



Wilton Park



Image: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe;

Conference report

Promoting effective international peace operations in increasingly complex environments

Sunday 15 – Tuesday 17 June 2014 | WP1336

In association with:

NYU | CENTER ON
CIC | INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION

With support from:



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



UTENRIKSDEPARTEMENTET

Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs





Conference report

Promoting effective international peace operations in increasingly complex environments

Sunday 15 – Tuesday 17 June 2014 | WP1336

This meeting was held in partnership with the Center for International Cooperation, New York University, and with support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Ministry of Defence (Policy and Strategic Department). At a time when the United Nations (UN) is conducting, or supporting, an unprecedented range of military/police and civilian political missions in increasingly challenging environments, the conference sought to make a strategic reassessment of UN operations, their political basis, planning, transition, exit and use of force, as well as conditions when the UN should act in structured partnerships to fulfil critical mission capabilities. The meeting took place the week following an announcement to the Security Council by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon that he has asked the Secretariat “to initiate work on a review of United Nations peacekeeping”.

Key points

- In responding to complex violent conflicts the UN should use the range of its instruments, and develop these further. The Security Council should focus more on conflict prevention.
- Peace operations are to support effective political processes. The distinction between peacekeeping and Special Political Missions should be ended and all should come under the rubric of peace operations; there is a need to address the boundaries in the UN Secretariat.
- The importance of mandates: peacekeepers are being increasingly mandated to operate in complex environments with asymmetric and unconventional threats, including where there is no peace to keep. Mandates need to be broad, to include both military and civilian tasks, and the process should be inclusive of the host government and civil society. But mandates also need to be realistic, rather than over-ambitious, flexible and adequately resourced. Implementation is key and should be approached sequentially.
- The importance of planning: starting with political analysis, bringing in external expertise, engaging national actors, governmental but also civil society, especially women, and marginalised groups, and looking to coordinating contributions from international financial institutions, regional organisations and others. There is a need to plan for what can be delivered with the resources

available and for flexibility to change in response to developments. Peace support operations should be needs-driven.

- Protection of civilians is crucial to political success. There is no common view on how concepts like robust peacekeeping and the protection of civilians should be implemented. Robust peacekeeping must be part of a broader political strategy of a peacekeeping operation. It requires improved capabilities, political will and leadership.
- Speed of deployment, mobility and adaptability are key capabilities for effective peacekeeping operations. Introduction of advanced technology, which is more than unmanned aerial vehicles, is an opportunity to do peacekeeping better.
- Tensions remain in partnerships between some regional organisations and the UN, in particular the African Union, and among African organisations. Effective peace operations partnerships also need agreement on strategic priorities, a common objective, and a division of labour, using everyone's strengths.
- The review of peacekeeping operations represents a major opportunity for a comprehensive and strategic assessment of peace support operations, encompassing the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Department of Field Services (DFS) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). It should involve Troop/Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs). It would best be assigned to an external, independent and expert group.

Global strategic context and international crisis management

1. The UN currently operates in an increasingly complex environment in its multiple efforts to assure peace and security. Conflicts are often more intractable and long-lasting than in earlier periods, and, in some cases, weak states repeatedly relapse into conflict. They are marked by transnational and regional dimensions, as well as the intermingling of organised crime, international terrorism and political extremism. They include asymmetric and unconventional threats, with growing risks for UN and other personnel in such volatile environments. At the Security Council, there are renewed tensions among the P5, a further complication, while some host governments have not been helpful in supporting UN deployments. All this is taking place against the background of financial austerity and considerations of cost-reduction. Peace support operations have evolved significantly in recent years in response to these challenges. While there is complete agreement no single template fits all operations, and the diversity in peace support operations now apparent can be seen as a source of strength, there is also concern that as UN missions become more varied the organisation may overreach and take on tasks for which it is operationally and politically ill-prepared. There is a need to develop a broader strategy for anticipating, understanding and responding to future crises.

The politics and planning of peace operations

2. UN operations are increasingly being deployed in environments where violence is ongoing, and there is no clear political framework or roadmap in place to support. In such circumstances, it is key for a mission to focus its early efforts on assisting the parties to establish a basic roadmap for peace, emphasising a good offices role and working to promote dialogue as well as protect civilians. It is argued that promoting political dialogue is a core task of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who should ensure the political dimension is at the centre of a mission's role. Despite the Security Council endeavouring in recent instances to promote a phased or prioritized approach to mission mandates, some question whether the UN uses its different tools well sequentially.
3. Can the tools for mission design, based on improved analysis of a conflict or evolving

situation, be strengthened? Planning a mission has to start with analysis and understanding of the political context, looking at scenarios and identifying risks, bringing in external expertise, including from academic specialists non-governmental organisations. There is also a need to engage national actors, both the government and civil society, especially women and marginalised groups. Regional organisations and international financial institutions can also contribute their expertise, and the comparative advantage of respective roles should be considered. There needs to be a realistic assessment of resources to identify what the mission can reasonably deliver, and the involvement of potential troop contributing countries from the outset. While recommendations for deployment will be reached through this process, these should be open to revision once a mission has been deployed, and thereafter: many feel there is a need for greater flexibility in mission design to be able to adapt to ongoing developments.

4. Within the UN system a number of obstacles are seen to impede such an approach. The UN's expertise in some situations is limited, and there is no sustained use of external expertise. DPA has a brief for continuous monitoring, while DPKO examines a situation only when there is a crisis. A collective strategic analytical capability for the Secretariat would be advantageous. The distinction between peacekeeping and SPMs is felt to be artificial; their separate management and funding arrangements makes for a dysfunctional approach. Missions are generally planned as a whole from the outset, which limits engagement with national authorities. Yet even if more flexibility could be introduced into mission design, financing arrangements, in particular the role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACBQ) would be an impediment to revising mission planning.
5. Long-term options for improving mission planning could include restructuring the Secretariat, so that political expertise could be applied continuously, as well as ending the distinction between peacekeeping and special political missions. Since the latter measure would entail financing SPMs from assessed contributions rather than the regular budget, opposition of permanent members of the Security Council who fear having to pay more would have to be overcome. There is strong support, however, for the review of peacekeeping announced by the Secretary-General to address both political and technical issues, encompassing both peacekeeping and SPMs, and their funding arrangements. In the shorter-term, it is suggested that strategic planning for missions could be better coordinated if a senior official from outside DPA and DPKO could be mandated by the Secretary-General to head an inter-departmental and inter-agency team. Similar arrangements could also review existing missions facing critical developments.
6. Some question the timeliness of international action. It is argued that acting early, to prevent conflict, could be much less costly for the international community. Conflict prevention is felt to be insufficiently understood and considerably under-resourced at the UN. For example, some 90% of funding for DPA's Mediation Support Unit comes from outside the UN's regular budget. Whether political will exists among member states to invest in conflict prevention seems a moot point. It requires addressing root causes, such as human rights and corruption. Better information exchange between the Security Council and donors to development could help in improving insight into conflict prevention, and more timely action.

Mandates and defining what the UN can achieve

7. There has been much recent debate about the increasing scope of Security Council mandates, outlining ambitious goals for political and social progress, and whether these have become too broad for a mission realistically to deliver. Is it the dynamics of the Security Council, where member states have differing definitions of what constitutes consolidation of the state, which leads to the creation of large mandates? Some argue that while peacebuilding should be better integrated into the mandate and mission, the

peacebuilding programme should nevertheless be narrower and essentially cover only what is needed for a political process to take place. Civilian capacities in particular are seen to be insufficient for an ambitious agenda.

8. At the same time, despite the breadth, it is argued that identifying this range of tasks is not superfluous or inherently unrealistic; it reflects what is needed to provide support to peacebuilding. The key is in implementation. A mission cannot undertake at the same time all the tasks it is mandated to fulfil. This requires prioritisation and a phased approach to implementation, based on benchmarks, or mutual commitments with the host government. It entails accurate and timely reporting from the mission on what has been achieved and what not; this has not always been the case, which does not help mandate-setting. Prioritising and phasing are also relevant in terms of mission capacity; a mission has to tailor its action to its resources. Mandates create expectations, and these have to be managed, including for the Security Council itself. It is suggested that efforts should be made to improve discussion with TCCs at the time of setting mandates, as well as tap into the expertise of regional organisations earlier.
9. Despite continuing efforts, integrating activity across the UN system so that UN actors go beyond working in parallel to undertaking genuinely joined up approaches is hard, but the relationship between missions and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) assumes special importance for mission draw down and planning for transition. While the main responsibilities, such as security, are to transition to the government, there is a need to maintain support for activities such as governance and strengthening of democratic institutions, rule of law and land reform. A radical departure from current policy, some suggest, could be to invite staff of the principal UN partners who are expected to sustain longer-term activities to integrate within mission components at the outset, when the mission is established, or when these activities are included in the mandate.

The use of force and threats to peace operations

10. Calibrating the use of force to the demands of a peace process and the realities on the ground is a constant challenge, and one which has gained renewed urgency in the recent past. Employed as a tactical tool, the use of force should be wielded as and when necessary; it derives utility from being employed in support of a political process or framework that will eventually contribute to greater stability and peace. At the same time, there is no black and white answer to when and how to use force. It must be examined on a case-by-case basis. The use of force in self-defence is largely uncontroversial; the confusion arises when pro-active, offensive actions are required to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, when interpretation of the mandate is required. There is little common understanding of what the protection of civilians means in practice.
11. There appears broad agreement in the Security Council that the protection of civilians is a priority task for most missions. The Security Council mandate, while requiring a mission to protect civilians, provides the mission with parameters rather than specific instructions; it is for the mission leadership, and Force Commander in particular, to decide how to fulfil this mandate.
12. Effective protection of civilians, through robust peacekeeping, requires troops on the ground to identify the threats to civilians, and to take action to prevent or pre-empt atrocities from happening. This needs a thorough understanding of the environment through a responsive, all-source intelligence network. Developing such an intelligence capacity is relatively new to the UN and a delicate issue for the host government, and other member states. It also requires technical equipment and expert support as well as cultural and linguistic familiarity. There is also a need to have reasonable air and ground mobility. Most importantly, the troops on the ground must have the mind-set, the will, the leadership and individual initiative actively to find those threatening or attacking civilians.

13. A mandate is only as strong as the will of the senior leadership and the TCCs to implement it. The creation, and success, despite some reservations, of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates well the challenges of robust peacekeeping, in particular the readiness of some commanders and TCCs and the reluctance of others to implement their mandate to the fullest extent. There was serious concern the FIB would risk making the UN a party in the conflict, undermining its impartiality, and increasing the danger of direct attacks on both peacekeepers and other UN personnel. Yet deployment of the FIB is generally recognised to have changed the dynamics in DRC and reinvigorated both Congolese troops and the rest of the peacekeeping mission. Rather than use the FIB as a precedent to establish separate units within a peacekeeping force specifically willing to use force if needed, it is argued there should be a clearer definition and understanding of robust peacekeeping in practice, and no artificial distinction between which peacekeepers may, as a last resort, use force to implement the mandate.
14. Among some TCCs there is concern that consultation with them, when establishing the FIB, was inadequate, resulting in strong reservations among policy-makers in these countries' capitals for their contingents to take on robust tasks. Others also recognise that to enable robust peacekeeping to evolve in implementing mandates in volatile environments there needs to be improved dialogue with TCCs. It is suggested a discussion at highest political level in TCC capitals with the UN's senior peacekeeping leadership is the only place where policy issues like what risks TCCs are willing to take should be addressed. Casualties in peacekeeping can always be exploited in domestic politics, and politicians need to be convinced.
15. Robust peacekeeping is not only a matter of political will, but ability to act. A more concerted investment in pre-deployment training would help in this, with DPKO providing more clarity and guidance on the use of force, explaining mandates and rules of engagement better, and using scenario training situations. Improving military leadership in the field, a key factor, also needs sustained training efforts.
16. There is little appetite for UN involvement in situations of high intensity conflict, where there are greater risks of casualties, and organisations like NATO or the African Union are generally better placed. A peace enforcement mandate by the Security Council is generally seen as overstepping the limits of UN peacekeeping and the key principles on which it is based. Peacekeeping is not counter-insurgency, nor is it counter-terrorism, although the intermingling of terrorist and militia groups in some situations poses difficult distinctions. Some suggest, however, that it is time for the UN to have a strategy with respect to transnational Islamist groups like Al-Qaeda, whether this is containment, or use of force against them, or developing political strategies.

Partnerships in peace operations

17. Contemporary demands on peace operations make cooperation vital between international, regional, sub-regional and national actors, both governmental and civil society. No single institution can deal with the range of security challenges. Different partners bring different strengths, and working in partnership can also broaden the resource base. Regional organisations are seen as being closer to the ground, and may in some cases bring greater legitimacy. There is a willingness of the African Union to deploy in situations where there is no peace to keep. After more than a decade of UN collaboration with the African Union (AU) on peace and security issues, it is suggested a clearer framework for this partnership is needed, so that political, operational and administrative cooperation can be established in advance of a crisis and there can be joint planning to deliver the most effective collective response. There have been strains in the UN-AU relationship: over issues of leadership, for example in the transition in the Central African Republic from an AU mission to UN one; on burden-sharing in Mali; and on interoperability and technical standards in Darfur, where there are also differences on strategic approach.

18. NATO has also played a major role in peace operations in recent years, primarily through its large-scale deployment in Afghanistan. Increasingly multiple organisations are working together, and in parallel, addressing distinct, yet interconnected, issues to consolidate stability and build functioning states. This requires dialogue between the organisations involved, clear definition of the respective roles, taking account of comparative advantages, as well as definition of the relationship between organisations, to avoid both duplication and gaps. It is no easy task. Standardisation of procedures is also important for effectiveness in the field. One way in which it is suggested this could be done is through a generic Operations Plan, a mechanism for the formalisation of partnerships. While needing to be highly adaptable to different situations, it could still include a list of clearly defined strategic priorities and objectives, and the means to reach them. Effective peace operations partnerships also need political will, a common objective, and a division of labour, using everyone's strengths.

Resources and funding

19. With peacekeeping at a turning point not only in the pace at which missions are being established, and their scope, but also the nature of the environments in which they are deployed, the current annual funding requirement for peacekeeping is expected to surpass eight million US dollars. Yet this is some 16% lower than five years earlier, per capita of uniformed personnel and adjusted for inflation, as a result of sustained cost reduction efforts. Economies should not impact effectiveness, or compromise the security and safety of UN personnel. It is argued that the figure of eight million dollars is an artificial ceiling considering the need; the international community must be willing to back their decisions to establish missions and increase mandates with the necessary resources. The growing complexity of peacekeeping operations means that they cannot be resourced at minimal levels, either in terms of numbers or capabilities.
20. The UN is hugely reliant on the global south for troops, and there is a need to update and improve the regime of reimbursement for troop costs. Some European Union member states have recently made significant contributions to specific missions. With the drawdown in Afghanistan, however, the UN needs greater European engagement, in particular the niche and enabling capabilities available in Europe. These include engineers, helicopters, airlift, medical capabilities and modern technologies. For the complex environments in which missions are deploying, there is also a need for TCCs and Police Contributing Countries (PCCs) to provide higher quality of equipment as contingent owned equipment.
21. Ensuring speedy deployment and nimble operations is a major concern given UN recruitment and budgetary procedures, which are the same whether deploying to the field or headquarters. It is suggested there should be a trigger mechanism to enable a waiver to following the standard procedures, as occurs for humanitarian crises. At times, however, the host government may create barriers for rapid deployment. It is suggested that greater interoperability between missions would make best use of limited military capabilities and other mission resources. Yet inter-mission cooperation does not work well at present and needs to improve. While it may become a valuable tool for rapid temporary deployments to support a mission in crisis, it will likely struggle to deliver large-scale reinforcement for protracted periods. 'Rehatting' troops is a challenge too. Forces may not meet UN standards of capability and self-sustainment, there are different rules of engagement and command and control structures, and a need for human rights screening. Bilateral assistance plays a major role in bringing troops up to the required standard of training and provision of necessary equipment.
22. While new TCCs are coming on board, there is a need to reinforce the working relationships between the Security Council, TCCs/PCCs and the Secretariat. The newly established Office of Peacekeeping Strategic Partnerships should help in this. To help force generation, there is a need for more in-depth and sustained discussions, with a focal point in DPKO for continuity in support to all TCCs/PCCs. The system needs to do

better to recruit quality civilians. With mandates covering rule of law issues, there is an urgent necessity to review the UN's civilian deployment mechanisms.

Conclusion

There is a real need for change, a strategic shift, in how the UN conducts its peace support operations. The organisation cannot continue on a basis of 'muddling through'. The planning and mandating of missions must improve, to enable needs-driven operations. There is broad agreement on the need for connectivity between peacekeeping and SPMs despite the divisions in the Secretariat. Member states should press for change.

There are tensions on robust peacekeeping and the protection of civilians, and in partnerships between the UN and other organisations, particularly the AU, and among organisations in Africa. There need to be capacities built at the regional level, and a strategic way to take forward the partnership with the AU. The dilemmas on funding peace support operations need to be addressed, at the same time as reviewing investment in conflict prevention. The Secretary-General has set out a broad context for the review he announced on 11 June 2014. The nature of the times demands this should take a strong strategic approach and not only examine technical issues. The review would best be undertaken by an independent panel external to the organisation; it should be given time to reach its findings and not hurried.

Isobelle Jaques

Wilton Park | July 2014

Wilton Park reports are brief summaries of the main points and conclusions of a conference. The reports reflect rapporteurs' personal interpretations of the proceedings – as such they do not constitute any institutional policy of Wilton Park nor do they necessarily represent the views of the rapporteur.

Should you wish to read other Wilton Park reports, or participate in upcoming Wilton Park conferences, please consult our website www.wiltonpark.org.uk

To receive our e-newsletter and latest updates on conferences subscribe to <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/newsletter/>