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CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Keeping or Building Peace?
The Challenges of Solving Armed Intra-state Conflicts

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The world faces old and new security challenges that are more complex than our multilateral and national institutions are currently capable of managing. International cooperation is ever more necessary in meeting these challenges. The NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC) works to enhance international responses to conflict, insecurity, and scarcity through applied research and direct engagement with multilateral institutions and the wider policy community.

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Keeping or Building Peace?

The Challenges of Solving Armed Intra-state Conflicts

On 11 June 2014, the UN Secretary-General, speaking in the UN Security Council, expressed his concerns about what he perceived as unprecedented violence and complexity facing present UN peacekeeping operations around the world. He suggested a thorough review of all UN peace operations was necessary¹; this paper is intended to make a contribution to this review.

The Secretary-General's concerns were triggered by a number of recent setbacks in peacekeeping operations and by repeated attacks on UN peacekeeping operations that resulted in the deplorable deaths and injuries to a number of peacekeepers.² He gave three problem areas as the reasons for this adverse situation: (i) *UN peacekeeping was increasingly mandated to operate where there is no peace to keep*; (ii) *some UN peacekeeping operations are being authorized in the absence of clearly identifiable parties to the conflict or a viable political process* and (iii) *UN peacekeeping operations are increasingly operating in more complex environments that feature asymmetric and unconventional threats*.³

The Secretary-General was no doubt right in listing those three problem areas, but they are not the reasons for the difficulties that peacekeeping is facing today. This paper argues that the reason for these difficulties is that peacekeeping, a tool that had been developed to help end inter-state wars, is now being used to solve also intra-state conflicts. And although the operational environments in intra-state armed conflicts were now vastly different from those of inter-state wars, UN peacekeeping had never sufficiently been adjusted to enable it to deal with such new situations. Not only that, intra-state conflicts needed more complex responses than peacekeeping could offer.

The solution that the paper suggests, is to develop instead *a comprehensive peacebuilding approach*⁴ to enable the UN to intervene more effectively in fragile countries with intra-state conflicts. Such a comprehensive peacebuilding approach would not only have to continue to include

important security components but go beyond this and include political, judicial, humanitarian and development components. Such a solution would have to involve the entire UN system. In this, peacekeeping would remain an important but in no way the only component of such comprehensive peacebuilding operations. So far, the fragmentation of the UN system and its different aims and operating principles prevented such an integrated approach.

The new global challenge: failing states with internal armed conflicts

When the Secretary-General spoke at the Security Council, only Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the then Jordanian permanent representative⁵, dissented and stated that UN peacekeeping operations in the past "*were just as complex as anything we face today*"⁶. Prince Zeid was, of course, right; the problems UN peacekeeping is facing today are nothing new. We only have to remember the problems of UN peacekeeping missions in Angola, Somalia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Rwanda and Sierra Leone that made headlines and brought UN peacekeeping to the edge of collapse. And the list of UN peacekeeping missions that were and are in trouble is even longer.

The problems that the Secretary-General had listed to plague UN peacekeeping had started with the end of the Cold War in 1990. This is ironic, as this was a time of great hope for a new world order that would bring peace and prosperity to all the people around the world. With the end of the East-West antagonism this seemed now possible. The UN, it was hoped, could finally play its peace-bringing role with a Security Council that was no longer blocked by vetoes.

In this climate of optimism, the Security Council began to deal increasingly with inter-state conflicts⁷, something that had not been possible earlier because of the UN principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another state. The reason was that the UN faced a change in the threats to global peace and security. Inter-state wars, the original *raison d'être* for UN interventions, had become increasingly a matter of the past while the numbers and intensity of intra-state armed conflicts within fragile

countries had dramatically increased. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP)⁸, since 1990 the majority of armed conflicts around the world were now intra-state conflicts. In 2013 every one of the thirty-three active armed conflicts around the world was an intra-state conflict. Intra-state conflicts existed also before, but were largely kept within the bounds East-West conflict and remained out of reach for the UN. The end of the Cold War brought them to the forefront of international attention.

In response to the new threats to global peace and security now emanating from civil wars and non-state actors in fragile states, since 1990 the Security Council approved in quick succession UN peacekeeping missions to intervene in a series of intra-state conflicts⁹ such as in Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Somalia and Mozambique. Between 1990 and 2013, the Security Council approved a total of 51¹⁰ new peacekeeping missions, of which 47 peacekeeping missions, or 92%, were mandated to intervene in fragile states and deal with intra-state armed conflicts. During the Cold War era any similar UN interference, for whatever reason, in sovereign UN member states was unthinkable.¹¹

Intra-state conflicts meant not the end of regular troops getting involved in the fighting. But they now fought irregular/unconventional armed opposition, secessionist, rebel or, more likely, radical Islamists groups¹² from within their own countries.¹³ Also foreign troops continued to intervene in such intra-state conflicts. In nine of today's on-going thirty-three intra-state conflicts one or the other side receives direct outside military support. What had changed, however, is that these intra-state conflicts were no longer over conflicting national interests among states – at least not primarily. Now they were over influence, power, territory and resources within a state among communities and/or political, ethnic, religious groups.

A worrying development is that failing states with intra-state conflicts became the breeding grounds for increasingly powerful, well-armed and highly motivated non-state actors. These non-state actors not only challenged traditional state authority but began to control and “administer” increasingly large territories. And not only that. While these armed conflicts remained largely local, some of the more radical non-state actors began

to operate globally. All of this developed into a dynamic that threatens an international global security system that is still based on individual sovereign nation-states as the basic building blocks for ensuring world-wide peace, security, prosperity and justice.¹⁴ In the post-Cold War era, intra-state armed conflicts have hence replaced inter-state wars as the main threat to global peace and security.

Peacekeeping is not peacekeeping¹⁵

And peacekeeping remained the tool of preference for the Security Council also for the new UN peace missions it now sent to end intra-state armed conflicts. Peacekeeping was a tested formula, it was readily available and it was cheap. Even today the fielding of a UN peacekeeper costs only about 10% of what it would cost to field for example a US army soldier. It also seemed to provide a “fair” distribution of responsibilities among UN member states: rich countries, and that meant essentially Western countries, paid most of the bills for peacekeeping while poorer developing countries provided most of the soldiers and suffered most of the fatalities!

But peacekeeping had been developed as a tool for inter-state wars with the aim of separating belligerent regular national armies. Peacekeeping was then mostly in the form of mutually agreed military observers; indeed, peacekeepers were never meant to enforce ceasefires or peace agreements. However, when peacekeepers began to be deployed also in intra-state armed conflicts, their tasks changed drastically and they were confronted with very different and far more complex and hostile operational environments. In intra-state conflicts peacekeeping was no longer peacekeeping.

Traditional peacekeeping¹⁶ to help end inter-state wars dealt with the regular armed forces of member states, either by helping implement a ceasefire agreement, patrol ceasefire lines or monitor an agreed withdrawal of foreign military forces. UN peacekeeping was therefore essentially a military affair, that of the Blue Helmets. Peacekeepers would only be engaged after a ceasefire agreement or any similar agreement had been signed by the belligerent states and only after (!) the fighting had stopped. The deployment of peacekeepers was part of an inter-state

agreement. UN Peacekeepers could therefore rely on both parties to respect their integrity and independence. Outright attacks on traditional UN peacekeepers were and still are rare.¹⁷

Traditional UN peacekeeping would exclusively concentrate on the military aspect of ending the fighting between armed forces and they would usually be deployed to specific areas such as along borders or around military installations. Traditional peacekeepers were never to interfere in any internal problems of either of the belligerent countries. For traditional peacekeepers it was of no avail if they had to deal with democracies, dictatorships or military rulers and they would ignore, as a matter of principle, even the worst human rights abuses that may occur in either of the conflicting countries. In this spirit, traditional peacekeeping developed in the 1950s three basic principles to govern its operations: (i) to operate with the mutual consent of all belligerent parties; (ii) to maintain strict impartiality and non-interference in the internal affairs of a country and (iii) to use force only in self-defense.

UN peacekeeping in intra-state conflicts faced a very different operational environment that was in stark contrast to what they were used to in dealing with inter-state wars:

- Intra-state conflicts ended rarely with a ceasefire agreement – let alone any comprehensive peace agreement. Even if there was one, it would rarely stick. In fact, some of the belligerent non-state actors may never have been party to such an agreement. As a result, arriving UN peacekeepers would find themselves often in the middle of an on-going armed conflict with peace remaining illusive.
- Intra-state conflicts rarely have clearly identifiable conflicting parties. Under such circumstances, peacekeepers would not only have to deal with mostly weak and dysfunctional host governments while at the same time with one, or even several powerful and armed rebel and opposition groups. The political positions of these different opposition groups in the conflict are often difficult to make out, leaving UN peacekeepers to face a high degree of uncertainties.
- Intra-state conflicts rarely allow the UN to take a neutral or impartial position. In such conflicts, UN peacekeepers often have to take positions, in many case they may even be mandated by the Security Council to directly support a government. Not surprisingly, most non-state parties to the conflict would see this as taking sides in the conflict. UN peacekeepers become players in the conflict and hence vulnerable to attacks.
- Intra-state conflicts may increasingly include radical non-state actors who neither accept international standards nor the UN as an interlocutor. In the worst case scenario, they might see the UN as an agent for Western or other groups' interests and consider UN peacekeepers enemies.
- Intra-state conflicts have rarely clear lines of separations among belligerent parties. Instead of being able to concentrate on specific critical locations, peacekeeping operations have often to spread out to cover the entire territory of a country.
- Intra-state conflicts demand often a more assertive UN peacekeeping in which peacekeepers have to take and then hold territory that had previously been controlled by either of the many belligerent groups.
- Intra-state conflicts required UN peacekeepers even to collect weapons from irregular rebel forces and 'decommission' their fighters. Despite all programmes of their integration, this is often a highly emotional and sensitive task.
- Intra-state conflicts may even need UN peacekeepers to take over the security of parts or the whole country and control the border; with this UN peacekeepers take over sovereign state functions. This would only add to them becoming part of the conflict.
- Intra-state conflicts bring often awful human rights abuses – and this by all sides. Peacekeepers being in the middle of it can no longer ignore this. They have to take pro-active approach in protecting basic human rights and civilians; in fact these became now one of their main operational objectives.

In traditional peacekeeping operations, peacekeepers had never to face such complex environments and they were never asked to perform any similar array of tasks. The very different operational environments they faced and substantially increased tasks UN peacekeepers were expected to perform were “forced” upon them by the realities of intra-state conflicts. No decision by the UN leadership or even by the Security Council could have changed this. Peacekeeping will hence have to adjust to the changing realities on the ground – and not vice-versa.

From the Iran-Iraq war to Sierra Leone’s civil war

The UN interventions in the Iran-Iraq war (1980 – 1988) and the in the Sierra Leonean civil war (1991 – 2002) are just about ten years apart but are both very different types of peacekeeping operations, the first in an inter-state war and the second in an intra-state armed conflict. They provide good examples for the very different operational environments and requirements.

In August of 1988, Iran and Iraq, after eight years of a devastating war, agreed to accept UN Security Council resolution 598 that calls for an immediate ceasefire and both sides called on the UN to help implement this ceasefire. In response, the UN set up the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) from August 1988 to February 1991. This was a typical traditional peacekeeping operation that induced only about 400 lightly armed military observers (mostly officers) who monitored the implementation of the ceasefire agreement; they were essentially assigned along the Iran-Iraq border. They had no other military or civilian objectives and did not have to train or provided any assistance to anyone. They ignored problems in either of the two countries, including the massive human rights abuses that happened especially inside Iraq at that time. UNIIMOG operated with the mutual agreement of both sides, they remained impartial (that meant at the time that they did not get involved in any local politics) and carried only side-weapons for self-defense. Except for an attack by irregular (though Iraqi sponsored) mujahedin forces on Iranian territory, the ceasefire held and UN peacekeepers were neither attacked nor harassed. The only fatality had been the result of a vehicle accident.

When, in July 1998, the UN had sent it’s first of a series of different UN peace missions into Sierra Leone, the conditions it found and the tasks it had to perform were almost dramatically different to what UNIIMOG had to deal with. Sierra Leone was still in the middle of its civil war and there was no such thing as any mutual agreement to respect the safety of UN peacekeepers. The UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone was therefore almost immediately attacked, about 500 peacekeepers were kept hostage and about 300 peacekeepers lost their lives. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was therefore a much more robust UN peacekeeping force. Despite its rather innocent sounding name, this was a UN peacekeeping mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter mandated to use force if necessary in the pursued of its mandate. UNAMSIL that started off with 6,000 peacekeepers included at its height over 17,000 peacekeepers, 42 times the number of UNIIMOG.

UNAMSIL become deeply involved in Sierra Leone's civil war; in fact it took over the security of the country and of its borders and hence performed typical sovereign functions. It began to fight rebel forces and to take and hold territory, even against the resistance of various rebel groups. Instead of being concentrated on any specific area, UN peacekeepers had now to operate over the entire territory of Sierra Leone. Despite a peace agreement in 1998 (the Lome Peace Agreement), UNAMSIL was repeatedly attacked. In 2000, about 500 UN peacekeepers had been kidnapped for months with a number of them being killed. Their commander was beheaded in full view of his troops by renegade rebel forces. Between 1999 and 2005, 192 peacekeepers were to lose their lives for peace in Sierra Leone. There was no longer any pretense that UNAMSIL operated with the mutual agreement of all conflicting parties, that it remained impartial in this conflict or that it used force only in self-defense – and this, although these three principles were still part of the official UN policy.

With its intervention in Sierra Leone, the UN become responsible for virtually all the problems of the country. UNAMSIL were not only responsible for the decommissioning and reintegration of ex-combatants or the rebuilding of national security forces, with the support of other UN agencies they were now also involved in all sorts of civilian tasks from organizing elections to promoting national reconciliation, from assisting the return of refugees and internally displaced to food assistance to the venerable, from rebuilding a basic justice system to organizing a transitional justice system, from rebuilding state institutions to organizing basic health and education services. The list of those tasks is almost endless.

Interesting is also a comparison of numbers: While the Iran-Iraq war affected a total population of both countries of about 100 million, the population affected by the civil war in Sierra Leone amounted only to five to six million. And while the Iran-Iraq war must have cost the lives of about half a million military and civilians, the civil war in Sierra Leone, despite all its brutality, may have cost the lives of about 75,000 people. Nonetheless, the UN intervention in Sierra Leone cost substantially more and lasted much longer. UNIIMOG had cost only US\$ 178 million while UNAMSIL had cost about \$ 2.8 billion. And not only that. If we include also the civilian activities of the UN that were necessary to end the Sierra Leone's civil war we may speak more about six million dollars in UN peacekeeping, humanitarian, legal and development assistance. By contrast, UNIIMOG never had any humanitarian or development activities. And while UNIIMOG lasted only about 2.5 years (August 1988 – February 1991), the entire duration of the various UN peace missions in Sierra Leone lasted almost 16 years (July 1998 to April 2014).

In Sierra Leone the UN had suddenly to manage a very different intervention. This was no longer a traditional peacekeeping mission and it was also not a multi-dimensional peacekeeping mission. Actually peacekeeping was now only a component of a much greater undertaking. This had become a more complex, more complicated, more dangerous, more expensive UN mission. And although this was never given an appropriate name, we will call this here a UN integrated peacebuilding mission.

While in the Iran-Iraq war peace was to be kept, in the Sierra Leonean civil war a peace was still to be built. While in the inter-state Iran-Iraq war peace meant simply the end of the fighting, in Sierra Leone's intra-state war peace meant now re-erecting a functioning state able to provide peace, security, justice and prosperity to its people.

In ten years the UN had moved from helping end inter-state wars to solving intra-state armed conflicts and from keeping to building peace.

Intra-state conflicts need a different approach to peacekeeping

The UN's first reaction to intra-state wars appeared to have been to try to adjust realities to fit its traditional peacekeeping approach. For example in Rwanda the mandate of the UN mission in Rwanda, UNAMIR, was limited to monitoring and facilitating the 1993 Arusha Peace Accords. Accordingly, UNAMIR consisted of only a small number of lightly armed peacekeepers, had limited resources and no mandate to interfere in any other national matter. Above all, it was not mandated to use military force, even to achieve its limited aims. In other words, UNAMIR was modeled along the lines of traditional peacekeeping missions, only this time their deployment was in intra-state conflict environment. But intra-state conflicts do not allow for such limited engagement, once the UN is in a country it can no longer select what it 'wants' to deal with and leave all other problems unintended. This misconception of relying on a limited mandate ended in a terrible disaster and the genocide of 800,000 mostly civilian in 1994; a shame and loss in credibility that continues hovering over the UN.¹⁸

Even today, we see somewhat similar approaches. A case for this may be the UN mission, created in 2013, in Mali, MINUSMA. Although MINUSMA is now much more rooted into the problem of the country if compared to Rwanda and far more robust, it still relies on a hastily developed ceasefire agreement and on seeing the problem essentially as a security problem. But could such shaky ceasefire agreement be the basis for building a UN mission around it? Haven't we learned from other examples (e.g. Sierra Leone) that even peace agreements that are signed by all parties will be repeatedly broken? Don't we know that real peace agreements will need a much more inclusive and longer-term process that includes the different communities of a country? Can Mali's problems be solved with a primarily security-oriented approach or wouldn't preventing Mali from falling apart need a more comprehensive approach?

Of course, UN peacekeeping has developed over the last 24 years to adjust better to dealing with situations in violent intra-state conflicts through what it calls multi-dimensional peacekeeping. The number of its peacekeepers in

such missions were often drastically increased¹⁹ and peacekeepers received pre-deployment training. They became better armed and equipped and their rules of engagement were strengthened. UN peacekeeping also began to include programmes such as security sector reforms, the decommissioning, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and de-mining actions, and were mandated to help secure elections and protect humanitarian aid deliveries. Peacekeeping missions were now all headed by SRSs with political mandates and began, albeit modestly²⁰, to diversify their staff to include also police, human rights, political and civil affairs officers.

However, the overall aim of UN peacekeeping was still security – not surprising as UN peacekeeping remains essentially a military operation. This has contributed to the limited impact of UN peacekeeping as it deals essentially only with the consequences of an intra-state conflict – the break-down of internal security – and not with any of the conflicts' root causes! Its reliance on ceasefire or similar agreements tends to overlook the fact that in intra-state conflicts with weak governments and many often competing armed non-state actors make such agreements highly unreliable instruments. At best, they could be a first step in bringing the various sides together, but they would never be sufficient.

One of the most surprising aspects of UN peacekeeping today is its insistence on maintaining the operational principles of the mutual consent and impartiality that were once developed for its traditional peacekeeping. Only the third principle was somewhat slightly amended and now reads "*Non-use of force except in self-defense and in defense of the mandate*".²¹

While these three principles made a lot of sense for traditional peacekeeping, they make no longer any sense for peacekeeping operations operating in intra-state conflict environments. In intra-state conflicts the UN could no longer hope to operate with the agreements of all conflicting parties, it could no longer remain impartial (at least not in the absolute sense of its traditional peacekeeping operations) and it could no longer hope to do with only a minimum use of force. In fact, these three operational principles tend to become under the

conditions of intra-state conflicts counter-productive. How, for example, could the UN have authorized air strikes in Srebrenica or seized arms depots of pro-government thugs in Rwanda by obtaining first the consent from all conflicting parties? And how could the UN have maintained its claim of impartiality when it bombs or attacks one conflict party – although this is exactly what may have been necessary?

Before looking at the peacebuilding aspects of UN interventions, UN peacekeeping must be reformed to adjust it to operating in intra-state conflicts. This would have to start with accepting the consequences of operating within the different environment of fragile countries afflicted by intra-state conflicts:

First, UN peacekeepers must accept that when intervening in intra-state armed conflicts, they are not likely to find a stable post-conflict situation but instead will face violent, high risk environments with great uncertainties. Peacekeepers cannot hope returning to the low risk environments of its former more traditional engagements in intra-state conflicts. In other words, the UN must learn to accept casualties and even fatalities.

Second, UN peacekeepers must accept that when intervening in intra-state armed conflicts, they can no longer hope to keep any peace but must contribute to build peace. The aim is no longer to end the fighting (and killings) by separating belligerent forces but rather to integrate and reconcile hostile forces and communities with the aim of rebuilding functioning states and creating peaceful societies.

Third, UN peacekeepers must accept that when intervening in intra-state armed conflicts, they are likely to “inherit” all the problems of the country in which they arrive, irrespective of whether they have the mandate or the resources to deal with them. Many of these problems will not even be linked to its security mandate.²²

Fourth, UN peacekeepers have to accept that when intervening in intra-state armed conflicts, “peace” is potentially divisive and is not the same for all conflict

parties. The peace the UN supports will have no doubt winners as well as losers.²³ In fact, in intra-state conflicts UN peacekeepers cannot remain ‘aloft’, but will increasingly be drawn into the conflict they want to help solve. This may include taking political positions that may be strongly opposed by one or several parties to the conflict. Peacekeepers must accept that this may trigger open hostilities towards them.

Fifth, UN peacekeepers must accept that when intervening in intra-state armed conflicts their original three operational principles (mutual consent, impartiality and minimum use of force) no longer make any sense and that these have to be replaced by a set of more realistic principles for operating in intra-state conflict environments. UN peacekeeping must move from the more passive notion of impartiality to more pro-active value-based principles that could be drawn from the UN Charter, the UN human rights conventions, the R2P and other UN conventions and principles.

Sixth, UN peacekeepers must accept that by intervening in intra-state conflicts it must now also deal with armed non-state actors from secessionist movements, criminal associations and from rebel forces to radical Islamist groups, many of whom may not accept international principles or welcome UN peacekeepers as interlocutors. The UN must develop appropriate policies for this and such policies would then have to apply to the entire UN system.

Seventh, UN peacekeepers must accept that for solving intra-state conflicts, the UN can no longer only concentrate on providing internal security but that interventions must also include political, social, justice, humanitarian and development activities. In other words, UN peacekeepers must accept that interventions in intra-state conflicts require a UN system-wide approach in which peacekeeping is only an integral part.

All this would require fundamentally revising the present Capstone Doctrine for peacekeeping and instead turn it into a UN system-wide Operational Doctrine for intervening in fragile countries with intra-state conflicts.

Intra-state conflicts need a different approach to peace

The success of traditional UN peacekeeping to end inter-state conflicts depended on the degree at which a ceasefire agreement was holding. Peace was here rather one-dimensional and meant the absence of any fighting and killings.²⁴ In fact, traditional UN peacekeeping never resulted in comprehensive peace agreements.²⁵

However, when dealing with intra-state armed conflicts, the notion of ‘peace’ broadens considerably. To bring peace means now not only to establish security and to end the killings but also caring for the war victims, integrating combatants, supporting transitional justice and finding compromises among belligerent communities; it means returning those who were internally displaced, promoting national reconciliation and fostering national unity. Peace now includes access to justice and the protection of human rights, it means creating national institutions that can provide services, and it means health, education and job opportunities. Intra-state peace means rebuilding of more democratic and inclusive nation-states with functioning institutions in which all of the formerly belligerent parties and communities can settle their disputes and find a common ‘home’.

The widely held notion that one needs establish security before building institutions or beginning any recovery/development does not work. In the reality of fragile countries with armed conflicts there is no such thing as a clear sequence of activities²⁶ with peacekeeping first and peacebuilding²⁷ later. In fact, all these aspects are intertwined and must be applied in combination. Specific situations may require that some aspects of UN interventions such as political mediation, humanitarian assistance, transitional justice or security be more emphasized at one time or another, but there will never be a situation in which only one aspects (e.g. security) will completely substitute for all others. And peace can no longer be simply partitioned according to institutional or operational requirements of the UN. Building peace in fragile countries with intra-state armed conflicts requires a holist approach.

This holistic approach cannot be a peacekeeping approach – it must be something that may be better called ‘a comprehensive peacebuilding approach’. Peacekeeping will in most cases still be a very important, and probably even be the largest and most costly component, but it would only be one of many components. In peacebuilding security issue would be in parallel to political facilitation, promotion of justice and human rights, humanitarian aid as well as institution-building and development assistance. Peacebuilding will have to deal not only with governments, ministries and local security forces; peacebuilding requires to work with (ex-)combatants, refugees and IDPs, war victims, civil society, religious and traditional leaders the media, the artists of a country. It will have to promote democratic institutions, a more inclusive and accountable government and a general sense of national unity.

Potentially, at least, the UN has here a unique comparative advantage: while the UN Security Council is the only body that can – or should – provide legitimacy for external interventions in a fragile states afflicted by armed conflicts, it is the diversity of the UN’s various organizations and departments that can cover virtually any aspect of support for a comprehensive peacebuilding approach. The UN is here in the fortunate position to have in-house technical capacities to provide assistance from political facilitation and mediation to police services, demining and security sector reforms, from supporting elections to the writing of constitutions, from promoting transitional justice and access to justice to upholding human rights, women rights, children rights, etc., from assisting refugees and internally displaced to providing food assistance to the vulnerable, from helping deal with illnesses and diseases to provide basic education, from reconstruction to development. The great advantage of such comprehensive approach to building a “positive” peace is that the UN can always make progress on one or two of these components while others may not progress because they hit some barriers. This would allow the UN to remain pro-active, even under difficult circumstances.

Unfortunately, this is only a potential advantage because to bring about an integrated and comprehensive peacebuilding approach is also the UN’s main weakness; the UN’s field operations remain more fragmented than

ever. What would be need for effectively intervene in fragile countries with armed conflicts is, regrettably, spread over at least 40 different UN departments, commissioners, agencies, programmes and funds²⁹ with each of them having their own governing structures, operational policies, funding sources, field representations and programmatic and administrative rules. And even more important, each of them has its own institutional identity, something that they tend to defend ferociously.

And there is a further problem. The UN's efforts to promote the peacebuilding concept has largely failed. Today, the UN Peacebuilding Commission is at best marginalized. The UN has never developed anything close of a system-wide comprehensive peacebuilding approach. But this is what would now be needed. In my IPI paper *Rethinking Peacebuilding* I have developed the idea of integrated peacebuilding interventions in more detail.

Conclusion

We cannot wish away the three problems areas the Secretary-General had listed in the Security Council. Instead, we have to accept them as being part and parcel of UN peacebuilding interventions in fragile states. Therefore the question should be another: instead of a review of peacekeeping operations³⁰ and ask why, for example, peacekeeping mission find no longer any peace to keep, the Secretary General should have asked for a review of how the UN could more effectively intervene in failing states with violent internal conflicts in which weak governments face armed non-state actors.

Such a review of UN interventions in intra-state conflicts would have to involve not only peacekeeping but the whole range of UN interventions that would have to be brought to bear in such complex intra-state conflict environments. It is therefore regrettable that the review of the UN's peace operations is planed separately from the 10th anniversary review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture. Both reviews should have been made together.

A comprehensive system-wide solution would have to overcome limiting internal institutional interests within the UN. In many ways, the institutional interests within the UN may pose greater obstacles for creating more effective UN interventions in armed intra-state conflicts than any objections from member states or the uncertainties the UN is facing in failing states. Such reforms would hence require not only a stronger political will among UN member states but, even more so, a stronger internal UN leadership.

Many may argue that to seek a comprehensive solution for UN interventions in intra-state conflicts would be too ambitious and hence have little chance to succeed. But we must not forget that it is the complexity of the problem that we want to deal with – *intra-state armed conflicts* – and it is the complexity of what we aim at – *a holistic peace* – that require more complex UN interventions. Intra-state conflicts are complex and need therefore complex responses.

Of course, also a more comprehensive peacebuilding approach is no guarantee that we will be able to solve all the problems of failing states and intra-state violent conflicts. But it would go a long way of making UN interventions more effective – and it would contribute to improving the UN' credibility as the main global player for maintaining peace and security also for future generations.

Endnotes

¹Since then, the Secretary-General has moved forward and installed a 14-person expert team to come up with recommendations by April 2014.

²Alone in Mali the UN mission, MINUSMA, lost 29 peacekeepers in just a little over a year of deployment.

³Quoted from *The Secretary-General: Remarks at the Security Council opening debate on trends in United Nations' peacekeeping*, 11 June 2014.

⁴See also my IPI paper *Rethinking Peacebuilding: Transforming the UN Approach* of September 2014. In this paper I make essentially the same arguments, only from the point of view of peacebuilding.

⁵Prince Zeid has since taken up his position as the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. It is hope that his understanding of the realities of UN field operations will also guide his leadership of this core UN institution.

⁶Quoted from a paper by Richard Gowan prepared for the 2014 Peacekeeping Annual Forum, 14-16 October 2014 in Beijing, China: *Peacekeeping at the Precipice: Is Everything Going Wrong for the UN?*

⁷Some of these intra-state conflicts (e.g. in ex-Yugoslavia) – but by far not all – were the result of the collapse of the Eastern bloc.

⁸Lotta Themner, Peter Wallenstein, *Armed Conflicts, 1946-2013*, *Journal of Peace Research* 51, No.4 (July 2014).

⁹During its first 44 years, the Security Council had authorized only one mission to intervene in an intra-state conflict, the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC) in the 1960s. But also ONUC had started as a traditional peacekeeping mission with the aim of monitoring the withdrawal of Belgium and other foreign mercenaries. It only later it became entangled in the internal affairs of the Congo. Not surprisingly, ONUC quickly fell victim of East-West divisions and ended in failure. The time for UN peacekeeping missions intervening in intra-state conflicts had had not yet come; this had to wait for an end of the Cold War.

¹⁰This number includes at times succeeding peacekeeping missions for the same conflict area.

¹¹In fact, the UN Charter (Chapter I, Article 2) appeared to prohibit the United Nations *to intervene in matters which are essentially of any state*. With the recent increase in tensions among the P5s in the Security Council, the issue of national sovereignty appears to become again a more important issue.

¹²This does not exclude that these groups attracted sympathizers from other countries.

¹³In the process, regular armed forces tend to become undisciplined and unruly themselves, living of the lands they had been sent to protect. Intra-state conflicts can result in the most awful human rights abuses – and this by all sides!

¹⁴*The 2013 Failed State Index* of the Fund for Peace rated out of 178 countries surveyed, a staggering 108 countries as either close to collapse or at least, with tendencies of becoming a failed state. The OECD, for the same year, classified 47 countries as fragile states. Whatever the truth, the problem of states failing or being close to failing is definitely on the increase.

¹⁵This also draws attentions the problematic terminology used in the UN. In the strict sense, intra-state conflicts, UN blue helmets were no longer peace-keepers. But the term suck, more in reference to the inputs (soldiers) of those missions than their aims (keeping peace). We will find a similar confusion, when we use the term peace-building.

¹⁶I use here the term 'traditional peacekeeping' for operations to end inter-state conflicts in order to distinguish it from peacekeeping in intra-state armed conflicts.

¹⁷UNDOF peacekeepers (in fact, military observers), a traditional peacekeeping force along the Golan Heights, were not attacked this year by either Israeli or Syrian armed forces they were mandated to separate but by irregular Syrian Islamist forces fighting in a civil war. Syria's civil war had spilled-over into traditional peacekeeping.

¹⁸An independent report on the Rwanda tragedy commissioned by the UN come to the conclusion that *the overriding failure which explains why the UN could not stop or prevent the genocide, and that is a lack of resources and a lack of will - a lack of will to take on the commitment necessary to prevent the genocide*. Report assessing United Nations involvement in Rwanda, 1999.

¹⁹See text box: *From the Iran-Iraq war to Sierra Leone's civil war*.

²⁰Despite its multi-dimensional approach, UN peacekeeping has still relatively few political, civil affairs or other civilian experts. Of the about 116,000 international personnel in UN peacekeeping missions today, roughly 94 % are troops, military observers and uniformed police, of the remaining 6 % the larger part of its international staff fulfills administrative and operational support functions (not included in these numbers are about 11,000 locally employed staff who serve mostly in installation security and logistic support functions).

²¹*United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*, also called the Capstone Doctrine, DPKO/ DFS, 2008.

²²Recent examples are the internally displaced who sought shelter in UNMISS camps in the South Sudan or victims of the Ebola epidemic seeking help from UNMIL in Liberia. The UN cannot just look the other way with the argument, that this is not part of their mandate.

²³Losers are often belittled as "spoilers", but this is mostly a too one-sided point of view. Losers could be whole communities (e.g. the Serbs in Kosovo or the Krajina). The UN must accept that there is no fair peace and that it is the winner who determines the post-conflict peace arrangements. Very often peace is enforced by an international community that has also its own interests.

²⁴Johan Galtung, the apostle of peace research, called this a 'negative' peace as compared to a 'positive' peace that included all aspects of human existence.

²⁵This is the main reason why so many of the traditional peacekeeping operations such as UNSO, UNMOGIP or UNFICYP tend to last forever.

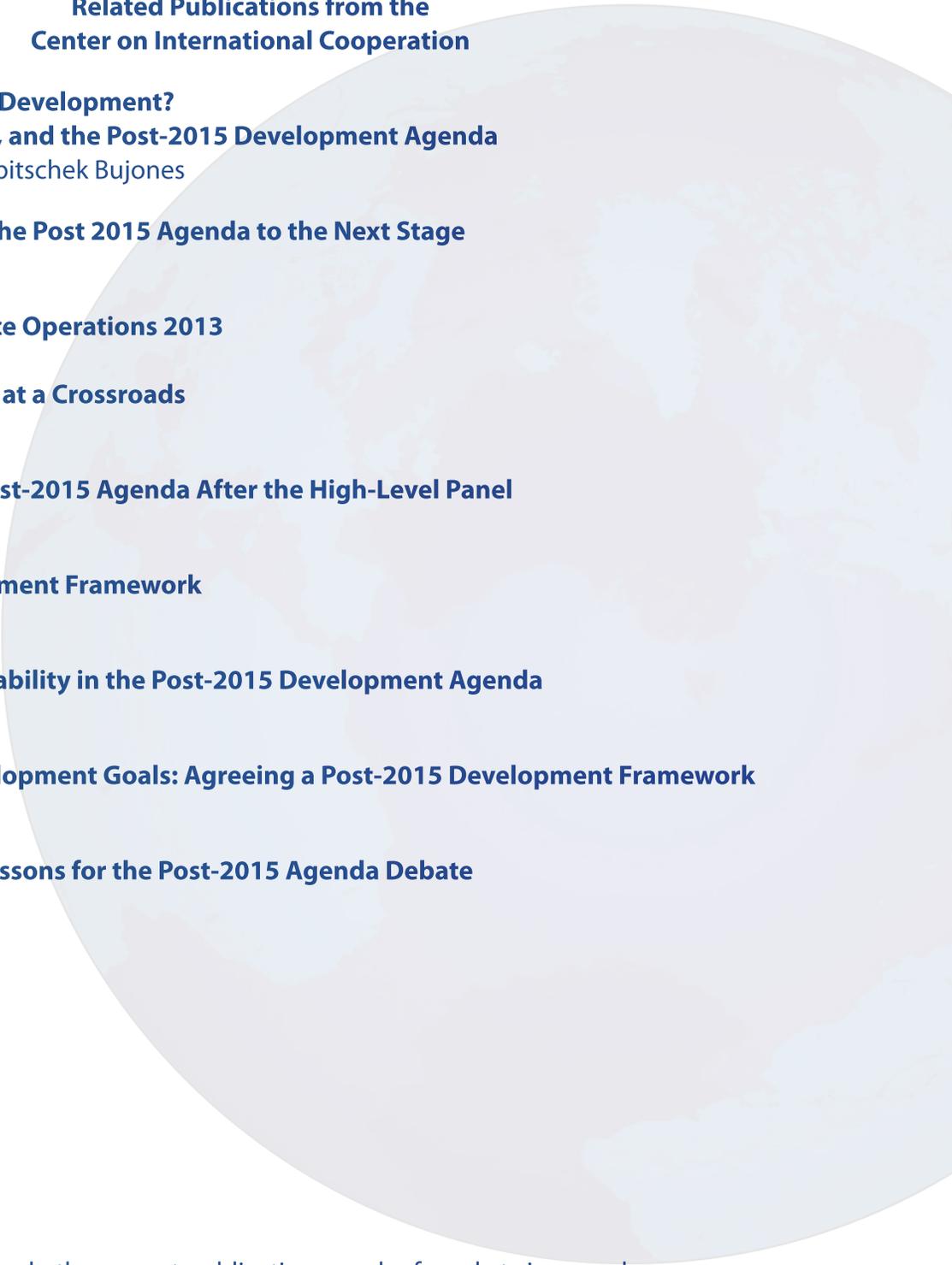
²⁶The idea that there distinct phases in solving conflicts also goes back to Johan Galtung who suggested a sequence of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding. However, in the real world of UN peace operations such distinctions make hardly ever any sense. See Johan Galtung, *Three Approaches to Peace*, 1976.

²⁷The UN even coined the strange term of 'post-conflict peacebuilding'. But if the conflict is over (post), why does one still have to build peace. Wouldn't then reconstruction be enough? Unfortunately, behind those terms are often institutional interests.

²⁸Like with the term 'peacekeeping' before, also the term 'peacebuilding' is controversial. But despite all differences in defining peacebuilding, it may still be the best term for describing a comprehensive approach for building peace in fragile conflict-ridden countries.

²⁹The FUND project of the Ralph Bunche Institute lists already 31 different UN institutions with separate field operations for development.

³⁰The TOR of UN peace operations now includes also the UN's special political missions but this does not change this argument.



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