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# The Evolution of the United Nations Standby Team of Mediation Experts in Context

Key Trends, Issues and  
Recommendations

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## Executive Summary

This synthesis report considers trends and issues in the context of international peace mediation and mediation support and relates them to the past, present and future operational needs of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs in terms of the Standby Team of Mediation Experts (SBT). It cites the exponential growth of peace mediation and the professional contribution the UN and the SBT have made to it. In the last seven years, the mediation support field enjoyed an associated increase in the number of actors and a growing awareness of the complexity of the practice with a view to achieving sustainable peace. There is an increased tendency for indigenous mediation practice and for regional organisations to broker mediation processes.

The SBT is a unique instrument with great added value in the field of global mediation support. Its hallmark is senior, high quality professional mediation and facilitation expertise. Whilst highly regarded and widely appreciated, it is difficult to assess the impact of the team through linear/output-based monitoring and evaluation models. These need to be adapted to the particular practice, be fluid and dynamic, and be part of an overall learning system. Without a commitment to make the SBT (like any other mediation support tool) a learning system, the knowledge and depth of mediation support is unlikely to develop further – notably to adapt to evolving needs.

With an increase in the size of the SBT from 5 to 8 members over the last 7 years, their overall deployment rate to theatres has levelled out at around 50%. Since its inception, there has been a

steady increase in the duration of the SBT members' contracts; an overall increase in the length of deployments; and high level engagement and deepened relationships with the clients. All of these are mutually determining factors, which, in combination, have made the team yet more relevant and effective, and consequently increased the demand for its work.

This paper offers options for the future operation of the SBT, and concludes with a set of recommendations regardless of the option chosen.

## Summary of Recommendations

### On Functions

- ✓ *Recommendation 1:* Keep the SBT as a high-level resource for (UN) peace processes
- ✓ *Recommendation 2:* Increase the size of the team whilst keeping strategic focus
- ✓ *Recommendation 3:* Widen the variety of expertise
- ✓ *Recommendation 4:* Increase the preventive capacity of the team
- ✓ *Recommendation 5:* Empower flexible facilitation expertise
- ✓ *Recommendation 6:* Provide mandates to allow SBT members to do their work more efficiently
- ✓ *Recommendation 7:* Maintain the hybrid nature of the structure

### On Increasing Sustainability and Quality

- ✓ *Recommendation 8:* Adopt Mediation Guidance No. 9: Reflective Practice for Learning

### On Management

- ✓ *Recommendation 9:* Update the strategic concept and framework of the SBT by a strategic review of the UN DPA Policy Directive for Mediation
- ✓ *Recommendation 10:* Enlarge the team with multi-annual contracts on a rolling basis
- ✓ *Recommendation 11:* Adopt retainer contracts for former mediation standby experts
- ✓ *Recommendation 12:* Boost management capacity (both UN and implementing partner)

### On Operational Issues Important for the SBT Members

- ✓ *Recommendation 13:* Improve travel conditions
- ✓ *Recommendation 14:* Title the SBT Members "advisors" rather than "experts"
- ✓ *Recommendation 15:* Adopt a code of conduct derived from the UN DPA Policy Directive for Mediation

### On Enhancing Internal Evaluation and Accountability

- ✓ *Recommendation 16:* Improve accountability to the donors
- ✓ *Recommendation 17:* Set up a monitoring and evaluation system

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## Background

The aim of this synthesis paper is to present major lessons learned about the Standby Team mechanism since its inception in 2008. It seeks to condense the major strands of thinking regarding the future of mediation support through the instrument of the Mediation Standby Team of the United Nations (SBT). In the preparation of this paper, the January 2011 evaluation report was drawn upon and compared with the present situation.

The lessons captured in this report are based on extensive interviews and discussions with some, but not all, Members of the present Standby Team, and an evaluation of questionnaires sent out to former Members. Semi-structured interviews were also held within the United Nations, specifically with the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC, the implementing partner) and the two main donors for the project, Norway and the European Union. An initial draft of the paper was presented at a facilitated discussion with over 30 stakeholder participants including past and present members of the Standby Team (see Annex I for Agenda and List of Participants). The results of these discussions have been carefully recorded, considered and integrated into this report, which concludes with a set of recommendations for the future of the SBT, previously tested and discussed with the main stakeholders.

Although informed by the (sparse) current literature on international mediation practice, this review is not based on a systematic or comprehensive literature review. It is informed in part by the practice within the SBT itself, my co-evaluation of the SBT in 2011, and observations in the mediation support field of the author over the years. Prof John Packer, also a former Member of the Standby Team, has acted as a valuable editorial advisor and facilitator of the November 2014 stock-taking meeting held in Oslo drawing upon his extensive knowledge of UN and other processes and experiences. Miguel Varela of mediatur assisted with research, analysis and presentation of this work.

As a disclaimer, it should be noted that the statistical information on the SBT at our disposal for this report was not fully conclusive. This paper is thus not intended to be a quantitative evaluation, but a synthesis of a valuable stocktaking exercise initiated by the implementing partner – the Norwegian Refugee Council – supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Mediation Support Unit of the United Nations.

Any error in the text remains the responsibility of the main author.

Brussels, 31 January 2015, Antje Herrberg

## Introduction

Seven years after its inception, the Standby Team of Mediation Experts of the United Nations (SBT) has become a common reference and a brand of excellence in international peace mediation and mediation support. Its unique semi-autonomous model blends independence from and ownership by the UN, balancing operational independence and flexibility with the global weight and reach of the United Nations. To date, no other organisation or institution has been able to match this effort.

Credit for its success should be shared amongst a number of actors: partly the UN Mediation Support Unit (MSU), whose principals and staff have done a remarkable job in relentlessly marketing and steering the SBT in the right directions; partly the wider environment of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), which has become an intelligent and convinced client; partly the rise in demand for effective mediation support, promoted notably by the UN Group of Friends of Mediation. Credit is also due to the steady, systematic, reliable role that the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has played in ensuring recruitment of the best experts in the field, and patiently, behind the scenes, facilitating their timely deployment; as well as the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which underpinned the idea with solid financial support and quiet, steady stewardship. The European Union has also demonstrated a firm commitment for EU-UN cooperation through its support of the SBT. Last but not least, credit must be given to the members of the Standby Team for the outstanding work they have achieved in the seven years of operation. Each member believed in their role as peace agents,

and many have actively contributed to and facilitated peace processes, without political ambitions and out of the lime-light. Individually and in combination, all of these factors have contributed to the success of the SBT.

The Standby Team of Mediation Experts currently comprises a group of four men and three women, mostly Western, Anglo-Saxon and educated, with a diversity of ethno-cultural backgrounds and linguistic proficiencies, possessing world-class expertise in, inter alia, process design, constitution-making and reform, power-sharing, gender and social inclusion, and security arrangements. Many have long-standing mediation experience with geographical expertise in virtually all parts of the world.

The stocktaking process (of which this report is the result), initiated by the Norwegian Refugee Council, was a timely exercise. Almost the entirety of the 2013/2014 SBT had continued into a second year of successful operation, with some members ready to continue into a third year. In a continually volatile world where violence often seems to be the predominant expression of political dissatisfaction, and where the UN and other actors attempt and manage to provide mediation support, the demand for the services of the SBT has grown.

To understand the needs and ability to respond to mediation support, a critical analysis of the work of the SBT in the face of growing complexity is the first necessary step. To this end, this synthesis paper addresses three principal questions:

1. What are the principal trends and issues in the world of mediation and mediation support? What is the relevance of these trends to the SBT?
2. In light of these trends, is the original premise on which the SBT was founded still valid?
3. In light of the current political, institutional and managerial contexts, what are the key recommendations that could enhance the quality of mediation support through the SBT?

## Trends and Issues in Mediation and Mediation Support: Mediation is the Answer

According to Chapter VI of the UN Charter, “Pacific Settlement of Disputes”, international peace mediation is a core activity of the UN which follows from its objects and purposes. In the last few years, and especially since adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 65/283, the practice of mediation is clearly en vogue. The UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Group of Friends of Mediation have done outstanding jobs in both advocacy and effective work. The *raison d’être* of the SBT has been well-established and demonstrated over time.

The practice of peace mediation has become a prestigious activity with an undeniable glamour effect on diplomacy – it is becoming part and parcel of diplomacy and professional and academic training. Dozens of conferences and meetings are dedicated to the topics of mediation and mediation support. The DPA’s Mediation Support Unit (MSU) has evolved from an infant unit within the DPA to a motor of mediation and support well beyond it, in particular working with the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the UNDP. The MSU, together with others, now plays a key role in enhancing mediation skills at the more senior levels within the United Nations and beyond.

Thus, the era when one dashing, smart and enthusiastic man (note the emphasis on “man”) could vanish in a conflict theatre

with a loosely defined mandate and emerge after a couple of years with a peace agreement in hand (cf. Jan Egeland, Fink Haysom, Martti Ahtisaari, Jean Arnault et al.) is over. Today, with the increased status of and attention to international peace mediation, it is the former Statesman (rarely a woman) who takes up the job as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) or Special Envoy. Whilst experienced in running a country or a ministry, they have often yet to accumulate the experience of running a peace mediation process and rely on the much-needed support provided by the DPA/MSU.

The fact that mediation is en vogue means that a lot of different practices have been ‘packed’ into it. Today, UN mediation includes many forms of facilitation and dialogue, from local community to political dialogue, to multi and single stakeholder processes as well as national dialogues – much of which could also be understood as peacebuilding. The practice of mediation branding does create certain misunderstandings or misperceptions with the clients (frequently ‘conflict parties’), and explains why these valuable services are sometimes rejected. Finally, in this vein, we sometimes forget that mediation has its limits and might not take care of the varied ills and manifestations of political conflict; take Syria as one example.

Yet, even with our heightened awareness, due sensitivity and increased competence, the international community is realising that peace mediation is not for the faint-hearted. As one well-placed commentator and practitioner Laurie Nathan points out, understanding and dealing with the increasing complexity of the field is perhaps the most pressing challenge for peace mediation – given the varied dispositions of parties in a civil war, the multiplicity of actors, the fragility of systems and structures in a given conflict context, and, perhaps most importantly, the difficulty or failure to grasp the contextual complexity itself.<sup>1</sup> Some of these issues are global; many are idiosyncratic of a certain conflict situation or environment. And then there are the geopolitical power dynamics, which often have a very significant impact on peace-building efforts. Current contextual issues with relevance to mediation support, as experts often point out, include:

- A growing tendency for recognition and/or independence of entities/ethnic groups.
- Increased competition has increased the costs of coordination and transaction costs in peace process planning.
- There is a recognition that civil society has to be part and parcel of a peace process. The UN needs to see and engage them as partners, rather than just ‘receivers of expertise’ and beneficiaries of processes.
- Religious radicalisation.
- Regionalisation of conflicts.
- The powerful, arguably necessary but sometimes overbearing presence of the ICC, at times inhibiting the practice of trust-building needed by the mediator.
- The inflationary and inflammatory characterisation of “terrorism” preventing actors from engaging with groups who are stakeholders in a peace process.
- The challenge of including more women as actors in mediation processes, and the role of the international community in promoting such, which does not seem adequate.
- Predominance of negotiations concerning cease-fires, power-sharing arrangements and constitution-making.

These – and undoubtedly many more – issues underline how our deepened understanding of the nature of the processes changes the way we engage in mediation today. Thus, the international community is (again) also realising that it needs to invest in building societies that can resist conflict, putting effort into prevention rather than simply taking a predominantly (and sometimes exclusively) ad-hoc, reactive approach. The Westphalian paradigm is being tested; the influence of non-State actors and groups without territorial components is on the rise; and we can no longer afford to be reactive as we

<sup>1</sup>Nathan, Laurie (2014) “What is the essence of international mediation in civil wars? The challenge of managing complexity.” BPC Papers V.2. N. 02.

have been in the past. Today, we understand that mediation processes do not happen exclusively at a table or in a conference room, but are a reflection of open transitional processes. For the UN, as for the rest of the international community, these transition processes are often intractable, enduring, and difficult processes, sapping patience and devouring enormous amounts of political and financial resources.

Here, we cannot escape the essential political nature of the work and the dynamics, which characterise political “transitions” which demand awareness of the complexity of peace and peace processes. This also explains why the management of these processes has become a ‘peace enterprise’, with sub-divisions, working groups and multiple working layers, rendering them difficult to navigate, ultimately adding to yet more complexity. Today, a peace process is not only about bringing arms to rest, but about building peace in terms of institutions of governance and democratisation processes; while many examples may be cited, one clear example is the Malian peace process, which leaves the informed observer with the question of whether such processes are not rendered too ‘heavy’ and too complex for resolution in the short term.

And – whilst needing to take a longer-term view on the transformative nature of peacemaking – we need to be quick and nimble. With today’s practice and use of communication technology, the reach of small actors has been substantially extended, and time-lags can trigger conflict or peace. Smarter, quicker, sharper responses are needed. All of the above clearly points to the fact that creative, innovative, out-of-the-box thinkers and supporters of peace processes are in demand. Whether the UN can fill this need is a relevant question.

## The challenge of the globalisation of peace mediation

The clout of UN mediation, as powerful and strong as it may be perceived, can also create wariness amongst certain communities. Whilst the UN and its associated partners remain active in promoting the various practices and professionalisation of mediation, a certain degree of (perceived) ‘UN dogmatism’ and ideology is probably unavoidable. The UN Guidelines for Mediation are regarded as universal principles of mediation; a ‘globalisation’ of mediation is being forged. Yet the culture of dialogue and mediation remains quite distinct and present in different societies and some regional organisations insist on greater regionalisation of their mediation mandates and specific engagements, taking into account regional specificities.

### Box 1: The 8 UN mediation principles

1. Preparedness	2. Consent
3. Impartiality	4. Inclusivity
5. National ownership	6. International law and normative frameworks
7. Coherence, coordination and complementarity	8. Quality peace agreements

Nevertheless, as put by one interviewee, “it is important to develop a new comprehension on third-party roles, not necessarily associated with that of a traditional mediator”. Whilst the UN might not be the best placed actor for third-party roles, there is a growing tendency of reliance on other mediation support providers such as regional inter-governmental organisations, certain State actors or some specialised non-governmental organisations. This tendency also results from a degree of reluctance to internationalising local processes, with an associated fear among the parties of ‘losing control’, as well as an apprehension about the consequences of the application of international norms and standards. What cannot be neglected, however, is the UN’s substantial and sometimes unique convening power, which can make all the difference in bringing parties to the table and providing a suitable framework.

Related to this point is the growing realisation that for peace processes to be sustainable, local actors need to be empowered to shape and handle the peace – hence the growing tendency for regional and national actors to claim more ownership in peace implementation, prompting the UN or some of its agencies to support “national infrastructures for peace” (and what is known as ‘insider mediation’). For the UN this implies the need for close cooperation with the peacemaking and peacebuilding actors within the institution (interagency cooperation with the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and MSU, for instance).

#### Box 2: Official UN mediation-specific documents

- ✓ UN Secretary General Report on “Enhancing mediation and its support activities” (S/2009/189, 8 April 2009)
- ✓ UN General Assembly Resolution on “Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution” (A/RES/65/283, 28 July 2011; updated on A/RES/68/303, 31 July 2014)
- ✓ UN Secretary General’s Report on “Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution” (A/66/811, 25 June 2012)
- ✓ UN Guidance for Effective Mediation (2012)

## More mediation practice means increased coordination

Associated with its increased efficiency (and arguably, in part, because of it), the demand for mediation is also growing. As a consequence, international peace mediation has become a dynamic and competitive field. At times, unfolding crises can resemble a gold-rush where mediation practitioners step over each other’s toes to acquire a ‘piece’ of the peace process – hardly promoting and often hindering effective third party mediation and reducing the trust and confidence of conflict parties in peace mediation.

All of these developments have consequences for the practice of mediation support and the role of the SBT. The trends for multiple actors and competition have increased transaction costs, meaning that more time and energy is being spent on coordination rather than working on a certain process in itself. Moreover, competition for resources has created some opaqueness and lack of information-sharing between key actors. This is simple economics in a market where resources for mediation are limited (despite the growth in the past ten years), with many vying to provide the service and acquire resources for the provision thereof – with the attendant effect that ‘real’ high-level expertise is more in demand than ever.

# The Continuing Relevance of the Standby Team

## Purpose and function of the Standby Team of Mediation Experts

Inspired by the use of rosters in the humanitarian field, the Norwegian then-UN Special Advisor of the Secretary General for Conflict Prevention, Jan Egeland, was an early and strong advocate for the creation of the Standby Team, believing it could become the premier UN 'mediation squad'. Norwegian actors, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), worked together with some progressive and proactive actors within the still newly established Mediation Support Unit of the DPA and managed to place the first Standby Team of Mediation Experts at the disposal of the United Nations in 2007. Today, according to Egeland's assessment, "the SBT is closer to its original idea than it has ever been".<sup>2</sup>

Initially funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the SBT project was and remains based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UN and the NRC. The initial purpose of the project was to strengthen the UN's capacity in mediating disputes and to enhance the quality of support and expertise available to UN and UN-supported mediation endeavours.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Jan Egeland, 13th November 2014, Oslo.

The original idea of the model was set up to provide high-level and specialised expertise, which was not readily available within the UN system or for deployment in the field.<sup>3</sup>

Initially, the SBT was a project funded exclusively by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which remains, together with the European Union, the largest donor. Current donors contributing to the SBT include Turkey, Finland, Belgium and the United States of America.

**Fig. 1: The Budget of the SBT**



The annual budget of the SBT Project is about USD 2.8M, including salaries of the team members, its management within the NRC, travel costs (including transportation and per diems), reimbursable items, recruitment costs and overheads. 30% of this budget goes to the salaries of the SBT members.

The implementing partner (NRC) operates on the basis of a MOU concluded in 2007 and a Reimbursable Loan Agreement concluded in 2012 (updated on a yearly or biannual basis). The 2012 DPA Policy Directive for the Standby Team of Mediation Experts provides the overall policy framework within which it operates, including an outline of tasks of the MSU.

Upon hiring, each individual SBT member/expert is provided with thematically specific Terms of Reference, which specify the main role of support and expert advice he/she is to provide to the UN in support of its on-going good offices and mediation work. SBT experts receive Terms of References specific to the assignment from the client, arranged with and conveyed through the MSU.

<sup>3</sup>Herrberg, Antje and Wills, Oliver (2011) "Evaluation of the Mediation Support Unit Standby Team of Mediation Experts." Final Report. Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council.

### Box 3: The UN SBT According to the Original MOU

#### Main task

To be available for full-time deployment on short notice to assist and support the mediation of the United Nations and its partners.

#### Key aspects

- ✓ Provision of expertise that is not readily available within the UN system
- ✓ SBT contracts for 12 months
- ✓ SBT fully available at all times (24 hours a day/7 days a week)
- ✓ Deployment within 72 hours
- ✓ Deployments for up to one month (renewable)
- ✓ In any location

#### Responsibilities of the NRC

- ✓ Recruitment of Experts
- ✓ Human Resource Management
- ✓ Travel deployment management (flights, hotel, etc.)
- ✓ Provision of equipment
- ✓ Financial contract management
- ✓ Performance evaluation

#### Responsibilities of the MSU

- ✓ Planning & liaison with 'clients'
- ✓ Preparation of experts including background information

## The SBT's Hallmark: Professional Competence



Recruiting on a yearly basis 8-9 experts of global renown, available to work in difficult conditions for the period of one year, with a good but not outstandingly competitive salary, is clearly a challenge. On a yearly basis, the NRC, which manages the recruitment, reviews 400 applications through a rigorous selection process. The volume of applications is consistently increasing, with most candidates for process design and security, and least for constitutional and power-sharing experts. Most applicants are lawyers (with few international lawyers) and political scientists. More men apply than women. They typically have post-graduate education (Master's or higher degrees), speak several languages, have a minimum of 10 years practical experience, and are between 40 and 60 years old. It does not come as a surprise that a number of those interviewed noted the 'finite' number of such experts, until the next generation reaches this standard (which it undoubtedly will).

- 400 - 600** applicants a year
- More **men** than **women**
- >**10 years** of experience
- 40 - 60** years old
- Lawyers, political scientists and security experts
- Most applicants** Process design
- Least applicants** Constitutional lawyers

### Personality matters

The hiring and selection process and induction of the SBT members in action is part of its successful formula. A key quality of SBT members is the mixture of flexibility, personal efforts, political savvy and substantive expertise that create a special chemistry and working environment wherever they go. Much of this is intangible but crucial to be able to fit within and succeed in influencing peace processes. The key combination of skills in mediation, technical expertise, and human skills is highly appreciated. What is so special in the SBT is that each of the teams present a range of complementary skills and personality traits, and they are chosen as such. They range from the classical senior expert profile, to that of the advisor and 'adept mediator' type. As pointed out in the 2011 report, the personality factor in providing mediation support remains highly important. Often the tactical and political skills needed to make a difference on a mission are the very skills that enabled them to perform their tasks.

## Team's Expertise

It is worth pointing out that the term 'team' might not be considered strictu sensu. Whilst bound by sense of common purpose, complementarity of knowledge and skills with synergetic effect, in fact the SBT is rarely deployed as a team except for induction, mid-term and end-of-year reviews, as well as gender and high-level UN mediation training. Some joint deployments to allow for complementary action have occurred occasionally (e.g. Kyrgyzstan in 2013, Mali and Ukraine in 2014). Rather, the SBT members see themselves more like a group of advisors, or, as one SBT member pointed out, as a special 'platoon'.

Table 1: Thematic Expertise of the SBT

First Team ('08-'09)	Second Team ('09-'10)	Third Team ('10-'11)	Fourth Team ('11-'12)	Fifth Team ('12-'13)	Sixth Team ('13-'14)	Seventh Team ('14-'15)
Team Leader; Process Expert	Power Sharing	Power Sharing	Security Arrangements	Power Sharing	Power Sharing	Power Sharing
Power Sharing	Security Arrangements	Security Arrangements	Power Sharing	Security Arrangements	Security Arrangements	Security Arrangements
Security Arrangements	Security Arrangements	Security Arrangements	Constitutional Issues	Security Arrangements	Constitution-Making	Constitution-Making
Constitution-Making	Constitution-Making	Constitution-Making	Gender	Constitution-Making	Gender and Social Inclusion	Constitution-Making
Transitional Justice / HR	[Gender]	[Gender]	Natural Resources	Gender	Process Design	Gender and Social Inclusion
[Water Sharing]	Water Sharing	Water Sharing	Mediation, Facilitation and Dialogue	Natural Resources	Process Design	Process Design
[Housing, Land and Property]	-	-	Mediation, Facilitation and Dialogue	Process Design	Process Design	Process Design
-	-	-	-	-	Natural Resources	Natural Resources

## What is the unique selling point (USP)? : The Swiss Army Knife model



Expert power  
Independence  
Truth to Power  
Multitasking  
Flexibility  
Diversity

Notwithstanding its proven relevance, effectiveness and efficiency (as spelled out in the 2011 evaluation), there remains some question about the added value of the SBT in relation to other tools of mediation. As suggested during the November 2014 stocktaking seminar, the Standby Team is like a 'Swiss Army Knife' for mediation comprising multiple but separately deployable elements within the one mechanism. Standby team members and other partners point out the following qualities as unique selling points:

- ✓ **Expert power** – The SBT is providing expertise that the UN DPA or other UN actors are not in a position to provide in the same manner. The expertise is not only based on international practice but also on a firm understanding of a range of comparative systems, experiences and choices (and implications thereof). Even though stressing the uniqueness of each case, actors appreciate the comparative analysis and insights. The advice of the expert reduces the scope of mediation error. Their critical analyses, questions and suggestions are ideal for actors who work in high-paced 'closed' working environments.
- ✓ **Independence** – Whilst UN peace processes require technical expertise, the heavy political work of the UN DPA does not allow them to take on a technical, intellectual attitude. The fact that the SBT comprises "Experts on Mission", rather than UN staff members, allows deployments to play out in different ways with different audiences. This status enables the SBT member to be more flexible and free to talk to actors and parties on the ground than other professionals or diplomats working for the UN (or for member States). SBT Members are at once very close to and within the UN and yet something of an arms-length from the UN – an ambiguity which can and does work to mutual advantage. The drawback of this arrangement is mainly operational (the official lower status) which is most relevant within the UN system.

- ✓ **Truth to power** – Due to their unique standing, members of the Standby Team can and should be asked and expected to speak (appropriately) their truth to power without having to fear immediate consequences in terms of a career path within the UN system or elsewhere. This is an element of the position that should be protected, whilst at the same time handled with care.
- ✓ **Multi-tasking, multi-hatting** – A member of the Standby Team may be posted, for example, in Yemen whilst working on another file (and waiting for certain things to happen on the ground). They may be requested to offer training for local actors; one day it might be power-sharing; the other, inclusive societies. There is a growing tendency (and since 2013, a decision) to drop the official designation of individual expert specialty of the SBT member in order to allow for this flexible practice. Many Standby Team members work on multiple files, a clear-sign of their special competencies and strengths. In addition, they play different roles depending on the circumstances of deployment, the needs on the ground, and personalities and requests from the principals. An SBT member may one day act as a UN diplomat; the next day she may act as a seminar organiser, trainer or speech-writer. This has an impact sometimes on their individual professional satisfaction (NB: having to work on several files increases workload and complexity), but has been most of the time held in balance, and has been accepted as a necessary aspect of the job of an SBT member.
- ✓ **Flexibility** – Within the UN system, the SBT is uniquely flexible. SBT members are deployable immediately and sometimes stay on the ground 'as long as needed', which constitutes a shift from the initial 72 hours benchmark. Each deployment is different and could be immediate. In the words of one team member: "I make sure that I pick up my dry cleaning every day." The flexibility applies equally to the skill-sets the SBT member ends up using. They might have been originally sent to provide advice on a power sharing agreement, then end up providing a design for an inclusive process, or vice versa.

- ✓ **Diversity** – the Standby Team is diverse in terms of its composition of language skills, cultural backgrounds, gender, expertise and ‘talents’. Some members of the Standby Team are more classic ‘expert’ types, providing highly specialised technical advice; others display outstanding talent with very good ‘people skills’; most usually have both of these. In order to create a genuine ‘alchemy of peace process support’, the deployment manager needs to be able to gauge what kind of combination of these skills is necessary. This requires talented and diligent recruiters and human resource management from both the MSU and the implementing partner.

## What are the challenges for the SBT today?

Of course, the nature of the practice of the SBT is not without challenges, some that inescapably come with the job, others that could be accommodated. Principal among these are:

- ✓ **Planning versus response**

Given the nature of the work of the SBT, members have to be ready to deploy at any given time. When this occurs, SBT members are provided a file of information (rather than a conflict analysis), often without time for a full briefing, and arrive in the theatre without being equipped for a conflict analysis. Upon arrival, and due to the work environment that comes with emergency and conflict situations, they have to ‘find their way’ in the maze of UN operations to the right women or men who can provide relevant and good advice, or who can facilitate access to those who can provide critical information or analyses. Sometimes a request for an SBT member is a little-considered cry for help to resolve a situation that has become unmanageable. The expert herself may become lost, on occasion arriving at a point of irritation because her role is not sufficiently defined or understood; her ability to work is limited or compromised, or otherwise constrained. These scenarios occur, and they highlight the tension between desired planning (which takes time and resources) and the nature of emergency/crisis deployment. Management is challenged to assess the true need for deployment, and then to be

able to support the expert in terms of conflict analysis and achieving the necessary political connections on the ground. These problems can be mitigated through co-deploying MSU members of staff with SBT members in order to facilitate entry and access, or giving the SBT a mandate to conduct conflict analyses on the ground (see also recommendation 12).

- ✓ **Importance of conflict analysis**

Any conflict management professional likes to have the fullest information to conduct a solid conflict analysis. Even if provided with this at headquarters, the expert on the ground needs to make up her/his own mind about the situation on the ground. Thus, notwithstanding (or precisely because of) the emergency, experts need the time, space and mandate to conduct their own analysis of the situation on the ground in order to carry-out their work to best effect.

- ✓ **Deployment over, mediation support over?**

An important lesson learned from the SBT is related to the length of expert engagement (beyond the one-off deployment). Due to the high-level engagement and ability to perform (in addition to the high quality of the job performed), their role is increasingly linked with processes. They are sought at different stages - equally demanded following the mediation negotiation process itself, moving into the critical phase of peace process implementation, and then often again at a later stage when issues are arising and sometimes the peace process relapses into conflict; in those situations it is of added value to work with experts acquainted with the process and actors. Partly for this reason, some of the SBT members stayed on the team beyond a one-year assignment – following through with ongoing processes. In this regard, it would be useful to address the issues of specific follow-up support through, for example, retainer positions following the conclusion of SBT members’ terms.

✓ **Terms of References/Code of Conduct**

At times, and especially when deployed urgently, SBT members are greeted with confusion as they 'hit the ground'. Which information can be shared with this expert who is neither a consultant nor a member of staff? Will she/he respect the confidentiality of information? Why should she/he talk to the mediator? Should she/he be speaking with the stakeholders? Why does she/he ask difficult questions? Why should we work with him/her? How can our risks be mitigated?

The assets of an SBT member mentioned above may constitute challenges as well. Certainly, the above questions are not without validity, especially given the sensitive and fragile nature of conflict resolution processes. Indeed, there have been some (very) rare instances of inappropriate or unhelpful SBT member conduct in specific situations. For this reason, and in order to secure an understanding of the role of the SBT member, a code of conduct for mediation experts is recommended as an insurance policy for all primary actors: the experts themselves, the clients and the MSU. Such codes of conducts are normal practice in other mediation environments, and they should become a standard element of the employment contract of the SBT members.

of the overall demand structure could shed light on the relative stable deployment rate, as there is an overall perception of increased demand. Note, however, that statistics for logged requests have not been analysed, if available.

With an increasing demand for deployment, the SBT will need to develop a strategic view on its engagements – this requires enhanced mechanisms in terms of choices for deployments, which may come earlier in the conflict (i.e. 'up-stream' in conflict) or with a view to catalytic or multiplier effects, for instance. A more strategic engagement (affecting outputs and impacts) would likely result in greater chances for success, especially for preventive or mitigating purposes; notably, earlier, up-stream deployments may well utilise more available time and more tools to operate, but also allow the team to operate under less pressure. Such an approach would certainly benefit from a further range of expertise (see below) and the additional valuable in-puts that would improve capacities. With the increasing demand for SBT assistance and the team's limited resources, a system of prioritisation and deployment management would prove helpful. While preventive deployment may be more valuable in the long-term, it may be limited by the need for SBT support in more urgent situations, at least until SBT capacity is increased.

## The evidence: Can the SBT's impact be evaluated?

### Deployment rates and strategic deployments

According to the deployment statistics available, we can observe an initial increase (from 2009-2010) followed by a continuous average deployment rate of around 50% for each SBT member (referring to deployments in the field). The remainder of SBT member time is spent at the desk, involving report-writing and provision of remote expertise, and, for colleagues based in New York, frequent interaction with colleagues at the DPA. As the deployments have increased in number and especially in duration, the MSU reports an overall increase of conflicting demands; relative availability has been constrained with already deployed experts often sought (simultaneously) for other deployments. An understanding

## Overview of SBT Deployments by Function\* (2008-15)

Theme	Security Arrangements	Water/Natural Resources	Process Support/Design	Constitutions	Power Sharing	Human Rights Transitional Justice	Gender	Land	Total
2008-2009	11	4	20	4	4	1	N/A	N/A	44
2009-2010	4	10	1	7	6	N/A	2	N/A	30
2011-2012	8	8	15	7	16	N/A	10	N/A	64
2012-2013**	6	6	4	5	4	N/A	4	N/A	29
2013-2014	16	9	36	13	20	N/A	10	N/A	104
2014-2015 (to date)	7	6	9	18	10	N/A	10	N/A	60
<b>Sub-Totals</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>331</b>

\*Numbers refer to days either in the field or home-desk work.

Includes repeat missions to same peace process.

\*\*Data only available until mid-2012

Reportedly, the tendency for increased and conflicting deployments and the management of deployments has evolved. Rather than having to 'sell' the team, as was the case in the initial phases of the project, MSU is moving from being a demandeur to becoming a selectioneur that allows it to be strategically selective. The basis for this selectiveness, however, is yet to be defined. This also allows deployment managers to shape requests so as to allow higher quality service and improve chances for success. Strategic deployment might take into account the role the UN would like to play in a particular process; it could also assist in securing the SBT member a solid space to perform in a way to maximise her/his inputs and outputs. This development begs questions of criteria and wider strategy, in light too of evolving DPA and broader UN priorities.



**Deployment Rate**  
 2008/09 -> 36%  
 2009/10 -> 57%  
 2010/11 -> 47%  
 2011/23 -> 58%  
**Average ≈ 50%**

Regarding the indicators of initial success, interviewees in the 2011 Report point out that it is critical to have access to the (UN) mediator and to the parties. Because of the fact that the MSU can now be more selective, such access should be more likely. It can also be more easily fulfilled due to three additional reasons: first, the fact that the MSU has developed a solid network of mediation actors (SRSGs, Heads of Missions, etc.); second, the growing self-confidence and renown of the experts; and, third, the improved performance of the MSU itself as a result of accumulated experience and developed systems. In this last respect, it is crucial to prepare well each mission to the maximum extent possible in the circumstances (including the compilation of a briefing file, engagement with the requesting client, assistance with the actual deployment, the formulation of the Terms of Reference, etc.); relevant procedures are now often a standard of best practice in the MSU.

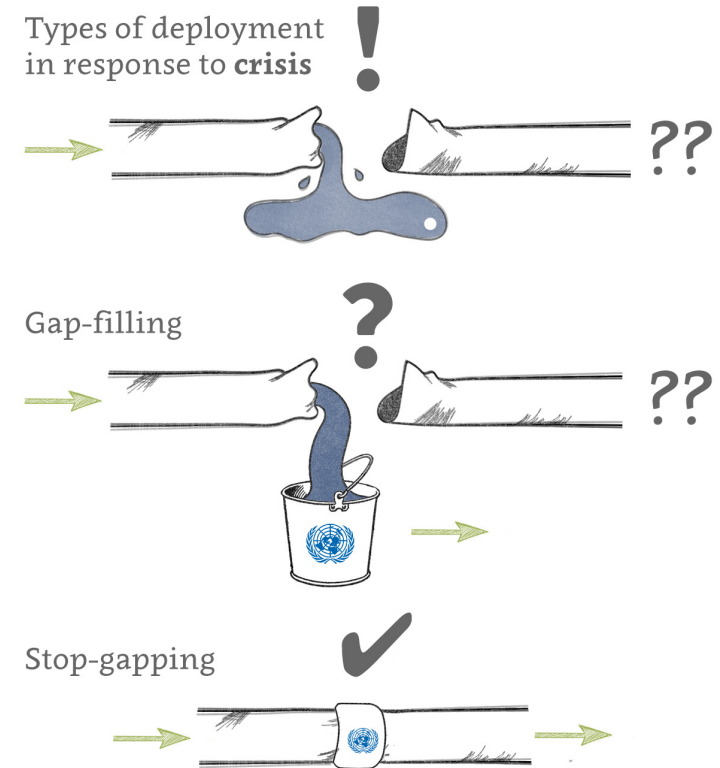
The aforementioned factors influencing a strategic deployment are worthy of reflection and discussion.

## Typologies of deployment

Another point of interest is an increasing tendency over the years for longer-term deployments. Since 2009, the number of long-term deployments has multiplied. One explanation for this is the fact that most of the SBT members of 2013 continued into 2014 and thus were able to build more solid relationships with actors/clients and then to re-deploy for longer time-periods. However, a review of the statistics shows an overall trend of deployment away from simple, ad hoc deployments to more longer-term assignments which involve a relationship-building role with the client on the ground. This arguably contributes to, and is evidence of, greater impact. As such, it is to be welcomed. But its implications should then be addressed.

Considering the data, one can distinguish between four different types of deployments that can be metaphorically compared to plumbing jobs:

- ✓ **Ad hoc** – quick fix deployments, mostly one-off, also desk research for specific focused questions or ‘testing the ground’. Examples: training, facilitation of an event, writing a paper, conferences etc.
- ✓ **Gap-filling** – temporarily filling a gap before a more permanent fixture is installed. For example, a crisis unfolds and a member of the SBT engages in a fact-finding mission. Or a DPA/DPKO mission is being planned, but a ‘woman on the ground’ is needed. Or the local UNDP office will open a PDA position, but in the meantime an SBT member might fill-in.
- ✓ **Stop-gapping** – permanently fixing a problem by provision of discrete technical expertise and/or facilitation to address problems. For example, providing essential advice on constitution-making or reform, being part of an inquiry or similar commission, designing a process or institutional arrangement, etc.
- ✓ **Playing a role/becoming part** of the fixture: experts have become an integral part of the team/process on the ground and, therefore, can be difficult to extract if the client becomes reliant on them. In such cases, the roles/deployments take on the character of permanency (and should probably best be filled by recruitment).



From a survey of the statistics, gap-filling and stop-gapping have become increasingly relevant for the SBT, moving away from the initial ad hoc method of deployment as the SBT was originally conceived to serve. Care might have to be applied that the SBT will not become a method for the client to access and consume “free” human resources where scarcity in missions exists, which has the danger of watering down (or thinning out in terms of capacity) the essential nature of the SBT.

The extension of contracts beyond one year is clear evidence of the SBT having more (relevant) deployments. According to the SBT members and other colleagues interviewed, relationships were deepened and their extended networks allowed them to have higher quality and impactful deployments.

## Evaluation?

As pointed out earlier, the initial idea of the Standby Team was a “set up to provide high level and specialised expertise which is not readily available within the UN system or for deployment in the field.” SBT members are contracted full-time for a period of 12 months, thus “at disposal fully and at all times on standby to be deployed within 72 hours for up to one month (renewable) to a specific location.”<sup>4</sup>

Whilst the initial idea and definition is still valid, there is a growing tendency for 12+ months (renewable) contracts, a tendency for longer stays on the ground (+1 month) and more rapid deployment (as short as 4 hours). The project seems to have over-performed, at the same time begging the question whether or not its initial purpose still holds or merits adjustment.

### The challenge of evaluating mediation support

In asking colleagues the question of ‘impact’, one gets answers and multi-faceted stories as diverse as the members of the SBT. Each deployment has purportedly made impact, some more, some less, always due to a range of conditions and contextual factors. Often, “claims of impact are not trustworthy”; while there are typically correlations, there is uncertain causality. Reported ‘impact’ ranges from modest claims of having encouraged/inspired youth activists in the

<sup>4</sup> Mediation Standby Team 2011 Evaluation Report, p. 3.



CAR to drafting a peace accord in Mali, to designing an architecture for a national dialogue, to training and coaching local or high-level mediators to achieve more inclusive peace processes, etc. The diversity of the cases means a diversity of impact, and diverse benchmarks with varying degrees. And in some cases “it is completely inappropriate to advertise impact” – which refers to the well-known (but here problematical) matters of ‘crediting’, confidentiality, etc. Furthermore, it is a fact that the UN is often “leading from behind”, supporting instead of leading (alone) peace processes, which makes it even more challenging to assess the impact of particular actors whether organisations or individuals (much less SBT members who come in-and-out).

At least since the writing of the first evaluation of the SBT, it has become increasingly clear that its impact or success is largely subjective, and due to its maturity and level of sophistication it cannot be fully assessed through an ‘OECD DAC-able’ linear logic assessment format. As much as we would like, the complexity of a peace process does not fit into such ready-made concepts or frames. Thus, assessment of the SBT should be more of an organic and nuanced activity.

Given the above considerations, the formula of “x times deployed” + “Client happy, MSU/NRC happy” is less relevant or appropriate for assessing success in the larger terms of the objectives of the SBT mechanism. Notably, a simple deployment statistic will not reveal the usefulness of a deployment, nor will the (mere) satisfaction of clients – although it is of course an important criterion. The reality of the essentially political work is more complex and uncertain, subject to a myriad of factors and vicissitudes, which exactly characterise by definition the conflict situations in which SBT members are deployed or otherwise engage. As such, an SBT member may not have ended up drafting a peace agreement, but he or she advised one or more parties about what a good process looks like and so substantially increased the chance of there eventually being a peace agreement; maybe the SBT member effectively supported the brokering of the peace agreement or a ceasefire but the agreement failed for some extraneous reason, or the process continued through an NGO-led dialogue.

In short: there is not one way to assess impact and success, and

almost any way must possess nuance to capture the existing complexity. Hence, an appropriate system of monitoring and evaluation of mediation support will have to be applied in a fluid, dynamic environment, more than simply a peer review and a grading sheet. This requires diligence in data collection, full transparency, honesty and discretion. It will require a ‘360 degree perspective’, looking at a variety of questions, rather than only benchmarks. It will require privileged access over time (which is problematical). And it will still require a certain dedicated management framework to make it operational. Nonetheless, whilst there is little conclusive evidence about the impact of the SBT, there is now an enormous wealth of experience and lessons learned, and a body of experience, which could be systematically (if not easily) assessed. The chances to learn from this will require targeted action and specific investment sooner than later. As the 10th anniversary of the mechanism approaches, and as the challenges evolve, this appears more merited.

## The 9th Principle of Mediation: Reflective Practice

If the Guidance for Effective Mediation had one more principle, it should be the need for reflective practice in peace mediation. In fact, reflective practice is a mediation tool in itself. Learning from one's own and others' experience(s) is not only important in terms of professional development, but also important to create an institutional memory and be able to analyse progress in the practice of support of peace mediation processes. Done together with actual actors, it can become an important tool for further re-conciliation.

Seven years after the inception of the SBT, we have learned little about the mechanism's own progress except through anecdotal references. The reason? The environment in which the SBT, the MSU and indeed the DPA operate is simply not one that lends itself to a reflective approach. Creating a learning system requires a stable, regular and patient support system that can work independently enough not to be affected by policy fluctuations or daily operations. Given the nature of the work coupled with the small size of the MSU, there has been virtually no capacity to allocate the time or other resources properly to capture, analyse and learn reflectively, and on an ongoing basis, from the evolving and accumulated experiences. As such, a special opportunity has so far been missed with the associated risks including, over time, to lose sight or forget (especially as SBT members depart). In the words of the philosopher Santayana, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it".

The challenge is not new (nor is it specific to the UN). Already in 2011, the evaluation report of the SBT noted “there was little opportunity to organise joint lessons-learned meetings beyond induction meetings”. Today one SBT member mentions: “it was frustrating that it seemed very difficult to express, share and learn from experiences both individual and collective”. Indeed, the MSU has organised mid-term and end-of-year retreats in order to address this, including overlaps between incoming and outgoing teams.

This is a laudable effort given its limited human resource base and dynamic operations. However, the relative return from these efforts in terms of developing institutional knowledge given the enormous amount of time (and thus money) invested for the SBT, the NRC and the MSU to organise such retreats/meetings begs the question of how to make more from these efforts. There have been, indeed, efforts to address the shortcoming of learning, through the writing and sharing of some case studies, presentations to HQ staff, etc. However, more could and should be done. The concern remains that the richness of experiences is not sufficiently captured, analysed or shared as a service for the international mediation support and, indeed, the donor community.

Whilst it is not the initial purpose of the SBT (nor the MSU) to provide for systematised and reflective learning, the lack of it entails that the overall goal for increased professionalisation in the field of mediation support for the UN and beyond cannot be fully met in the medium term. Without learning and sharing, the UN MSU will fail to capitalise on the lessons learned of the SBT, and its mediation competence will reach a ceiling. Although we recognise the Art of Mediation as a personal practice, in order to generate a culture of peace mediation across and beyond the UN including its future generation, the international community will have to invest to create a correct learning environment. Past and present members of the SBT have an enormous potential to contribute to development of such a culture and can provide a breeding ground of a rich learning community that will expand the practice of peace mediation and mediators and mediation support pro-

<sup>5</sup> For unitar’s work in this regard, developed over many years notably through its Peacemaking and Conflict Prevention Programme, see: <http://www.unitar.org/pmcp/>

professionals. This would bolster the efforts of, inter alia, UNITAR and DPA/PMD<sup>5</sup> in providing well-considered training courses and materials (for UN staff and others, including for SRSGs and similar senior-most officials). Furnishing trained professionals with access to materials from practice on an ongoing basis, and integrating training with ongoing practice in a continual learning framework, will contribute to individual and collective improvement in performance and help reach the shared objectives of peace.

Several approaches have been suggested: for example, the organisation of regular meetings of practitioners on a periodical basis; creating a learning community of practitioners and experts on each topic, assessing diverse responses, reflecting on the political challenges for the UN, but also on assumptions and metaphors that we assume as truth or accept as “received wisdoms” (e.g., as expressed by one interviewee, the assumption that conflict is linear, while peace is sequential).

The creation of such a learning system should, according to interviews and the stocktaking meeting, include:

- ✓ **Professional debriefings** – SBT members should be interviewed regularly, and especially at the end of their term, about their experiences. These interviews should be semi-structured and follow a supervisory technique practiced in the mediation field. (Cf UNITAR’s briefings of SRSGs). These briefings should be conducted by specialists outside the immediate system of SBT management. In addition, management of MSU and PMD, together with the SBT member, should identify the key moments for debriefings within a process or deployment context to capture lessons learned.
- ✓ **A Community of Practice** – With a view to maximising the accumulated knowledge of the unique group of past, present and future SBT members and associated MSU and NRC colleagues, there should be created an ongoing and dynamic community (which partly exists informally, but without express learning objectives). This could include meetings, such as a ‘practitioners’ retreat’. In particular, it may be of advantage to give SBT members the opportunity to meet on a yearly basis (or bi-annual basis) to exchange key lessons

learned from experiences and their individual and shared reflections thereon. These meetings could be, e.g., hosted by the institution of a former SBT member in order to assure confidences, and would be self-managed, except for travel costs. SBT members would take the opportunity to produce a report following the retreat, for use by the UN/donors. This would allow an institutionalisation of knowledge and know-how and the sustaining of a community of practice, also to be drawn upon as appropriate. This would also allow the SBT members on the roster to stay in touch with the on-going practice of the MSU/UN and so remain better equipped for possible engagements.

- ✓ **Creating a system for deployment management** – In order to understand the needs for deployment and the needs of a peace process, an effective method for collecting statistics needs to be defined and implemented. Although there is some good data available, overall it is not conclusive. With additional donor resources going into providing more materials for experts, a more efficient and nuanced quantitative monitoring is needed.
- ✓ **Developing a reliable, flexible evaluation method** – All of the above form part of a holistic evaluation method. For effective critical assessment and learning, an evaluation model for the SBT that can be easily adapted to their practice, with a view to maximum institutional learning and for overall reporting, would be of evident value.

The creation of such a learning system for the SBT will require extra resources, and does, in essence, constitute a project in itself. Both the MSU and the implementing partner – the NRC – need to devote additional human resources, both management and support, for this practice. In addition, these activities should be developed by specialists, and one institution should be entrusted with the knowledge management function. Several options should be explored. For example, it could be of advantage to entrust an institution close to the UN Headquarters, with long-term established links.

So what is the emerging consensus:  
we want more – for what and how?

From the discussions, stakeholder meeting and interviews, an emerging consensus has evolved: whilst the initial idea of the SBT concept still holds, its operational realities and context have evolved, and the SBT will have to evolve as well. There is a broad agreement as to the value-added of the SBT as a tool for mediation support within the UN structures managed in a hybrid fashion. The SBT has attained sufficient positive brand recognition, but the increased length and diversity of deployments have caused bottlenecks impacting negatively on the originally intended, classic ad hoc deployments. There is a need to uncouple conflicting demands between different types of requests for deployment.

Two consensual options to respond to the new realities observed are: 1. increase the size (i.e. number of members and possibly areas of expertise) of the team; and, 2. engage additional (former) SBT members on retainer contracts for continued advice and immediate access.

Such a development of the mechanism would allow the SBT to take on more diverse tasks, responding to the different types of deployment with different lengths and characters. In order to take advantage of deepening relationships over longer than a one-year contract, it would be of advantage to offer, as an option, longer-term temporary contracts for those who are in a position to take them and who are needed for longer-term engagements. Thus, instead of following the typical life cycle of a Standby Team (with all beginning and ending together), a more efficient and effective way would be to recruit members on a rolling basis. In effect, such an enlarged team would be an amalgamation of a standby and roster arrangement – amenable to more permutations in use and, as a whole, more effective in overall reach and impact. However, such a team would require additional dedicated management from both the sides of the NRC and the UN MSU, although there will be savings realised in terms of less time and other resources spent on induction and ‘marketing’ of the team alone. The savings from the transaction and real costs could be reinvested into learning and management.

## UN or Global Team?

The option whether a mediation team could be globalised beyond the United Nations exists, but does not fully materialise in the discussion or this review and report. It is observed that the SBT mechanism is available to, and has been used by, 'clients' outside the UN including regional intergovernmental organisations and specialised international NGOs. That may continue to be the case and possibly increased in use – although the UN system itself has been increasing demand. However, reconceptualising the SBT as a truly “global” team would have many implications for design, possibly composition, and likely management, and so it would merit a fundamental rethinking and likely re-haul of the original concept. This is not now proposed to be undertaken, but may merit reflection ahead and possible consideration upon the 10th anniversary of the SBT in light of global developments including in the practice of international peace mediation notably on the part of regional IGOS.

## Conclusions

In light of the above, there seems to be a general consensus that the SBT has met and possibly exceeded its original objectives and, in the face of persistent challenges of conflict, the SBT should be maintained and strengthened as a mechanism. In short, the UN SBT is necessary, valuable and appreciated. As the table below indicates, having in mind the evolution and future of the mediation field, the SBT has made an important contribution to peace and security by improving the practice of international peace mediation. Indeed, it has become a principal reference in the field, and a model of effective practice. Still, it can and should be boosted in its capacities to meet increasing and evolving demand.

The table below shows recommendations/accomplishments from the 2011 evaluation of the SBT and their relevance for today.

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Recommendation 2011	Accomplished?	Relevance 2014?
Continue semi-autonomous operation of the SBT with full ownership of the UN	Fully accomplished	Still high as the relative independence is seen as a clear value-added
Diversify donor support to ensure sustainability	Partly accomplished	If the budget is to increase for enlargement, very relevant. Multi-annual programmes would be advisable
Adopt benchmark for deployment and introduce a less quantitative and more qualitative system	Partly accomplished	Set up a learning system for a 360 Degree evaluation
Allow for sufficient real contact opportunity between UNDP and SBT	Fully accomplished especially with multi-annuals	Relevant
Provide the experts with sufficient resources to guarantee their efficiency	Substantially improved over the last 3 years	Worth exploring further, could be augmented through increased deployment support
Develop a policy or standard procedure and a code of conduct	UNDPA Policy Directive of 2012	Revision with a view for communicated code of conduct
Enhance gender parity and gender sensitivity	Considerable work has been done	Can still be better
Clarify principles of partner and role distribution	Clearer	Depending on the options, it would be of added value to explore whether the NRC could take on additional quality functions besides recruitment

## Recommendations

Accordingly, the following are a series of recommendations, arising from the stocktaking exercise, for the SBT, the UN MSU, the UN DPA, and the donors. They touch on the functions, the sustainability and quality, and the management of the SBT, as well as on operational issues important for the SBT members and on enhancing internal evaluation and accountability.

### Recommendations on functions

#### Recommendation 1

Keep the SBT as a high-level resource for (UN) Peace Processes

If the SBT did not exist, it would need to be invented. Whatever the options proposed above, the facility of having high-level experts that can be deployed flexibly is highly valuable. Their seniority comes from their expertise: according to one DPA client, the SBT members need to possess a “certain authority and expert power in order to be effective.”

## Recommendation 2

### Increase the size of the team whilst keeping strategic focus

UN DPA stresses the need for a bigger team with additional expertise to fulfil the many competing requests for use of the SBT. Indeed, it seems that the MSU has moved from a demandeur position in initially promoting the SBT service to one that now better strategically responds and carefully selects from deployment opportunities. This opportunity for strategic focus should be further analysed and reflected upon.

## Recommendation 3

### Widen the variety of expertise

The expertise currently provided within the SBT is varied, with process design, power-sharing and constitutional expertise being the most requested. There is no clear statistical evidence of the type of deployment logs nor clear-cut data on requests; a more thorough tracking and analysis of the typology of requests and the consequent services offered would be useful in order to offer specific recommendations. Some areas of additional expertise that have been mentioned as desirable to add include: expertise on questions surrounding territorial integrity/self-determination, federalisation; experts on transitional justice/dealing with the past in connection with rights of victims/women/children; economic governance; humanitarian access; conflict migration; psychological dimensions in mediation (body language/questioning techniques, etc.); training and coaching; etc.

## Recommendation 4

### Increase the preventive capacity of the team

According to Chapter IV of the UN Charter, one of the primary tasks of the UN is to engage in preventive activities against the outbreak of violence. The United Nations, through its vast network and field presence, is an adept observer, yet the international community continues to struggle to engage in providing early responses. It is considered of added value by many interlocutors, pro-actively to provide the expertise of SBT members also in these contexts: i.e., for conflict analysis,

organisation of mediation workshops, and working with Peace and Development Advisors on specific topics, working with local partners and simply being present for proactive advice during periods of growing tension and instability.

## Recommendation 5

### Empower facilitation expertise

Within the last seven years, and increasingly so, the facilitation expertise of SBT members has been appreciated by a number of actors. Whilst the experts are explicitly briefed that their role is to advise and assist senior UN staff members and other clients as assigned, individual members of the team have engaged in active, appreciated facilitation, such as in the Maldives, DRC, Kosovo, and CAR. This role requires the trust of its principals (i.e. senior UN officials), and the parties often appreciate the discreet and semi-detached nature of some of the SBT members, which helps them facilitate an agreement. This practice still leaves room for the different, more political engagement by the principals like SRGs, Envoys or other principals of the United Nations. Members of the SBT should be entrusted with a facilitation role in their terms of reference, especially process design experts. Their capacity to mediate and facilitate should be considered assets by UN senior officials.

## Recommendation 6

### Provide flexible mandates to allow SBT members to do their work efficiently

Members of the SBT are eager to do an efficient and effective job. For this to happen, they require mandates open enough for them to engage in effective fact-finding and accurate conflict analysis, and to be able to have discussions with important actors. Although there are always undoubtedly highly sensitive political relations and issues, SBT members are selected on the basis of attributes which exactly qualify them to know what kind of mandate they require in order to fulfil the task at hand, without affecting the status of the senior UN staff in charge of peace process management. (See also Recommendation 11)

## Recommendation 7

### Maintain the hybrid nature of the structure

The SBT's unique selling point is its flexibility and ability to play different roles in supporting United Nations and others' actions in peace mediation. Its semi-autonomous status is also advantageous in terms of nimbleness and other efficiencies as well as certain political terms.

It has been of added value to have the Norwegian Refugee Council managing the Standby Team mechanism. It is difficult to imagine that the MSU could absorb all the work implemented by the NRC – it would probably not be sustainable, either. This goes in particular for recruitment, which is a distinct reason for the SBT's success, but also the financial reporting, administration, support for travel arrangements, etc. In addition, the intimate proximity and accumulated experience and trust of the implementing agency could enable it to play a role in assisting with knowledge management (see also Recommendation 8). This caretaker system would also allow the SBT to focus exclusively on their substantive support function.

## Recommendations

### on increasing sustainability and quality

## Recommendation 8

### Adopt Mediation Guidance No. 9: Reflective Practice for Learning

Given the increased competence of actors in peace mediation, the SBT project might lose its added value and competitive edge without incorporating a system for learning. The SBT has so far not been used as a unique generator of knowledge and know-how for mediation practice – but it should be the case in the future. This applies less with regard to immediate lessons learned and the sharing that takes place at UN Headquarters (for which there are numerous opportunities), and more with regard to knowledge development that could contribute to institutional memory and professional and institutional development which should be part of any

such mediation practice and could be shared with the global mediation community to improve global practice. This type of approach does not suggest a static 'report writing' type of system or environment. It suggests reflective learning.

In this context, it is recommended that specific debriefing methodology be developed and applied for SBT members. In addition, in order to build a community of practice, SBT retreats (of present and past members) should be organised in a regular fashion – at least some periodic basis. This work can be partly outsourced to former SBT members. It would be advisable for knowledge management to be handed over either to the implementing agency, which could then on a yearly basis submit a lessons-learned report and support regular reviews, or this could be contracted to an independent specialist think tank/organisation that has working proximity with, and enjoys the full confidence of, the UN. Some combination could also be imagined. In any case, it is assumed that Policy and Mediation Divisions would be a close partner in this endeavour.

## Recommendations on management

## Recommendation 9

### Provide the SBT with a firm strategic concept, framework, and code of conduct

With its increased maturity, and to reflect a shift from creating demand for mediation to the UN's role of strategic engagement, it would be useful to review the overall Terms of Reference for the SBT, which should be based on the UN DPA Policy Directive on Mediation, its Policy framework and accompanied by a professional code of conduct. This would tie together the policy framework and directive with the professional practice element of the standby team. As such, it would clarify the exact scope and purpose of the team, its terms and conditions for deployment, and its role and function. Such a comprehensive approach and concept is a basis for donor commitment to the overall SBT project and will clarify relations with various actors in terms of roles and expectations.

## Recommendation 10

### Enlarge the team with multi-annual contracts on a rolling basis

The experience of extending contracts beyond one year has brought distinct advantages to improving the quality of deployments of the SBT. Networks can be better built, and there is less transaction and real costs from recruitment, which can be saved and invested in other areas of work. Experts and the MSU can be given the choice whether or not to extend contracts, providing a maximum of flexibility also for those who cannot commit to successive years of service, especially experts with children or holders of high-level positions. At the same time, in order to ensure certain continuity, it would be useful to stagger recruitment on a rolling basis. Such an option requires more attention to management of human resources (e.g., providing personal inductions etc.) and also team management to maximise learning. Money saved from the recruitment (presently consuming up to 7% of the total budget only for advertising costs) could be reinvested in this type of work.<sup>6</sup>

## Recommendation 11

### Adopt retainer contracts for mediation standby

Related to the above, and in order to ensure possible multi-annual commitment by experts, and to respond to the continued need of the MSU and actors in the field (including women and men with families/children), one consideration would be to offer retainer contracts to a number of experts, committing them to a certain percentage of their time for deployments. This seems to be also reasonable in light of the fact that the average deployment rate is around 50%. One approach is to allocate a budget for a limited amount of days of SBT members on a retainer for x amount of days per year (which could be replenished once these days might be used up).

<sup>6</sup> Mediation Standby Team 2011 Evaluation Report, p. 3.

## Recommendation 12

### Boost management capacity (both UN and implementing partner)

#### 12.1. Within the UN

Over the last 7 years, the size of the SBT gradually expanded from 5 to 8 members. The demand for deployment has reportedly increased exponentially (and there is numerous, although not systematically collected, evidence for this conclusion). Presently, there are one full-time P4 and one part-time P3 officer in charge of management and acting as a focal point for the SBT, whilst all other MSU staff members act as geographical focal points, liaising with SBT members. There is a net increase of staff working directly with the SBT. The increased operational workload of the MSU, however, makes the management of the SBT (in terms of preparation, briefing, and travel arrangements) a challenge. This raises also the question of whether more senior staff within the MSU could take up some of the assignments that SBT members have been typically taking up that are not considered essential mediation support activities (a question beyond the immediate scope of this review, but worth reflecting upon and requiring appropriate management).

Especially at a moment when the practice of mediation support and the work of the MSU are maturing from a responsive to a strategic focus it is worth increasing the resources for the SBT, to help it engage in proficient deployments and enhance its chances of mitigating and resolving conflict. Strategic deployment management entails improved information management, the creation of a learning system, and supporting and enhancing the overall capability of UN mediation support. These require additional levels of analysis and flexibility, which are resource dependent but should yield substantial dividends. In addition, the SBT should not be clouded by the 'urgent', but seek to respond to crucial, underlying elements that take time and require closer attention.

### 12.2 Within the implementing agency

The increasing size of the SBT has increased the pressure on the project manager in terms of recruitment, travel arrangements, and administration. This also means the project manager has little time for effective 'people management', or to ensure adequate collection of statistics, systematic evaluations etc. It would be of definitive advantage to support this management function of the NRC further, also to allow for systematic collection and presentation of deployment data and the creation and facilitation of the establishment and administration of a monitoring and evaluation system for the SBT. The manager could also act as coordinator/repository for knowledge management, including the organisation and support of learning retreats.

## Recommendations on operational issues important for the SBT Members

On the operational level several concerns continue to be voiced by the experts as critical issues affecting their successful practice (also spelled out in the 2011 report).

### Recommendation 13

#### Improve travel conditions

Economy travel, especially overnight and/or over long distances (sometimes with several transits), to a location where the expert will be working upon arrival is difficult to bear, harmful to health and negatively affects effectiveness. If the expert cannot travel in advance for sufficient recovery, donors should consider, as a minimum, funding travel in Business Class when the situation demands it.

### Recommendation 14

#### Title the SBT Members "Advisors" instead of "Experts"

Several experts voice the advantages of not being labelled an 'expert' but rather an 'advisor'. Others even mention the advantage of not having 'mediation' written on their business card – given various presumptions, which accompany the term. This might be situation-specific, but it is worth considering changing the SBT title to 'advisor', which gives an impression of more proactiveness and engagement and is somewhat more amorphous and less audacious and prejudicial notably in situations where the 'expert' is arriving for the first time. This might be even more relevant for process design functions and constitution-making or reform processes.

### Recommendation 15

#### Adopt a Professional Code of Conduct

As indicated above and stressed by the SBT members themselves, a code of conduct, spelling out the standards of professional conduct – sourced both from the UN DPA Policy Directive for the SBT and the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation based on the UN General Assembly Resolution on "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution" (A/RES/65/823), will provide SBT members and clients with an 'insurance policy' for their professional practice – instilling greater confidence on the part of clients – and, at the same time, advance standards of professional practice in peace mediation in general.

## Recommendations on enhancing internal evaluation and accountability

### Recommendation 16

#### Improve accountability to the donors

The multiple and hopefully growing number of donors, as well as MSU and NRC, would benefit from a unified approach to the SBT that includes somewhat fuller and shared reporting systems. An annual meeting with all donors could be established to respond together to issues and ensure a shared understanding of the state of the mechanism, developments, needs, etc. In that vein, donors should coalesce around one multi-annual (e.g., 3 years) SBT concept, one SBT budget, with the same corresponding rules, and thus consequently the same reporting. Such an approach should be actively encouraged and endorsed, also to reduce unnecessary transaction costs.

### Recommendation 17

#### Set-up a monitoring and evaluation system

The MSU, together with other knowledge management partners, should develop or be part of the development of a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system for international peace mediation, to increase overall knowledge development essential for the advancement of the mediation practice and capacity of the international community, and also for overall accountability. An M&E method should be tailored for the SBT. This goes hand-in-hand with the reflective learning proposed above, and would become an important tool for tracking, learning and further development.

## Coda

As stipulated at the outset of this paper, the UN Standby Team of Mediation Experts is now a known reference and established brand in the field of international peace mediation and mediation support. This synthesis report captures the essence of the main arguments surrounding UN mediation support through the use of the SBT. The authors are well aware that mediation support of the UN is inescapably subject to an intricate and sensitive political context, which is assumed in this analysis but may not be fully reflected. In the interests of conciseness, the political essence of the work has not been elaborated. Suffice to say, the validity and ultimate credibility of the SBT and its work turns on a keen understanding of the political realities at multilateral levels and in each situation.

It is also acknowledged that each of the recommendations presented here is relevant to the SBT and would entail the development of sub-projects to be developed and implemented within the evident context. In this respect, it goes without saying that sufficient resources – human, material and financial – need to be dedicated to fulfil the management dimensions of ‘better, bigger, more flexible, and more knowledgeable’.

# Annex I – Interviewed Stakeholders

**Emma Jackson**

Recruiter, Norwegian Refugee Council  
*Interview, 15 October 2014*

**Robert Dann, Chief, and Stephen Jackson**

Team leader of the Mediation Support Unit  
*Interview 16 October 2014*

**Jos de la Haye**

Team Leader, UNDP Lebanon  
*Semi-structured Interview, 16 October 2014*

**Christina Murray**

Member of the SBT  
*Interview and filled in questionnaire, 17 October 2014*

**Gjermund Sæther**

UN Department, Norwegian MFA  
*Interview, 17 October, 24 October and 12 January 2014*

**Sven Koopmans**

Member of the SBT  
*Interview, 17 October 2014*

**Maria Sommardahl**

Manager, Norwegian Refugee Council  
*Interview, 21 October and 30 October 2014*

**Jeff Mapendere**

Member of the SBT  
*Interview, 21 October 2014*

**Malgorzata Wasilewska, Thomas Henning, and Michal Miller**

European External Action Service, Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments Division  
*Interview 22 October 2014*

**Pierre Yves Monette**

Former member of the SBT  
*Interview 24 October 2014*

**François Grignon**

Teamleader, DPA, Africa I  
*30 October 2014*

**Andrew Ladley**

Former Sbt member  
*Filled Questionnaire*

**Graciela Tapiola**

Former Sbt member  
*Filled Questionnaire*

**Óscar Fernández Taranco**

Assistant Secretary General of the UN  
*Interview, 29 December 2014*

**Julian Davis**

Team Leader of the SBT  
*Interview, 29 December 2014, 29 January 2015*

**Benedicte Giæver**

Director for Expert Deployment/NORCAP, Norwegian Refugee Council  
*Interview, 13 January 2014*

**Elisabeth Mustorp**

Head of Section, Peacebuilding and Resilience at the Norwegian Refugee Council  
**Benedicte Giæver, Maria Sommardahl**  
*Focus group discussion, 12 January 2014*

**Gjermund Sæther, Arne Jan Flølo**

Senior Advisor, Peace and Reconciliation, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
*Focus Group discussion, 12 January 2015*

**Jan Egeland**

Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council  
*Interview, 13 January 2015*

# Annex II – Participants at the Oslo Stocktaking Event

**Ms. Tone Allers**

Director, Section for Peace and Reconciliation, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Ms. Rina Amiri**

Process Design, Gender and Social Inclusion Expert, Standby Team

**Ms. Sanam Anderlini**

former Gender Expert, Standby Team

**Ms. Kjersti Andersen**

Director General, Department for UN and Humanitarian Affairs, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Mr. George Anderson**

Former Natural Resources and Federalism Expert, Standby Team

**Ms. Delphine Bost**

Senior Officer, Donor Relations, DPA

**Mr. Michael Brown,**

Natural Resources Expert, Standby Team

**Mr. Robert Dann**

Chief, Mediation Support Unit, Department of Political Affairs

**Mr. Julian Davis**

Political Affairs Officer, Mediation Support Unit, DPA

**Mr. Özkan Duman**

Head of Section, Directorate General for Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey

**Mr. Jan Egeland**

Secretary General, Norwegian Refugee Council

**Mr. Jeffrey Feltman**

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs

**Mr. Arne Jan Flølo**

Senior Adviser, Section for Peace and Reconciliation, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Ms. Benedicte Giæver**

Director for Expert Deployment/NORCAP, Norwegian Refugee Council

**Mr. Kenneth Gluck**

Director and Deputy Head of Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), United Nations

**Mr. Tore Hattrem**

Director General, Department for Regional Affairs and Development, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Mr. Nicholas Haysom**

Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Afghanistan,

**Ms. Katrin Hett**

Political Affairs Officer, Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, DPA

**Mr. Juan Jeannet Arce**

Political Affairs Officer, Mediation Support Unit, DPA

**Mr. Frank Johansen**

Civilian Capacity Advisor Norwegian Refugee Council

**Ms. Nirina Kiplagat**

Programme Specialist, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, United Nations Development Programme

**Mr. Sven Koopmans**

Process Design Expert, Standby Team

**Mr. Andrew Ladley**

Former Constitutions Expert,  
Standby Team

**Ms. Lauratuulia Lehtinen**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
of Finland

**Mr. Jeffrey Mapendere**

Security Arrangements Expert,  
Standby Team

**Ms. Christina Murray**

Constitutions Expert,  
Standby Team

**Ms. Elisabeth Mustorp**

Head of Peacebuilding and Resilience  
Section, Norwegian Refugee Council

**Mr. Marc Otte**

Ambassador, Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs of Belgium

**Mr. John Packer**

Facilitator and former Process Design and  
Constitutions Expert, Standby Team

**Mr. Bård Glad Pedersen**

State Secretary, Norwegian  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Mr. Gjermund Sæther**

Senior Adviser, Section for UN Policy,  
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Mr. Daniele Senzanonna**

Programme Manager,  
European Commission

**Ms. Maria Sommardahl**

Project Manager, Mediation Support Unit,  
Norwegian Refugee Council

**Ms. Leni Stenseth, Director**

Section for UN Policy,  
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Ms. Petra Storstein**

Head of Donor Support Section  
Norwegian Refugee Council

**Mr. Wegger Strømmen**

Secretary General, Norwegian  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Mr. Miguel Varela**

Mediation Support Assistant,  
mediatEUr

**Mr. Francesc Vendrell**

Mediator-in-Residence,  
Department of Political Affairs

**Mr. Neal Walker**

Resident Coordinator in Ukraine,  
United Nations Development Programme

**Ms. Malgorzata Wasilewska**

Head of Division, Conflict Prevention,  
Peacebuilding and Mediation Instru-  
ments, European External Action Service

**Mr. Jan Erik Wilhelmsen**

Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource  
Centre

**Ms. Marie-Joëlle Zahar**

Power-Sharing Expert, Standby Team



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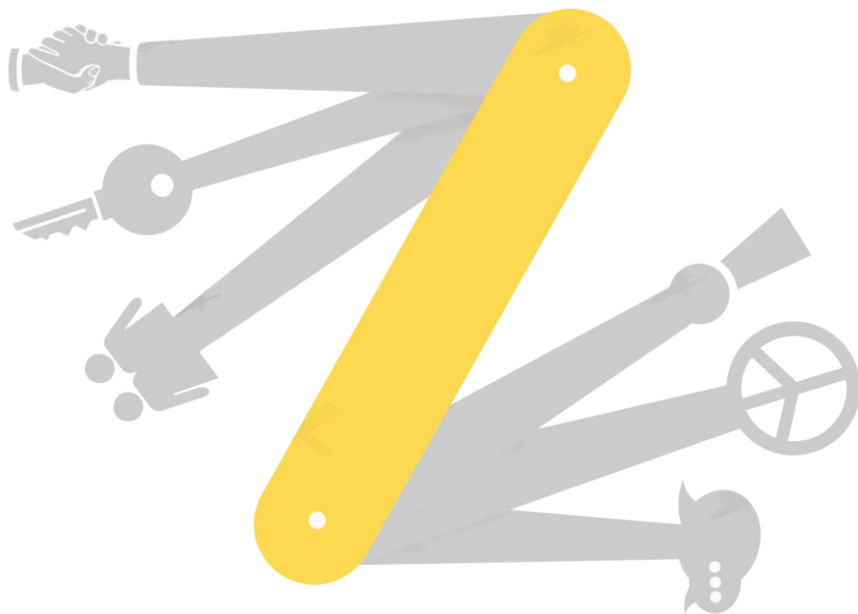
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