

International Day of UN Peacekeepers

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Folke Bernadotte Memorial Lecture

Ian Martin

Although I am a long-standing member of UNA-UK, this is the first time I have been in the right country at the right time to be present for this celebration of UN peacekeepers, and I congratulate UNA-UK and RUSI and all those who initiated and who organise this day. I am delighted too to commemorate Folke Bernadotte, assassinated 70 years ago this year precisely because he was a United Nations mediator for peace.

Last Thursday, an attack on a UN convoy in the Central African Republic killed one Mauritanian peacekeeper and wounded eight others. Last month in Mali, one peacekeeper from Burkina Faso, one from Nigeria and two from Chad died in three separate incidents, after four Bangladeshis had died in March. On 27 January, a Pakistani peacekeeper died in an ambush in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where in December fifteen Tanzanian peacekeepers were killed and 43 wounded when their base was attacked. The total number of peacekeepers killed last year was the highest since 1994.

This day of commemoration takes place at a time when there are recent successes of UN peace operations to celebrate. Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, where missions have now closed, would not have emerged from their nightmares without their years of UN peacekeeping. I take personal pleasure in witnessing peaceful political transitions being accomplished by the national actors after UN peace operations in Timor-Leste and Nepal. But we also have to acknowledge that today four of the UN's largest missions – in Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, are facing grave difficulties.

Looking back, it is amazing to recall that when Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced in 2014 that he intended to commission a review of UN peace operations, this came as a surprise. It was already fourteen years since the previous major review gave rise to the Brahimi report, and four years later it is clear that radical changes in the context of peace operations made a further review if anything overdue.

So I was pleased to be a member of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, now forever dubbed HIPPO, which reported in 2015. We knew that its timing posed a problem. By the time our report was published, the end of Ban's term would be fast approaching; while some changes could be hoped for, major reform would inevitably have to await the leadership of the next Secretary-General and new department heads. Yet a new Secretary-General might not want to be associated with a predecessor's initiative, and the initial impact of a review on member states is not easily sustained.

Nearly four years on, however, the analysis and recommendations of the HIPPO report have continued to be valued as the framework for developments and debate regarding UN peace operations. Its

recommendations having been largely accepted by Ban, modest reforms were set in motion in 2015-16 before his term came to an end. Member state reactions to the report were generally positive, inevitably with some cherry-picking. HIPPO's thinking, along with that of the other two major reviews published in 2015 - regarding peacebuilding architecture, and women and peace and security – featured prominently in the public exchanges between member states and candidates to be the next Secretary-General – exchanges which UNA-UK did so much to promote through the 1 for 7 billion campaign. The early initiatives of Secretary-General António Guterres showed his intention to take action which reflected HIPPO's approach and recommendations. It is now a good moment to take stock, as he and the Security Council just did around a debate at the end of March, giving rise to a detailed presidential statement by the Council.

The most frequently quoted phrase from the HIPPO report is “the primacy of politics”: that “lasting peace is achieved not through military and technical engagements, but through political solutions”, and therefore “politics must drive the design and implementation of peace operations.” We argued for an emphasis on conflict prevention and early engagement, to avert the need for military deployments wherever possible – a priority that has been strongly embraced by Secretary-General Guterres. We were concerned that large UN peacekeeping missions have been operating where the UN has been able to do little to advance a political process. The Security Council has not sufficiently exercised its responsibility to set a political strategy and sustain pressure to make it effective, including when host governments fail to cooperate and fulfill their commitments.

HIPPO was tasked to review all peace operations – not only peacekeeping missions. The three missions I have headed as a Special Representative of the Secretary-General were each what the UN calls special political missions – they did not have armed uniformed components authorized to use force; they were managed by the Secretariat's Department of Political Affairs, not the Department of Peacekeeping Operations; and they were financed out of the UN's regular budget, not the separate peacekeeping assessment. This conceptual, managerial and budgetary bifurcation has been seriously dysfunctional, especially where flexible transitions are needed to respond to changes in country situations.

HIPPO therefore recommended moving away from this distinction, and that we think in terms not of two types of UN missions, but of a spectrum of peace operations. The design of missions should not follow a template, as has too often been the case, but should be developed from the specific conflict context. When a new mission is to be deployed, we recommended two-stage mandating – getting an initial presence on the ground with a provisional mandate, but then returning to the Security Council with recommendations which reflect in-country engagement with the government, conflict parties and civil society. This proposal has been well received, but is as yet untested, since no new peacekeeping operation has been deployed since MINUSMA in Mali in 2013 and MINUSCA in the Central African Republic in 2014, before HIPPO was appointed. However, the Secretariat and the Security Council have in principle accepted the criticism of over-ambitious and unrealistic “Christmas-tree” mandates, and the need for prioritisation and sequencing in what a mission can accomplish. Secretary-General Guterres recently declared that “Christmas is over”, although this is more easily said than it is reflected in reconfiguration of current operations.

HIPPO strongly reaffirmed the moral obligation of peacekeepers to protect civilians. In no way is this in conflict with the primacy of politics: the ultimate protection of civilians lies in the political solution of conflict. Protection of civilians is a whole-of-mission responsibility, and non-military approaches must be maximized. But UN troops must be ready to act robustly and proactively to protect civilians within the limits of resources, although expectations must be realistic when, as HIPPO pointed out, around 100,000 troops had been given a mandate to protect civilians across more than 10 million square kilometres.

HIPPO wrestled deeply with the issue of the use of force in UN peacekeeping, at a time of much tension between traditional peacekeeping espoused by many troop-contributing countries and the trend towards more robust mandates adopted by the Security Council. We were clear that while UN peacekeeping missions must have the capabilities and training to defend themselves and protect civilians in an operating environment of asymmetric threats, their composition and character are such that they should not be asked to engage in military counter-terrorism operations. Such operations should be undertaken by the host government, or by a capable regional force, or by an ad hoc coalition authorized by the Security Council. As a recent article put it, we need robust peacekeeping but not aggressive peacekeeping, and the UN should be an impartial agent of peace: peacekeeping is not war-fighting. In my opinion, the expectations of the Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to “neutralize armed groups” and of MINUSMA in northern Mali crossed that red line. Calling on UN troops to use “overwhelming force” threatens to destroy their impartiality, hinder their peace efforts, and increase rather than decrease their vulnerability and that of civilians.

This makes all the more important HIPPO’s strong emphasis on partnership with regional organizations. This was endorsement of a trend already under way, and which is essential as regards conflict prevention and mediation, as well as in relation to military operations. It has found overwhelming acceptance – except when it comes to funding arrangements, where the US in particular resists UN funding for peace operations of regional organizations, most notably the African Union. Such cooperation is now enshrined in the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhancing Partnership in Peace and Security, but the warm collaboration at the top of the organisations has yet to be consistently reflected in country contexts.

HIPPO’s call for a people-centred approach in peace operations has also been widely echoed, but if it is to be more than rhetoric, it must be implemented and assessed at the country level. These days the Security Council listens more to critical civil society voices, as it should, not only during its visiting missions to the field but also in the Council chamber. Individual peace operations are rightly being pressed to engage more, especially with women, and to include more women peacekeepers to enable them to do so better.

Two critical tests for the relationship between peace operations and the local population are the extent to which a mission responds to threats to civilians from armed actors – including those linked to the host government - and to sexual exploitation and abuse by its own personnel, uniformed or civilian. Engagement with the local population is one of the best sources of intelligence regarding threats to civilians – and indeed regarding threats to personnel of the mission. Local people will understand that a mission cannot be everywhere and prevent every act of violence, but they will not excuse failure to

protect where a mission clearly does have the means. Secretary-General Guterres has now gone far beyond the recommendations of HIPPO in his measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, to ensure responsiveness to victims, and to insist on the responsibilities of member states contributing personnel. Pressure to insist on the implementation required of the leadership of every peace operation and of every member state - before, during and after deployment of its personnel - must continue to be unrelenting.

Alongside his immediate initiatives on sexual exploitation and abuse, and to promote gender parity within the UN, Guterres signaled his intention to act on HIPPO recommendations in several ways. The HIPPO report, like the Brahimi report before it, was highly critical of the poor capacity of the Secretariat for strategic analysis, planning and review of peace operations; this has been significantly strengthened by the establishment of a Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation Unit in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. A series of strategic reviews of major missions – some requested by the Security Council, some initiated by the Secretariat – have begun to be carried out by teams with independent leadership, utilising data analysis, and subjected to “red-teaming”. The push by the Trump administration to cut budgets has contributed to pressure for more radical strategic reviews of individual operations, but the actual budget decisions have been anything but strategic, and are in danger of exacerbating the divergences between mandates and resources which set peace operations up for failure.

Guterres also immediately announced his intention to restructure the Secretariat’s peace and security departments – which HIPPO said have been “hampering the effective assessment, design and conduct of peace operations”. His proposals, now being considered by member states, would in my view improve the structure in three key respects. In place of the duplication and rivalry of regional divisions in two departments, a single political-operational structure under regional Assistant Secretaries-General would ensure that peace operations are designed and managed within their regional context and in closer consultation with the relevant regional organizations. Second, the management of both peacekeeping operations and large field-based special political missions by the same department would better enable situation-specific responses tailored to context, and smoother transitions as those contexts evolve. Third, the integration of the Peacebuilding Support Office with Political Affairs would ensure that political strategies to prevent conflict and sustain peace comprise the necessary development dimension.

Guterres’ parallel proposals for management reform have among their objectives providing the delegation of authority which is absolutely essential to those who provide services in the field, and to expedite service delivery and recruitment. From the HIPPO perspective, the changes in management and policy, and the operational support which is proposed to be provided to both Headquarters and the field by a single department, must be rigorously assessed according to whether they do meet the distinct needs of the field.

Early this year, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations drew up an action plan following the report of a review on improving the security of peacekeepers, and in late March Secretary-General Guterres announced a new initiative he dubbed “Action for Peacekeeping”. He called for streamlined mandates;

political solutions; partnership with regional organizations; improved training and preparedness of peacekeepers; alignment of human and financial resources with mandates; and member state influence to sustain the consent of host countries. Each of these should mean further momentum for implementation of key HIPPO recommendations. His initiative is aimed at what he called “a quantum leap in collective engagement”, mobilizing all partners and stakeholders, including at a high-level event on the margins of the General Assembly this September.

It is especially important that this initiative is successful in overcoming tensions between the Security Council, whose permanent members drive the mandating of peace operations, yet with the increasingly important exception of China contribute very few uniformed personnel, and the troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs). Pressure from TCCs, and commitments by the Security Council to improve consultation, go back not just years but decades, yet the level of dissatisfaction remains acute – as I believe is justified. The return of some Western countries to peacekeeping, most notably in Mali, and in the case of the UK to South Sudan, is warmly to be welcomed. But there is an unhealthy divide between troops from the global South deployed to areas of danger – and in all too many cases taking casualties there – and westerners who dominate staff positions and whose niche capabilities are needed to mitigate risks, but who despite their greater capabilities share little in those risks.

Let me then conclude with how I think the UK can best contribute to the current agenda of reform.

As a member of the Security Council, the UK has a major share of the responsibility for setting the strategy and mandates of peace operations – and that includes responsibility for how poorly the Council has been meeting that challenge. The current process is over-dependent on three so-called penholders – France, the UK and the US, often referred to as the Council’s P3 - which have arrogated to themselves the lead on almost all country situations on the Council’s agenda. France is the post-colonial penholder for francophone countries, as well as providing five French diplomats in a row to head the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for the twenty years since it was promised this when it lifted its veto on Kofi Annan’s election as Secretary-General. The UK’s penholderships include Colombia, Cyprus, Libya, Somalia and Yemen; the last of these is particularly inappropriate in view of the UK’s support for the Saudi-Arabian-led coalition, which has contributed to the Council’s lack of effective action in the face of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. While the P3 consult among themselves and ensure that Russia and China will not veto their drafts, the Council as a whole engages in hardly any frank strategic discussion before its elected majority are given little time to go along with the penholder’s proposals.

The current process of strategic reviews offers an opportunity for a better process of Council consideration of mandates – indeed it cries out for it. I welcome the intention of the UK to have a Council discussion of the strategic review process during its August Presidency. The UK could also open up a review of the Council’s own mandating process, including the distribution of penholderships, and invite regional or other elected members to become co-penholders where it does retain the pen. To its credit, the UK Mission in New York has been working with Pakistan on proposals for improving consultation with TCCs, and it should press the Security Council to be open to significant change.

In its second role, as a major financial contributor – currently sixth after the US, China, Japan, Germany and France – the UK must ensure good housekeeping, but it should not follow the Trump administration’s non-strategic push for budget cuts. Rather it should ensure that the human and financial resources of peace operations are aligned with mandates, and that what is decided in the Security Council is funded in the General Assembly’s Fifth Committee. In the longer-term, the UK should drop its insistence that large field-based special political missions continue to be funded from the regular budget, and support the HIPPO proposal for a single peace operations account. It should join with other member states in seeking to persuade the US to agree to providing funds for African or other regional peace operations authorized by the Security Council from UN assessed contributions. And when 80 per cent of UN peacekeeping operations expenditures are military-related, and are shown to be of greater cost-effectiveness than other international interventions, perhaps it is time for them to be absorbed by defence budgets, as one expert has recently suggested, rather than by raiding development budgets for peace operations.

The UK’s third role is as a contributor of uniformed personnel. HIPPO only partly had its tongue in cheek when we said that the Panel “deems it particularly important that the forces of permanent members of the Security Council participate in UN peacekeeping operations.” It would, we said, put the parties to the conflict on notice that the Council is ready to invest in the settlement of the conflict, and could make a difference in the quality of policy deliberations in New York as much as it could affect effectiveness in the field. The UK’s 704 troops (321 of them in South Sudan and 249 in Cyprus), 32 staff officers and 4 military experts do not constitute the commitment that should be made by a permanent member with our military capability. A small number of British police officers made a fine contribution to the mission I headed in East Timor: today there are zero UK police serving in UN peacekeeping. The UK is strong in rhetorical support for the need for more women peacekeepers, but this should be reflected in actually sending increased numbers of women officers and troops; currently only 57 of the UK’s 740 peacekeepers are women.

Lastly, I have not yet said anything about the quality of mission leadership, but it is of crucial importance. HIPPO observed that there had not been a quantum improvement since the Brahimi report in 2000 was critical of the quality of mission leaders. The proper interest of the UK – and of every other member state – is not in seeking leadership appointments for its own nationals, whether in the field or in the Secretariat, but in insisting that the Secretary-General operate a truly merit-based selection process, and supporting him in resisting inappropriate pressures, not least from the permanent members of the Security Council.

Secretary-General Guterres has described the ambition of his Action for Peacekeeping initiative as being to bring together all partners and stakeholders to develop a new set of mutually agreed principles and commitments. The rise of China as an increasingly important peacekeeping actor and funder, and the changing relations between states of the global North and the global South, mean that the latter will not meekly accept decisions dominated by the former. In the Security Council, what Guterres has called the return of the Cold War is making consensus on issues of intervention and sovereignty harder to find. Our government, our civil society and our research community must make every effort to build bridges in the work of the United Nations for peace.