

## The Role of the SRSG in UN Integrated Missions

### Process Facilitator and Multi-stakeholder Mediator

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#### Summary

The policy brief focuses on the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in the context of UN Integrated Missions. The primary leadership function of the SRSG is to facilitate a process that can generate and maintain strategic direction and operational coherence across the political, governance, development, economic, and security dimensions of a peacebuilding process.

The power and influence of the SRSG resides not in the resources that he or she can directly bring to bear on a specific situation, but in the ability to muster and align the resources of a large number of agencies, donors, and countries to support the peacebuilding effort in a given context.

This type of leadership role implies that a person with skills, experience and a personality suited to multi-stakeholder mediation and negotiations is more likely to be a successful SRSG than someone who is used to top-down, autocratic, military command, private sector, or direct-control type leadership styles.

This perspective on the role of the SRSG has important implications for the way in which people are chosen and prepared for these positions, as well as for the ways in which support can be provided for this role, both at UN headquarters and in the field.

#### Introduction

This policy brief is based on the article 'Mediation and Peacebuilding: SRSGs and DSRSGs in Integrated Missions' that appeared in *Global Governance*, Vol. 16 No. 2 (Apr.–June 2010), as part of a special focus edition on *Post-War Mediation in UN Peace Operations: the Role of Special Representatives of the Secretary-General*.<sup>1</sup> It focuses on the type of leadership roles that are most effective for a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in the context of a UN Integrated Mission.

The role of the SRSG is widely recognized as complex and multifaceted. The SRSG is the overall head of a multidimensional UN peacekeeping or political mission.<sup>2</sup> In the case of UN Integrated Missions, the SRSG is also the overall coordinator of the UN system in a given country,<sup>3</sup> and is further expected to play a leading role in coordinating the overall international effort on the ground. In many cases, the SRSG is also the lead mediator in the ongoing postwar mediation efforts, and/or in any emerging post-settlement disputes between local political actors. Another criti-

<sup>1</sup> The author appreciates the editorial support of Ingrid Marie Breidlid of NUPI, as well as very useful comments and suggestions by Timothy D. Sisk, colleagues and peer reviewers at *Global Governance*.

<sup>2</sup> There are still a few traditional peacekeeping missions where the head of mission is the Force Commander, such as the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

<sup>3</sup> There are a few exceptions, such as Sudan, which hosts two peacekeeping missions (UNMIS and UNAMID) and thus two SRSGs, and the mission in Chad and the Central African Republic (MINURCAT), where one SRSG has responsibility for a mission that includes parts of two countries. MINURCAT and UNAMID are not Integrated Missions.

cally important role for the SRSG is to serve as the primary liaison between local and international actors.

### Peacebuilding and Coherence

The UN Secretary-General's report, *Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict*,<sup>4</sup> describes peacebuilding as a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of a (re)lapse into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and by laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development.<sup>5</sup>

The UN missions typically headed by an SRSG can be described as *peacebuilding missions*, because they are post-settlement missions focused on peace consolidation. The SRSGs heading such missions are responsible not only for the peacekeeping or political mission, but also for the wider UN and international effort, and for bringing together the various stakeholders, and coordinating the overall peacebuilding process.<sup>6</sup>

Peacebuilding requires the engagement of a wide range of internal and external agents, including governments, civil society, the private sector and international agencies. These actors should be working together in a coherent and coordinated effort, but in reality they often compete with each other for resources and opportunities. *The Joint Utstein Study*<sup>7</sup> of peacebuilding, which analysed 336 peacebuilding projects implemented by Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Norway over the last decade, identified a lack of coherence at the strategic level – what it terms a strategic deficit – as the most significant obstacle to sustainable peacebuilding. The Utstein study found that more than 55% of the programmes it evaluated did not show any link to a larger country strategy.

Although pursuing coherence is now widely acknowledged as a prerequisite for effective peacebuilding at the policy level, there still appears to be a considerable gap between the degree to which coherence seems to be self-evident, and the persistent challenges experienced in the field to achieve coherence at the operational level. In the real world, those

pursuing coherence often have to settle for the 'second-best' or 'partially coherent' solutions, in order to establish a workable foundation for cooperation.

The SRSG is ultimately responsible for pursuing overall coherence, and is thus deeply engaged in these negotiated transactions. Coherence is a goal, not an end-state. The process of seeking coherence, and thereby engaging various agents in the process, generates value because it provides the SRSG with the opportunity to influence and facilitate the management of the interdependencies among the agents.

### Integrated Missions

In the UN context, Integrated Missions and the Integrated Approach refer to a specific type of operational process and design, where planning and coordination processes of the various elements of the UN family are integrated into a single-level UN system.

In UN peacekeeping, a mission becomes an 'Integrated Mission' when the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) function is integrated with the peacekeeping operation through the appointment of a Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) responsible for the RC/HC function. 'Integrated Mission' refers to integration across the UN system: through the DSRSG RC/HC function, the peace and security responsibilities of a UN peacekeeping operation are linked with the development and humanitarian functions represented by the various UN agencies present in the UN Country Team.

The Integrated Approach differs from the Integrated Missions concept in that it does not require structural integration – although it may provide for it, where appropriate. Instead, the Integrated Approach refers to a strategic partnership between the UN peacekeeping operation and the UN Country Team, where all components of the UN system are to operate in a coherent and mutually supportive manner, in close collaboration with other partners. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon has reaffirmed the Integrated Approach as the guiding principle for all conflict and post-conflict situations where the UN has a country team and a multi-dimensional peacekeeping operation, or a political or peacebuilding office, whether these missions are structurally integrated or not.<sup>8</sup> The role of the SRSG is to manage this overall process in close cooperation with the DSRSG RC/HC.

The strategic leadership and coordination role of the SRSG should further be understood in a wider international context where coherence is pursued at the national level among government de-

4 *Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict*, A/63/881-S/2009/304, New York: United Nations, 11 June 2009.<sup>2</sup> There are still a few traditional peacekeeping missions where the head of mission is the Force Commander, such as the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

5 This definition of peacebuilding is based on the notes of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee on Peacebuilding, May 2007 (New York: United Nations, 2007).

6 These SRSG roles are described in both the 'New Horizon' non-paper and the Secretary-General's *Report on Peacebuilding*.

7 Dan Smith, *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: the Synthesis Report of the Joint Utstein Study on Peacebuilding* (Oslo: PRIO, 2003).

8 *Decision Number 2008/24 – Integration*, Decisions of the Secretary-General, 25 June 2008 Policy Committee (New York: United Nations, 2008).



partments (whole-of-government approach), and internationally among donors (harmonization), as well as between donor and recipients (alignment).

### The SRSB as Process Facilitator

The complexity of the coherence dilemma is due, in part, to the dynamic tension between the independence and interdependence of the agents engaged in the peacebuilding missions.<sup>9</sup> Each agent independently undertakes activities that address specific facets of the conflict spectrum, but a collective and cumulative effect is needed to achieve the overall peacebuilding goal. The core role of the SRSB is to facilitate the processes that manage these interdependencies within the peacebuilding system. As the only institution with system-wide responsibility, the SRSB is uniquely positioned to play this role.

The SRSB is tasked with coordinating and leading a system made up of multiple independent agents in control of their own resources. This implies that the SRSB cannot control or direct these independent agents in the same way that a general can control an army, or a manager can direct the employees and business units in a company. The SRSB will need to employ a different set of tools and skills than those typically associated with managing a company or commanding an army. When facilitating a peace process, the SRSB does not have control over the inputs, and can only indirectly influence the outputs that are meant to generate momentum towards the desired outcomes and impacts.

It is important to recognize that the SRSB has no direct authority over the UN agencies. Even when it comes to peacekeeping or political missions, the SRSB's authority is extremely limited and subject to negotiations with others in the system, including UN headquarters in New York and ultimately with the member states of the UN, which control the resources and direct the policies of the world organization. In these areas, the authority of the SRSB and the authority of the UN Secretary-General are similarly constrained.

Hence, the power of the SRSB lies not in control over resources or agencies, but in the ability to mobilize and align the resources of a large number of agencies, donors and countries to support the peacebuilding effort in a given context. The SRSB has the authority and credibility to convene, and can use that opportunity to facilitate a coordination process. The overall effect of this process can result in a much more comprehensive and all-encompassing effort than what any one organization could otherwise have achieved on its own.

Key entry-points for such system-wide integration are common assessments, integrated planning, operational coordination, and monitoring and feedback. These processes provide common spaces where agents can come together, make contributions, learn from each other and verify their information, analyses and perceptions.

The role of the SRSB is to *facilitate* the process that generates strategic direction and operational coherence in the system, not to control it. The SRSB can influence the process, but cannot direct it. The SRSB manage the process, not the UN mission, UN system or overall international effort. This is an important distinction to bear in mind, and to factor into how SRSBs are selected, prepared, managed (from a human resources perspective) and evaluated. Two factors stand out here: (a) personality and (b) process, or process tools.

The ability to organize people around system-wide objectives and goals and to make them understand how their individual programmes add up to the larger common effort, are critical skills and attributes for a successful SRSB. A person with skills, experience and a personality suited to multi-stakeholder mediation and negotiations is thus more likely to become a successful peacebuilding system SRSB than someone used to top-down, autocratic, military, private sector or direct-control type leadership styles.

Process tools are also critical, providing opportunities for agents to come together in a common space, to articulate their own positions, and to learn from each other. Process tools provide the opportunity to triangulate information and, in the process, create a new common narrative. Processes, such as common assessments, joint planning, joint monitoring, etc. are useful tools for engaging the various agents in a common objective. SRSBs should have knowledge and experience, directly or through support systems, of the process tools available to them, and how best to employ them to pursue coherence.

### Frustrations with the perceived Limits of Process Facilitation

Many in the UN system and beyond, including some current and past SRSBs and DSRSBs, have argued that the process facilitation role of the SRSB is insufficient, weak and flawed. These voices argue for strengthening the role of the SRSB in terms of the authority the SRSB should have over UN peacekeeping and political missions, as well as over the other UN agencies at the country level. Some also argue that SRSBs, or the DSRSBs RC/HC, should have a fund at their disposal and under their direct authority.

The question of whether SRSBs should have the power to direct UN agencies is related both to the *de jure* legal and administrative status of these agen-

<sup>9</sup> Cedric de Coning, *Coherence and Coordination in United Nations Peacebuilding and Integrated Missions: A Norwegian Perspective*, Security in Practice No. 5 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2007), p.3.

cies, as well as to the *de facto* benefits of their sustained independence. There are in fact several ways in which the authority of the SRSR can be increased without negatively impacting on the legal status or independence of these UN agencies.

While it is also possible to give SRSRs and Deputy SRSRs responsibility over specific funds, one should carefully balance the benefits of giving them direct authority over a relatively small amount of funds as opposed to indirect influence over the whole potential pool of funds available in a given peacebuilding system. There is a danger that the association of the SRSR or DSRSR with the interests of one specific fund might undermine their broader coordination role. The role of the SRSR should be elevated above the marketplace, so that there is no conflict of interest. Staying above the fray will ensure that the SRSR is in the most favourable position to facilitate a coherence-seeking process with credibility and objectivity – similar to a mediator in a multi-stakeholder negotiation process.

4 Ultimately, the SRSR function derives its power of influence and authority from its political credibility. The SRSR represents the will of the international community as expressed by the UN Security Council. This tacit authority, as well as the active political support expressed by the international community, is what provides the SRSR with political capital. Credibility and political capital can further be increased by the way the SRSR relates to the member states and internal actors, as well as by the way the SRSR chooses to use the political capital. Hence, the role of the SRSR is ultimately a political role, not a management one. Persons chosen for this function should be chosen for their political skills, and their ability to facilitate complex, multi-stakeholder and long-term processes.

## Conclusions

Despite frustrations and criticisms, the role of the SRSR as the overall head of a peacekeeping or political mission, the overall coordinator of the UN system, and the overall facilitator and convenor of the international community, remains unchallenged. The overall leadership role of the SRSR, and the need for such a role, appear to be widely recognized and accepted. There is, however, a limit to the degree of control that the international community and UN member states are willing to delegate to the SRSR. There exist many political, financial and organizational reasons for these limits – and they are highly unlikely to change significantly in the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, there are no limits on the potential power of the SRSR to facilitate the peacebuilding process. The SRSR enjoys enormous latitude to gain and use political capital and to steer and influence the processes that guide the overall peace process in a given country or conflict system. The degree to which an SRSR can transform this potential into reality depends on the personal skills and experience of the individual SRSR.

The selection, preparation and support of SRSRs are thus critical entry and leverage points for the UN Secretariat. Improvements in each of these areas can have a significant influence on the strengthening the role of the SRSR.

Ultimately, the primary leadership function of the SRSR is to facilitate a process that can generate and maintain strategic direction and operational coherence across the political, governance, development, economic and security dimensions of the peace process.

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