the very time when we know least about the people and the place with which we are dealing.” Lakhdar Brahimi, Hiroshima, March 2005 cited in Harland (2005: 2).

<sup>203</sup> Harland (2005: 3).

<sup>204</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003a: para. ii).

<sup>205</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003a: para. iv).

<sup>206</sup> Harland (2005: 5f).

DPKO. Secondly, “future missions need to [...] bring host-country nationals into decision-making at all levels [...].”<sup>207</sup>

#### 4.4 UNAMA in Afghanistan, since 2002

While the situation in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban provided at best a mixed environment for carrying out the tasks given to UNAMA,<sup>208</sup> in terms of management, the mission faced a rather favorable context compared to other UN operations. Not only was there ample time for planning and preparation, as military action against the Taliban and a role for the UN in the aftermath became a virtual certainty in the days and weeks after 9/11, but in addition, the mission attracted very well-qualified and experienced staff and resources from the key donors were readily available. Furthermore, the political impetus for the application of lessons learned through the high-level *Panel on UN Peace Operations* which resulted in the Brahimi Report was still fresh and Brahimi himself took the lead in implementing the recommendations that bore his name as the first head of the new mission to Afghanistan.

Despite the favorable circumstances provided by Brahimi’s strong leadership and the high level of political support from the Security Council and donors, the learning record, in particular in terms of mission design and start-up, can only be considered a case of mixed success. In effect, while some learning took place with regard to building political support among different departments at headquarters, divergent priorities and reporting requirements among the agencies obstructed progress on coordination in the field. Real improvements were made, however, on smaller-scale issues such as staff selection, communication between agencies and integrating strategies into the planning process to minimize the adverse political and economic effects, at the local level, of a traditionally fully foreign-supplied peace operation.

The role of leadership seems to be a double-edged sword in two ways. For one, centralizing strategic decision-making in Brahimi’s office led to more coherence in the planning but also to other agencies being effectively excluded despite the formally

##### United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA)

MANDATED: UNSCR 1401 (2002-03-28)

START OF PLANNING: 2001-10-05

FULL DEPLOYMENT: autumn 2002

STRENGTH: approximately 1,000 staff (80% Afghan nationals) in 2006

KEY TASKS:

(initially):

- support of the Bonn process of rebuilding and national reconciliation

(later extended to a wide range of peacebuilding tasks in areas such as:)

- disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)
- security sector reform (SSR)
- humanitarian relief
- economic reconstruction
- human rights and gender
- drugs and legal reform.

FIELD LEADERSHIP (SRSG):

03/2002 – 02/2004: L. Brahimi (Algeria)

02/2004 – 02/2006: Jean Arnault (France)

since 02/2006: T. Koenigs (Germany)

Sources: Johnstone (2006a); UNAMA web site ([www.unama-afg.org](http://www.unama-afg.org))

<sup>207</sup> Harland (2005: 9).

<sup>208</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003c: para. iv, v).

inclusive planning process in place. Secondly and more generally, the reach of “Brahimi-powered” learning seems likely to have extended only as far as the reach of his own attention span and personal involvement. At lower echelons and other UN agencies, however, staff numbers and procedures on the ground made a mockery of even the mission’s core principle of a “light footprint”.<sup>209</sup>

*Mandate, planning, coordination and deployment: Lessons partly learned*

The issues of mandate formulation, mission planning and inter-agency coordination are obvious focal issues for reviewing the learning performance with regard to UNAMA.

The most fundamental instance of learning in UNAMA was the mandate and mission design itself. After the heavily intrusive transitional administration missions in Kosovo and East Timor (see previous section), its key political innovation was the limitation of the UN role in governance – at least on paper – to strictly supportive functions toward an indigenous transitional government. This so-called “light footprint” approach was supposed to extend from the high politics of mandate through all levels of operation to the number of international staff employed and white UN vehicles to be seen on the streets of Kabul. It is still a matter of discussion whether or not this new approach was suited to the tasks at hand and the environment of post-Taliban Afghanistan, as well as to what extent the formal “lightness” translated into a lower degree of intrusiveness towards the Afghan administration.<sup>210</sup> In successfully advocating a new design principle in light of bureaucratic inertia, Brahimi used two important factors to his advantage: in terms of leadership, he took advantage of his exceptional personal standing within the Secretariat; and in terms of structural conditions, he profited from a number of tough political constraints in the Security Council that effectively prohibited any heavier transitional administration design. NATO’s unwillingness to deploy outside Kabul, US pressure not to limit the freedom of its own anti-terrorism operations throughout the country and a general wariness of the country’s history of resistance to foreign rule all helped cool “armchair general’s enthusiasm for a benevolent takeover of Afghanistan.”<sup>211</sup>

Another lesson identified by the Brahimi Report concerned the widespread problems in previous missions of coordination between agencies. The report proposed the *Integrated Mission Task Force* (IMTF) as a management tool to bring all relevant departments and agencies together at headquarters level for planning and overseeing a multidimensional peace operation. The group was supposed to start well ahead of a formal mandate of the Security Council to assemble an inclusive group of departments and agencies at a relatively high level of seniority<sup>212</sup> and therefore to play the role of a crucial hub through which all information and decisions would flow regarding the operation.

In practice, the first attempt at implementing an IMTF for UNAMA received mixed reviews from observers, including an internal evaluation made at the end of the planning

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<sup>209</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003c: para. ix); Interview with German diplomat posted to Kabul, 2006-08-16.

<sup>210</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003c: para. xiv); Chesterman (2002b).

<sup>211</sup> Chesterman (2002b: 4).

<sup>212</sup> See, in particular, United Nations (2000: para. 210) on the level of seniority envisaged for IMTF staff.

phase in February 2002. While starting early and with an inclusive number of units represented, the IMTF had failed to live up to its designated role because it lacked substantial input into the political decisions made by senior mission leadership and rather became more of a legitimizing institution, contributing to improved acceptance of plans but not shaping them.<sup>213</sup> Two likely reasons for this development have been identified by the IMTF's self-evaluation in 2002. To begin, SRSG Brahimi worked out the most important strategic decisions with his personal staff, leaving only the lower-level practical assignments to the IMTF. At the same time and interrelated to this, IMTF personnel were generally too junior in rank to have access to key decision-makers at and outside the UN.<sup>214</sup>

Moreover, despite its deliberately inclusive composition at headquarters, frictions arose between central planning by the IMTF and the SRSG's office on the one hand and field leadership of the *UN Country Team* (UNCT) on the other. Communication problems are one likely reason, for whether or not IMTF personnel "sufficiently" consulted with UNCT staff on the ground in Islamabad (after evacuation from Kabul) is a matter of contention between members of both groups.<sup>215</sup> More a product of different objectives and priorities than bureaucratic competition, UNCT re-established itself in Kabul long before UNAMA mission planning was finalized. Thus, the agencies created facts on the ground that could not be changed later, such as each choosing a separate physical location, which hindered the image of the United Nations as one entity (or a common perception of "the United Nations") as intended by the integrated mission doctrine.<sup>216</sup> As a whole, the IMTF planning process is widely criticized for taking too long (four months, from October 2001 to February 2002) while being overtaken by developments on the ground such as the uncoordinated reestablishment of UN agencies.<sup>217</sup>

Beyond these early planning issues, the fundamental lesson on the longstanding problem of coordination in the field – how to deal with multiple reporting chains – was again not learned. In trying to bring together independent agency heads in the field without having formal power over their budgets, UNAMA's new approach of "directive coordination" by the SRSG could neither deliver the desired solution nor avoid the issue. No matter how circumscribed with diplomatic language, the goal of the directive coordination was to create a hierarchic relationship between the SRSG and the heads of agencies on the ground – a principle that had already been set forth in Kofi Annan's 1997 proposals for reform.<sup>218</sup> Not surprisingly though, in the absence of formal budgetary and disciplinary powers for the SRSG, the new concept was effectively obstructed by the agencies. While widely recognized by outside observers, this problem seems not to have been identified internally at least until 2003 which indicates a failure in intra-mission learning.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003c: para. 35).

<sup>214</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003c: para. 34); Eide et al. (2005: 21).

<sup>215</sup> Griffin (2003: 211).

<sup>216</sup> Griffin (2003: 213).

<sup>217</sup> Durch et al. (2003: 49); Dahrendorf et al. (2003c).

<sup>218</sup> United Nations (1997: para. 119).

<sup>219</sup> Griffin (2003: 211) claims success while the Dahrendorf et al. (2003c), Durch et al. (2003) and Eide et al. (2005) reports consistently criticize this point.

As a final example on the implementation of the Brahimi Report, most of its lessons on deployment and staffing were not successfully applied. For instance, the recommendation, based on lessons from Sierra Leone and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to assemble mission leadership early before deployment was largely followed only with regard to himself and his personal staff. The DSRSG for Relief, Recovery and Reconstruction, for example, a crucial post, was not filled and deployed until several months into the mission when other UN and non-UN actors had already made their own plans on the ground.<sup>220</sup>

#### *Beyond the Brahimi Report: Intra-mission learning on peacebuilding policy issues*

The focus on design and start-up issues here leaves only little room for a host of other instances of learning, at varying levels of success, through the first couple of years of UNAMA. Two different examples of learning should be mentioned very briefly, though.

One such example concerns UNAMA's support of Afghan elections throughout the transitional process. In an internal evaluation of the 2004 presidential elections, DPKO's Best Practices Section identified an interesting instance of learning in the field—and its limits. Following previous problems with the timely contracting and deployment of short-term international election support staff through DPKO's *Personnel Management and Support Service* (PMSS), these contracts were unbureaucratically shifted from DPKO to UNDP, "which was able to cut in half the time from selection to arrival in the field."<sup>221</sup> In the official study, however, there is no record of subsequent changes initiated at DPKO and PMSS.

As a second example, outside experts have possibly contributed to policy learning in two important areas of UNAMA's peacebuilding mandate. From the beginning of the mission, UNAMA was criticized by a host of human rights NGOs and outside analysts for neglecting disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) as well as legal and judicial reform. In their view, not to assign these issues a higher priority in terms of resources, staff and high-level political attention had serious consequences for the constitutional process and the state-building strategy in general. As exemplified by the succession of reports by the International Crisis Group on these aspects of the Afghanistan operation throughout 2002-2004, external advice and advocacy was likely a factor in the gradual rise of both these issues on the agenda of the mission.<sup>222</sup>

#### *Official lessons identified from UNAMA*

There is only scant evidence of lessons transferred from UNAMA to later missions as the operation is ongoing and, to our knowledge, there are only two official reports of lessons learned: the IMTF's self-evaluation after the planning stage and the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section's assessment of UNAMA's support activities for the 2004 presidential elections.<sup>223</sup> The remaining problems of inter-agency coordination, in one insider's view,

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<sup>220</sup> Dahrendorf et al. (2003c: para. 50).

<sup>221</sup> Haeri and Blanc (2005: 18).

<sup>222</sup> On DDR, see ICG (2002b); ICG (2003b); ICG (2004a); on legal and judicial reform, see ICG (2003a).

<sup>223</sup> The IMTF self-evaluation is a non-public document. For the PBPS election study, see Haeri and Blanc

are due to “cultural issues” that need more time to change and do not lend themselves to institutional fixes.<sup>224</sup>

With regard to the IMTF planning process, however, a couple of lessons were learned in time for the planning of the latest mission to Liberia (UNMIL) in 2003 and changes were made accordingly.<sup>225</sup> The reason for this is difficult to pin down, but the two key elements are likely to be the internal lessons learned process and the personal priorities of the new mission’s SRSG, US ex-general Jacques Paul Klein who was looking back to his own personal wealth of experience in UN peace operations, starting from the Balkans missions (UNTAES, UNMIBH) in the mid-90s. A UN-commissioned study of integrated missions gives the latter element more weight, stating that “[mission] design reflects the inclinations and predilections of senior mission management, with little if any substantive reference to best practices, concepts of integration or modern management practices.”<sup>226</sup>

#### 4.5 UNAMI in Iraq, since 2003

As the most recently established mission in our survey, the *United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq* (UNAMI) is an unusual example in a number of ways. While incorporating, until November 2003, the prior presence of the *UN Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq* (UNOHCI) which ran the Oil-for-food program on the ground, the mission had limited political and humanitarian tasks and never came close to transitional administration-like duties, at least until mid-2006. The political turmoil surrounding the US-led invasion and its non-authorization by the Security Council put the mission in an uncomfortable situation – starting with the planning activities which, at one point, were chaired by an external consultant because no UN manager could be seen planning for the aftermath of a war the UN was officially trying to avoid.<sup>227</sup>

##### United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI)

MANDATE: UNSCR 1500 (2003-08-14)

START OF PLANNING: before April 2003

FULL DEPLOYMENT: not reached before the August 18 attacks; after evacuation redeployed only in 2004

##### STRENGTH:

- UN guard unit: 134
- Military advisers: 5
- International civilians: 221

##### KEY TASKS:

- coordination of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction
- good offices for the political transition

##### FIELD LEADERSHIP (SRSG):

05/2003 – 08/2003: Sérgio Vieira de Mello (Brazil)

08/2003 – 07/2004: Ross Mountain (NZ)  
since 07/2004: Ashraf Qazi (Pakistan)

Sources: Johnstone (2006a); UNAMI web site ([www.un-iraq.org](http://www.un-iraq.org)).

The bombing of UNAMI’s headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 was the first large-scale attack on senior UN personnel in a war the organization had vehemently

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(2005).

<sup>224</sup> Griffin (2003: 213).

<sup>225</sup> Durch et al. (2003: 48).

<sup>226</sup> Eide et al. (2005: 17).

<sup>227</sup> Interview with external consultant, New York, 2006-04-25.



opposed. This tragic event created a special set of circumstances leading to a number of learning initiatives that are interesting to investigate. Despite the paucity of sources and a lack of thorough evaluations of the ongoing mission, we can identify a number of interesting preliminary observations regarding its learning record.

*Crisis and learning: Staff security and the August 2003 attacks*

The aftermath of the August 2003 terrorist attacks on the UN's Canal Hotel compound in Baghdad is a prime example of learning triggered by crisis. The UN's tradition of not paying sufficient attention to formal rules on the safety and security of its staff and assets was shattered by a truck bomb. The UN finally acknowledged the risks that had been mounting throughout the 1990s and learned to take security matters more seriously.

The UN had evacuated its international staff from Iraq on 18 March, two days before the US-led invasion began. The story of its return to the country is one of good intentions but careless and irresponsible decisions in a succession of cases, from the decision on how and when to return to Baghdad to the decision concerning the handling of security during the days and weeks preceding the fatal attack. On 1 May, following strong pressure from NGOs and some member states but without any prior assessment of the security situation, which is called for in the UN rule book before any deployment to post-conflict areas, then-humanitarian coordinator Ramiro Lopes da Silva led his core staff back into Baghdad. Over the following weeks, more and more UN personnel kept flowing in as the Security Council, on 22 May, mandated the organization's work in the country and the new Special Representative, Sérgio Vieira de Mello, arrived with his team on 2 June.

The small UN security detachment on the ground became quickly overworked with the administrative burden of processing the new arrivals and frustrated with the mission leadership's blatant ignorance of basic security guidelines. Its complaints and warnings went unheeded both by the mission leadership and at headquarters in New York. Throughout June and July, a number of warning signs not only of the deteriorating security situation in Baghdad but also of the rising threat level to "neutral" humanitarian actors, including to the UN presence and the SRSG himself, were again ignored. On 19 August, a truck bomb detonated directly at the wall of the UN compound and beneath the office of the SRSG, claiming 22 lives and injuring more than 150 UN staff and visitors.<sup>228</sup>

Subsequent internal and external investigations identified and documented enormous security lapses. Quite apart from the question of appropriateness and sufficiency of the ensuing disciplinary measures against a number of senior personnel,<sup>229</sup> the incident of 19 August triggered a number of learning processes. With regard to the self-image of UN field staff, it dealt the final blow to the widespread fantasy that the blue flag would be regarded as neutral and benevolent everywhere and thus protect those working under it. In fact, this had been true to a certain extent during the Cold War, but already in the

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<sup>228</sup> This analysis summarizes the findings of the two external investigations led by Martti Ahtisaari (United Nations, 2003c) and Gerald Walzer (United Nations, 2004c), respectively.

<sup>229</sup> United Nations (2004a). Critics charge the Secretary-General with covering up responsibility on the highest level, see Lynch (2004).

1990s, a rising level of hostility against UN staff and assets had been noted in war zones around the world.

As a second example of learning, the veritable shock waves felt throughout the UN humanitarian and peace operations community after the Baghdad bombing led to a much more serious engagement with security needs and procedures. As the Deputy SRSG of UNAMI put it in an internal review dated 11 November 2004, the bombing “put an end to business as usual and opened a new chapter for the United Nations.”<sup>230</sup> Beyond the activities in Iraq and immediate security measures, for example, the sense of shock helped establish, for the first time after years of bureaucratic and political deadlock, a joint capacity for information analysis and advice to senior management in missions throughout the world. Formally introduced for the first time in the latest Haiti operation, the concept of *Joint Mission Assessment Cells* (JMACs) brings together civilian and military elements tasked with political analysis and intelligence in order to create a more comprehensive and coherent picture of the mission’s environment, particularly concerning security threats.<sup>231</sup>

*Learning and coordination: new constraints opening new horizons?*

On top of learning directly related to security matters, security constraints themselves came to shape all aspects of operations in Iraq after the attacks. By severely limiting the presence of international staff on the ground in Iraq, the insurgency and the new adherence to security procedures created powerful incentives for agencies to push the previous boundaries of cooperation on the ground. In this particular environment, the interim mission leadership in the months after August 2003 might well have come up with the first real piece of progress in terms of inter-agency coordination in years.<sup>232</sup>

Led by the SRSG ad-interim, Ross Mountain, and with the help of an external strategic planning advisor provided by the UN Development Group Office, UNAMI managed to introduce a new system of coordinated planning and management for the twenty-something UN agencies that were involved in Iraq.<sup>233</sup> This “cluster approach” includes some innovative elements to secure the buy-in of the major players within the system. In particular, the heads of the larger agencies (like UNHCR and WFP) are assigned substantial leadership roles in their respective areas of competence while UNAMI limits itself to procedural management, most importantly providing a framework for coordination among equals, and controlling the distribution and implementation of tasks agreed on by the agencies themselves.

From the publicly available documentation, the success of this instance of learning is based on two key elements. The first is the recognition by all parties that the security situation did not allow for their usual duplication of management and logistics functions—as seen in Afghanistan, for example. The other key element is leadership, which most cogently stems from two sources. One is a speech by Secretary-General Kofi

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<sup>230</sup> UNAMI (2004: 3).

<sup>231</sup> Chesterman (2006: 157).

<sup>232</sup> UNAMI (2004: 4-9).

<sup>233</sup> Resulting in a joint strategic plan submitted to donors to the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) in February 2004 (United Nations, 2004c).

Annan on 2003-10-31, the importance of which was strongly emphasized by the UNAMI Lessons Learned report on the new coordination mechanism. Annan's address, delivered in the mission's temporary base at Nikosia (Cyprus), called for thinking outside the box in addressing the needs of Iraq after the bombing. The other source is UNAMI's own leadership, which played a crucial role by bringing in the external advisor, setting up resource-intensive but useful workshops for all heads of agencies in Nikosia and identifying and supporting reform-minded managers within the agencies.<sup>234</sup>

#### *Official lessons learned from UNAMI*

Of course, the new approach did not eliminate all the challenges to coordination, nor would it be easy to apply the new procedures to a setting with a lower level of threat. However, the procedural infrastructure of learning has obviously improved compared to earlier operations. As a case in point, the mission conducted a self-evaluation of its new coordination mechanism a year after its inception and notes specifically both lessons taken from other missions (Afghanistan and Sudan are mentioned) as well as the need to provide documentation and lessons to later operations.<sup>235</sup>

Beyond this self-evaluation, no official lessons learned report has been published yet. Apart from the obvious changes in terms of staff security and the above-mentioned issue of coordination, there is, however, one more lesson the UN has apparently identified during its post-war operation Iraq. In his quarterly progress report on UNAMI of September 2005, the Secretary-General took explicit note of the "lessons [...] learned from the operations of the Iraq Trust Fund. The multi-donor, multi-agency trust fund approach has been effective in enabling donors to fund projects through a single channel, reducing transaction costs to Iraq, donors and the United Nations Development Group and avoiding duplication."<sup>236</sup> Like the cluster approach to coordination, the twin funds organized in the *International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq* (IRFFI) and operated by the UN Development Group and the World Bank, respectively, have been subject to internal evaluations.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> UNAMI (2004: 9-11).

<sup>235</sup> UNAMI (2004: 14).

<sup>236</sup> United Nations (2005: para. 47).

<sup>237</sup> See UNDP (2005) for the UNDP review of the UN fund.

## 5 Learning in the UN Peacebuilding Apparatus: Pushing the Frontiers of Research and Practice

“As long as they are carried out by human beings, interventions to put weak societies on a more stable footing will never be perfect. [...] They will continue to suffer from our flawed understanding, ideological blinkers, divisiveness, weak will and shortsightedness. But we are also capable, albeit inefficiently, of learning from our mistakes. [...] Applying these lessons ultimately depends on political will.”<sup>238</sup>

What lessons can we learn for the study and practice of organizational learning in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy? In this chapter we present elements of both a future research and a policy agenda on peacebuilding and organizational learning. In doing so, modesty needs to be our most basic guiding principle. This study has only started to scratch the surface of what is a promising area of research and an important concern for policymakers. More focused in-depth studies are needed in order to produce more robust research findings that can then inform recommendations for policymaking. In light of this, readers need to take the following preliminary sketches of agendas for research and practice with a grain of salt.

One further clarification is in order in this context: Making the question of organizational learning the focus of our research does not presuppose that such learning has frequently and successfully taken place. Anecdotal evidence from the available literature points in the opposite direction.<sup>239</sup> At the same time, we need to take the broader concerns of sceptics seriously. Michael Barnett, for example, argues that the bread-and-butter business of an international bureaucracy such as the UN, namely determining and operating on universal and generalized rules, might not be possible in the case of peacebuilding because of the historic specificity of the individual cases. Barnett argues that bureaucratic universalism is dangerous: “In order to be the rationalized, efficient actors that they present themselves to be, [UN peacebuilding officials] must flatten diversity and ignore contextual variations.”<sup>240</sup> It should be clear that learning cannot and should not equal the search for a “one-size-fits-all template”.<sup>241</sup> At the same time, from a policy perspective we hold that ultimately a learning organization that revises doctrines and guidelines based on experience and relevant new knowledge is a model worth striving for. Only a thorough and sober analysis of the successes and (even more importantly) the failures, shortcomings and roadblocks can point to promising and realistic policy strategies for getting closer to this model.

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<sup>238</sup> King and Mason (2006: 263-264).

<sup>239</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>240</sup> Barnett (2005: 5).

<sup>241</sup> Therefore, any attempts to use “pre-fabricated constitutions” (Benard, 2005) or “Governments-out-of-a-Box” (CMI and IPA, 2004; von der Schulenburg, 2005) are of most doubtful promise.

## 5.1 Future research agenda

Our case examples have surveyed a wide variety of instances of learning. We have seen both completed and aborted learning processes. We also pointed to instances of “no learning” when, with the benefit of hindsight, we concluded that the actors did not identify a problem even while outside observers convincingly pointed out the need for a new perspective regarding the same issue. In addition, we discussed a case of “lessons misapplied” as valid lessons from the Kosovo experience were insufficiently contextualized and therefore misapplied in East Timor.

Overall, this is a broad spectrum that points to a number of problems that any further research in this area must confront and address. First, “no learning” is a typical instance of a non-case that can hardly be made visible, certainly not in a reliable way that goes beyond accidental selection by external complaint. Second, and more importantly, the universe of different forms of learning and the universe of peacebuilding are simply too large to design in-depth research studies covering the whole of them.

Instead, it is crucial to concentrate on a particular manifestation of organizational learning, like we intend to do with our focus on cognitive change leading to a shift in bureaucratic rules. To achieve a degree of similarity between observations, a further research agenda also needs a more narrow selection of issues. After all, the entire field of peacebuilding offers simply too many instances of diverse learning processes to be a viable object of research as a whole. Looking into organizational learning in international organizations, we stand only at the beginning of a spiral process of retroduction, combining theoretical progress with further empirical research, and along the way dealing with new material on both fronts.

For now, there are three substantial building blocs for further research that we can take as the results of this study’s conceptual review and empirical analysis: a preliminary model of the learning process, a set of factors influencing that process, and the choice of an appropriate methodology.

### *A model of organizational learning in international bureaucracies*

Returning to our basic premise to see learning as a *process*, we need an initial concept of how this process evolves in order to study it – in short, a model. In developing a stylized process model of learning in international organizations rather than corporations, we must lead traditionally business-focused organizational learning theory onto completely new territory. Based in part on the works of Huber (1991) and Crossan, Lane and White (1999), our model is designed to trace the learning process in a very *general* way. In line with the requirements of the early stage in the retroductive method, the idea is just to organize the concepts that constitute learning. In a subsequent step, the model can be used to organize preliminary hypotheses drawn from related theories and observations of the empirical reality.

In line with most OL scholars we distinguish different stages of the learning process as cognitively driven rule change for heuristic purposes:<sup>242</sup> (1) *knowledge acquisition*, (2)

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<sup>242</sup> March and Olsen (1976); Crossan, Lane and White (1999); Berthoin Antal et al. (2001); DiBella, Nevis and GPPi Research Paper No. 7: *Learning to Build Peace? Developing a Research Framework*

*advocacy/decision-making*, and (3) *institutionalization*. Ideally, the three phases would add up to a learning cycle, i.e. the institutionalized rules would be subject to continuous review and further learning.<sup>243</sup> Our heuristic model does not include assumptions of the factors that influence the learning process, which we will discuss in the next section.

1. *Knowledge Acquisition*: Initially, the organization either actively searches for or passively receives knowledge from its environment, or converts its own previous experience into knowledge. Potential sources include a field officer's end-of-assignment report; a study conducted at the Best Practices Section to actively identify ways to solve new problems (or better solve existing ones); or the organization's decision to adopt and incorporate the recommendations of a policy paper prepared by an outside think-tank.
2. *Advocacy/decision-making*<sup>244</sup>: After knowledge acquisition, the carriers of knowledge spread the word about the new knowledge in the organization and develop knowledge-based proposals for new rules. Building coalitions and negotiating the relevance of their new knowledge and rule-changing proposals, they try to convince key people to accept their newly acquired knowledge *and* its implications for rule adaptation. In this phase it will be examined how knowledge is formed into proposals for new rules and how these proposals gain (or do not gain) momentum within the organization. The advocacy stage ends with an authoritative decision on whether and how to change the rules.
3. *Institutionalization*: Once a decision has been taken, it must be codified and implemented. The new rules are integrated within the existing body of rules and disseminated among concerned units and staff. The learning process is completed when the newly made rules are applied. In an ideal learning process the implementation is followed by an evaluation of the new rule, activating a feedback loop and restarting the learning process.

More detailed steps in the learning process can only be made visible by means of applying process tracing (see below) to concrete cases. Of course this is only a stylized model which does not allow us to make predictions on how different factors influence individual processes of learning. It is only a necessary preparatory step for subsequent in-depth research on the factors that influence learning.

### *Influences on learning*

Determining the relative importance of different factors supporting and hindering processes of organizational learning will be at the heart of any future in-depth research. Our study has produced some initial observations of potential factors both inductively (from our case examples) and deductively (from the literature on organizational learning).

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Gould (1996). However, our model departs from most models of learning in so far that it understands learning to be a process of knowledge-based rule change rather than information processing.

<sup>243</sup> On feedback loops see Argyris and Schön (1978); Haas (1990).

<sup>244</sup> We owe the suggestion for this term to Patrick Stadler (University of Bern).

Even while being a non-representative selection out of a vast universe of learning processes within and beyond the five selected missions, our case examples in chapter 4 have shown a number of factors that have influenced processes of learning. We saw the complex interplay between the bureaucratic and the intergovernmental levels where it was fundamentally political power that played an important role in supporting or forestalling learning. The negative effects of organizational structure on learning became apparent in the bureaucratic politics and turf fights documented in various cases. An interesting dynamic that merits further attention in subsequent research are the differences between headquarters and field levels and the interaction between the two in learning processes. On the one hand, learning processes in the field might be less constrained by bureaucracy and grand politics than those at headquarters. At the same time, staff in the field often seems independent of what are regarded as “the recent management fads” coming out of headquarters – the importance of learning being one of them. The day-to-day pressures of operating in the field are certainly not conducive to putting a premium on actively contributing to learning processes. Staff at headquarters on the other hand has to cater to political masters, bureaucratic imperatives and generalize across the whole range of very different situations on the ground. The influence of human capital for learning is obvious in the impact of staffing levels, recruitment policies and the role of local knowledge in mission planning and management. Human capital is also at work in the role of dedicated learning support, be it one-time internal evaluations or a permanent infrastructure of organizational learning. Access to external knowledge has been recognized as a factor on learning as well, as has the role of leadership, particularly by the SRSG personally. This is exemplified by the role of the first head of the UNAMA mission in Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, whose strong personal leadership together with the high level of political attention and ample resources might have provided one of the best possible real-world situations for learning short of crisis-induced revolutionary change.

Reviewing the relevant literature, we discovered a multitude of “factors”, “conditions”, “antecedents” and “triggers” said to be in one way or another causally linked to learning. As of now we lack both a systematization of these variables as well as detailed empirical investigations into how they actually influence learning.<sup>245</sup> As a first step toward systematization for the purposes of an in-depth follow-up study, we came up with a way of organizing and selecting plausible candidates for independent variables that might influence one or more stages of the learning process.

In a comparison of factors deduced from the literature and factors induced from the case examples and the interviews conducted as part of the pilot project (see Annex 1), we distilled eight clusters of potential independent variables that we found to apply to *at least two* different areas of the learning system (the peacebuilding bureaucracy, other UN actors, and non-UN actors) and that were supported *both* deductively by the OL literature and inductively by our empirical research (with one exception that is strongly supported by our interviews). Table 1 gives an overview of the resulting clusters of potential independent variables.

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<sup>245</sup> Babuji and Crossan (2004); Dodgson (1993); Huber (1991), among others.

The cluster organizational culture, for example, includes the organization’s decision-making culture (top down vs. bottom up), its absorptive capacity, its bureaucratic nature, etc. Future research needs to determine the most relevant clusters and single out the most important independent variables. In contrast to approaches focusing on single dominant causes or *triggers of learning* (most often a crisis),<sup>253</sup> we believe that a more fine-grained process tracing analyzing different factors that (co-)influence learning has the potential of presenting a much richer analysis of organizational learning.<sup>254</sup>

Applicability (cf. Figure 2) (and sources)	Peacebuilding Bureaucracy		Other UN actors		Non-UN actors	
	deductive	inductive	deductive	inductive	deductive	inductive
Clusters of potential IVs						
Power <sup>246</sup>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Organizational culture <sup>247</sup>	X	X		X		
Leadership <sup>248</sup>	X	X		X		
Human capital <sup>249</sup>	X	X		X		
Organizational structure <sup>250</sup>	X	X		X		
Staff mobility and fluctuation <sup>251</sup>	X	X	X	X		
Technical infrastructure for knowledge management		X				
Access to external knowledge <sup>252</sup>					X	X

**Table 1: Clusters of potential independent variables**

*Methodological suggestions for future in-depth studies*

As discussed in chapter 2, we suggest that future in-depth studies define organizational learning, the dependent variable, following Haas (1990) and Barnett/Finnemore (2004) as *a process of cognitive change through the questioning of the means and/or ends of addressing problems that manifests itself in the development of new rules and routines guiding the organization’s behavior*. Some approaches propose a more complex scale of learning (e.g. by distinguishing between simple and complex learning or single-/double-loop

<sup>246</sup> The role of power within organizations is discussed by LaPalombara (2001) and Child and Heavens (2001), see also Barnett and Finnemore (2004).

<sup>247</sup> Following, among many others, Child and Heavens (2001), organizational culture in the focal organization – and, by extension, with regard to BSU (Böhling, 2005) – plays an important part as a determinant of learning.

<sup>248</sup> Sadler (2001).

<sup>249</sup> Barnett and Finnemore (2004).

<sup>250</sup> The influence of structural features – esp. bureaucratic traits – of IOs are discussed by Barnett and Finnemore (2004) while Thompson (1967) tackles them in the context of boundary spanners and traditional corporations.

<sup>251</sup> Ness and Brechin (1988).

<sup>252</sup> Haas (1990); Haas and Haas (1995).

<sup>253</sup> See the discussion in Breul (2005), chapter 3.2.

<sup>254</sup> This is underlined by Hannan and Freeman who assert that “organizational outcomes depend heavily on internal politics, on the balance of power among the constituencies. When such an organization faces an external problem, which action will be taken, if any, depends as much on the coalition structure of the organization as on the contribution of alternative actions to organizational survival or growth. In such situations outcomes cannot be easily matched rationally to changing environments.” (Hannan and Freeman, 1989: 23 quoted in Pierson, 2004: 126)



learning).<sup>255</sup> We do not think that such fine-grained scaling adds much value at this stage of research on organizational learning in international organizations. The scaling of our dependent variable is nominal. Instead, we suggest relying on a simple nominal scale of “learning” (completion of the learning process) and “no learning” (non-completion of the learning process).<sup>256</sup>

On top of the inherent complexity of organizational learning as a non-observable process, any further research will have to deal with a multitude of independent variables or, in other words, multiple causality. We make two suggestions for addressing this challenge.

First, we suggest that future in-depth research concentrate on a single focal organization, e.g. the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy around DPKO or the peacebuilding bureaucracies in the US or the UK. Only once we have a number of in-depth single case studies, can we undertake credible cross-case comparisons.

Second, we suggest to “zoom in” on a number of select “focal issues” from the three areas of security, governance, and welfare<sup>257</sup> as well as the area of cross-cutting problems such as coordination of disparate actors.<sup>258</sup> In doing so, further research can cover a broad range of peacebuilding tasks while at the same time putting a premium on in-depth analysis. Tracking processes of learning on concrete issues over a longer time-span allows us to draw more informed conclusions than simply focusing on different peacebuilding missions as the unit of analysis.

A decision to design future in-depth studies as single case studies using retrodution also has consequences for the choice of method.<sup>259</sup> Process tracing seems to be the most suitable method for future research along the lines suggested in this study. Process tracing helps to unwrap the process by which the “initial case conditions are translated into case outcomes”.<sup>260</sup> The researcher searches for evidence by dividing the process into smaller steps and looking for discernable evidence of each step.<sup>261</sup> Therefore, process tracing is perfectly suited to detect how complex processes such as organizational learning unfold. At the same time, by dividing the process into stages – knowledge acquisition, advocacy/decision-making, and institutionalization – and investigating a few different focal issues, process tracing helps increase the number of observations.

### *Challenges and opportunities of further research*

Future in-depth studies hold the potential of breaking new ground both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, they can help develop a framework for analyzing and operationalizing organizational learning, a concept that until now has largely remained

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<sup>255</sup> For example Nye (1993), Argyris and Schön (1978). In a similar vein, Haas (1990) distinguishes adaptation and learning.

<sup>256</sup> It follows, of course, that we cannot trace all cases of no learning because processes that never started and rules that were never supposed to change cannot be made visible.

<sup>257</sup> “Sicherheit”, “Wohlfahrt” and “Herrschaft” in the terminology used by Czempiel (1981: 198).

<sup>258</sup> For the area of peacebuilding, these categories have been adapted frequently, cf. Kühne (2005); Schneckener and Weinlich (2005); CSIS (2002).

<sup>259</sup> Schimmelfennig (1995); Eckstein (1975); Lijphart (1971).

<sup>260</sup> Van Evera (1997: 64).

<sup>261</sup> Cf. Van Evera (1997).

at the metaphorical level. Tailoring such a framework to an international organization, they can add a political dimension to a field that until now has mostly focused on corporations. In doing so, future research needs to continue to bring together approaches from International Relations with organization theory – a literature so far underutilized for both the analysis of peacebuilding and the study of international organizations in general.<sup>262</sup> At the same time, in-depth studies on organizational learning would also help to remedy one theoretical weakness of the existing literature on peacebuilding which (according to one prominent observer) has “paid relatively little attention to the conceptual foundations of peacebuilding itself, or the basic premises upon which these operations are based.”<sup>263</sup>

Empirically, further studies on organizational learning in international organizations would contribute to opening up the “black box” of international bureaucracies<sup>264</sup> by means of an empirically rich process-tracing of (non-)learning. At the same time, the results promise to be relevant for the practice of the respective organization. In the case of UN peacebuilding, for example, the policy relevance for the design of learning systems at DPKO and the new PBSO is readily apparent (see next section).

Future research should not shy away from taking a closer look at the role of factors that are often overlooked in political science research. This includes the issue of leadership. While research in IR has produced a wealth of literature in institutionalist, structuralist or systemic traditions, it has shied away from the role of leadership.<sup>265</sup> It would also be desirable for future research not to remain confined to the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy but also take an in-depth look at the learning record of other organizations charged with similar tasks. Interesting cases for comparison could be other IOs such as NATO or the EU ESDP bureaucracy but also institutions such as the U.S./UK-led Coalition Provisional Authority.

## **5.2 Future policy agenda**

In 1993, John Ruggie observed: „The United Nations has entered a domain of military activity – a vaguely defined no-man’s land lying somewhere between traditional peacekeeping and enforcement – for which it lacks any traditional guiding operational concept.”<sup>266</sup> Ten years later, Simon Chesterman concluded that learning “has not [...] been one of the strengths of the United Nations. A senior Secretariat official describes this as an unwritten rule that ‘no wheel shall go un-reinvented’”<sup>267</sup>. Many observations in this study support these opinions. At the same time, on the basis of the scant evidence available thus far, it would be premature and presumptuous to rush to a final verdict on

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<sup>262</sup> We share this observation and research interest with our partners at the University of Konstanz who are working on peacebuilding in the context of their projects *Administrative Science Meets Peacekeeping* and *Casualties of the New World Order*.

<sup>263</sup> Paris (2004: 4). Paris states that while „the literature on peacebuilding has burgeoned since the end of the Cold War, few writers have scrutinized the assumptions that underpin the design and conduct of these operations” (Paris, loc.cit.).

<sup>264</sup> See Mathiason (forthcoming, 2007).

<sup>265</sup> See Keohane (2005).

<sup>266</sup> Ruggie (1993).

<sup>267</sup> Chesterman (2004: 256). The former senior UN official Sir Kieran Prendergast, head of the Department of Political Affairs from 1997-2005, made a similar observation in an interview in Cambridge, MA, 2005-11-04.

the UN's learning capacity. The current state of research should also prevent us from rushing to policy conclusions and recommendations. For example, we need additional research in order to make detailed recommendations on options for improving the knowledge management system within the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy. Further down the road, this knowledge-practice transfer is a highly desirable goal – and one that meets great interest on the part of the policymakers and officials in the UN system. At this stage, we need to confine ourselves to a number of observations on the practice of organizational learning in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy.

The analysis of the evolution of the “infrastructure of learning” has demonstrated that the UN bureaucracy in recent years has attributed greater importance to mainstreaming the gathering and application of lessons into its peacebuilding operations. The current leadership of DPKO seems to have achieved a modicum of success with its efforts along these lines. However, both the resources and political will devoted to improving the “infrastructure of learning” still do not seem to be commensurate to the challenges at hand. The UN's capacity to gather and apply lessons is an important corrective to the ad-hocism that characterizes its peacebuilding operations. Since the UN is in this business for the long haul, and since (as discussed in the introduction) demand for peacebuilding operations seems to be steadily increasing, further investment in its capacity to gather and apply lessons learned is all the more urgent. Here the support of member states (such as the German support for the Peacebuilding Best Practices Unit early in its existence and the ongoing support of the governments of Canada and the UK, among others) can make a real difference in the overstretched peacebuilding apparatus. Member states should increase their investments into the UN's infrastructure of learning. Here it is important to note that future investment should not be confined to the Peacebuilding Commission. The resources available for learning in the relevant departments, most importantly DPKO, are much more critical and therefore deserve sustained attention and targeted funding.

While funding and resources are critical, it is as important to remember that (as the opening quote in this chapter underlines) people are crucial to the business of learning. Without motivated, dedicated and able staff, further investment in the infrastructure of learning will be without effect. Therefore, UN officials operating under huge pressure in tough environments need to have both the incentives and the tools to gather and apply lessons. On the one hand, this presupposes an incentive system in career development that puts a premium on the contribution of the staff members to the organization's learning capacity. To a large extent, the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy is a knowledge-based organization but its current personnel management system does not reflect this. Other knowledge based organizations such as management consultancies put strong incentives in place in order for their employees to contribute to the collective knowledge base.

In terms of tools, on a very basic level this presupposes linking the expertise of different UN officials. DPKO's Best Practices Section has recently made great efforts to support organizational learning on peacebuilding, particularly in the form of its *Knowledge Management Team* and the *Guidance Project*. The Guidance project is tasked to establish a comprehensive body of reviewed and/or changed rules on the full range of

peacebuilding tasks. Meanwhile, the Knowledge Management (KM) team is expected to improve, in quantity and quality, the gathering of lessons learned and best practices. Both initiatives were planned in late 2005. Concrete learning initiatives within this framework are expected to be operational in early 2007.<sup>268</sup> Meanwhile, peacebuilding operations still lack a comprehensive database listing the areas of expertise and the track record of the respective staff members. However, learning to learn is more than a question of technology. Ultimately, drawing and applying lessons is a craft. As the example of the “misapplied” lessons from Kosovo in East Timor demonstrates, finding the right balance between generalization and context-specificity is a constant challenge. Training programs can contribute to improving this craft. Investing in people is a crucial component of strengthening the overall learning capacity of the UN peacebuilding apparatus.

Given what the often invoked international community has achieved so far in the area of peacebuilding, modesty and self-reflection are in order. At the same time, this is a call to intensify our efforts at “learning to learn”. As Ernst Haas, the pioneer of the study of organizational learning in international organizations, put it: “There is never a final lesson to be learned.”<sup>269</sup> Haas’ dictum holds true for both researchers and policymakers.

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<sup>268</sup> In addition, the newly created *Peacebuilding Support Office* (PBSO) aspires to “gather and analyze information relating to [...] best practices with respect to cross-cutting peacebuilding issues.” (UN Security Council, 2005). As of now, the workplan for the PBSO is unclear. In case, the PBSO develops any activities on our four focal issues we would also include this in future research.

<sup>269</sup> Haas, 1990.

## 6 Acknowledgments

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## **Annex: List of Interviews**

### **Mr Salman AHMED**

Acting Special Assistant to the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations  
United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-25 (in person)

### **Ms Melanie ATWOOLL**

Adviser, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations  
New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

### **Mr Dominik BARTSCH**

Senior Policy Adviser, Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Department of Peace-keeping Operations, and Transition Team for the Peacebuilding Support Office  
United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-24 (in person)

### **Dr Jamal BENOMAR**

Senior Advisor, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery  
United Nations Development Programme, New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

### **Dr Simon CHESTERMAN**

Executive Director, Institute for International Law and Justice, New York University  
NYU School of Law, New York, 2006-04-25 (in person)

### **Mr Michael CHRISTENSEN**

Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations  
New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

### **Prof Michael DOYLE**

Harold Brown Professor for United States Foreign and Security Policy, School of International and Public Affairs and School of Law, Columbia University  
New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

### **Ambassador Rainer EBERLE**

Deputy Director-General, Global Issues, the United Nations, Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, German Foreign Office  
Berlin, 2006-08-16 (in person)

### **Mr Sebastian VON EINSIEDEL**

Special Assistant to the President, International Peace Academy  
New York, 2006-04-24 (in person)

### **Mr Scott GILMORE**

Executive Director, Peace Dividend Trust  
New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

### **Mr Andrew GILMOUR**

Deputy Political Director, Executive Office of the Secretary-General  
United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

**Ms Michèle GRIFFIN**

Political Affairs Officer, Policy Planning Unit, Department of Political Affairs  
United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-25 (in person)

**Ms Julia Katharina GROSS**

Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations  
New York, 2006-04-25 (in person)

**Ms Joanna HARVEY**

Coordination Officer, Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Department of Peacekeeping  
Operations  
United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

**Ms Heidi HULAN**

Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations  
New York, 2006-04-24 (in person)

**Ms Eiko IKEGAYA**

Research Officer, Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Department of Peacekeeping  
Operations  
United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

**Dr Bruce JONES**

Co-Director, Center for International Cooperation, New York University  
New York, 2006-04-25 (in person)

**Mr Paul KEATING**

Political Affairs Officer, Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Department of Peace-  
keeping Operations  
United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

**Ms Yoonie KIM**

Adviser, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery  
United Nations Development Programme, New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

**Ms Joanna MOIR**

First Secretary, Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations  
New York, 2006-04-24 (in person)

**Mr Thomas W. OHLSON**

Adviser, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations  
New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

**Sir Kieran PRENDERGAST**

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, United Nations, retired  
Cambridge, 2005-11-04 (in person)

**Mr Edward REES**

Coordination Officer, Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Department of Peacekeeping  
Operations  
United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

**Ms Nicole RUDER**

First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations  
New York, 2006-04-24 (in person)

**Ms Laurie SHESTACK**

Adviser, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations  
New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)

**Ms Fatemeh ZIAI**

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United Nations Secretariat, New York, 2006-04-26 (in person)



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