

PEACEKEEPING IN CRISIS?

CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

BRUCE JONES

United Nations peacekeeping operations remain a vital policy instrument in a world marred by civil war, terrorism and conflict. However, the post-Brahimi Report consensus is weakening, and the new challenges threaten to undermine support for peace operations. Not least of these is the shift in mandate from impartial implementation of peace agreements, to the extension of the state's purview in complex and insecure situations. Bruce Jones discusses the current challenges facing peacekeeping, and argues that they must be resolved with clear strategy and strong major power commitment.

No less eminent a person than US President Barack Obama has argued that the principal threats to international security in the contemporary era emanate not from great power rivalry and war but from under-governed spaces.¹ Great power tensions will no doubt remain – recent events in Georgia and Iran attest to that. But it does seem clear that international security actors will spend more time in the future thinking about and responding to civil wars, failed states, transnational terrorism, and sub-national violence.

Since the end of the Cold War, the primary policy instrument that has been deployed in response to such violence is multilateral peacekeeping, particularly through the UN. Its scale has waxed and waned, as has its effectiveness. There is little doubt, though, that the efficacy (and to a lesser extent the efficiency) of UN peacekeeping and stability operations will prove to be an important part of national and international security in the years ahead. UN peacekeeping has proved to be a versatile tool for deterring or reversing inter-state conflict, ending civil wars, mitigating humanitarian crises, and extending state authority in areas where state capacity is weak or contested.² Mediation and peacekeeping have contributed to an 80 per cent decline in total armed conflict since the

end of the Cold War.³ Not all operations succeed, or succeed in full. To meet future challenges, both individual operations and the peacekeeping system as a whole require continued political, military and financial commitment by states and institutions.

It is thus worrying that United Nations peace operations face an extended and dangerous period of strategic uncertainty. A series of setbacks has coincided with military overstretch and the financial crisis. These pressures have created the risk that UN peacekeeping may contract despite high demand, or be misapplied, with grave consequences. Indeed, in the first half of 2009 alone the organisation narrowly avoided a potentially disastrous new deployment in Somalia and too hasty withdrawals of several smaller missions.

What are the likely challenges ahead? And what do they need to do to meet them?

Features of Contemporary Peacekeeping

Since the end of the Cold War, global peacekeeping has undergone cycles of expansion and contraction. After a round of 'boom and bust' in the 1990s, UN operations expanded through the last decade, as did those of NATO, the African Union (AU), the EU and other organisations.

The result was an unprecedented expansion in the scale of UN peacekeeping. From 2000 to the present UN peacekeeping has grown at a startling pace, and the organisation now commands over 110,000 personnel (troops and police) in the field in eighteen operations. NATO commands a further 80,000 in three operations; smaller EU and AU operations round out the picture.

Underlying this expansion were some significant factors: the Security Council has had the shared political vision to authorise ambitious and robust operations; financial contributors have been willing to pay the rising bill; and troop contributors, critically from South Asia, have contributed troops based on a combination of prestige, financial reward and capacity.

All three factors are now in doubt. There are constraints on political consensus, funds and personnel and, unless addressed, these are all likely to grow worse in the future.

The causes here are straightforward. Peacekeepers have been sent to larger, tougher settings, straining management and command systems; and they have been staying longer, substituting for post-conflict recovery mechanisms not yet well adapted to purpose. In many of these settings, peace processes have



Camp Kigali, the military school and barracks where ten Belgian UN Peacekeepers were killed at the beginning of the Rwandan genocide in 1994.
Photo courtesy of Greg Mills.

collapsed, or there is no real consent from the state, and thus peacekeepers are more compelled to use force and thus risk casualties, creating concern among troop contributors used to less risky operations.

Looking Ahead

Things will only get harder. There is a strong, if not nearly definite likelihood that the demand for effective peacekeeping will grow in the foreseeable future, perhaps in the next five to seven years. An analysis of the current picture of state fragility and patterns of sub-national or transnational violence suggests that the demand for global peacekeeping will rise.⁴

From 1999 onwards the UN has increasingly operated in non-consensual environments, which has made adhering to its traditional core principle of only deploying to where the parties offer consent increasingly difficult. Indeed, as is the current case in Somalia, many

future peacekeeping operations are likely to occur in contexts where this consent is limited or lacking. Beyond this, the increased presence of spoilers, international criminal networks, extremism, and terrorist networks further complicate mandate design and implementation.

The current picture of state fragility suggests that the demand for global peacekeeping will rise

The UN is also operating more than ever in contexts where its core mandate has not been the implementation of a signed peace agreement, which historically was the necessary precondition for deployment. Rather, the UN is increasingly finding itself in scenarios where not only is the state apparatus

weak and lacking in domestic legitimacy, but the ongoing conflict itself has not yet been dampened or halted by a cease-fire or peace agreement among warring or hostile parties. It is precisely in these contexts where the core elements of mission mandates become focused on the extension or restoration of state authority and capacity, rather than limiting the authority of the state. This has occurred recently in case after case, in Haiti, Sierra Leone, Lebanon and elsewhere. Moreover, there is a proclivity for mission focus to shift over time, from focusing on the implementation of a peace agreement in its initial phases towards the extension of state authority as a core mission goal. This shift has been evident in MONUC in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) after the elections in 2006-07.

Extending state authority, through military means, policing and civilian assistance, is now a core function of UN peacekeeping – a development that

makes mission design and deployment especially difficult and controversial.

These missions are hard. And they are likely to be effective only under specific conditions: when the state has sufficient political support from domestic actors, the UN and regional powers; and when a substantial international force is deployed to protect the government from spoilers and deter revolts.

Peacekeeping has suffered from becoming the response of first rather than last resort

The difficulty of these missions is highlighted by the fact that in each case where the UN has pursued extension of state authority as its baseline stance, its forces have been either led or supported by states with advanced military capabilities operating within unified command structures (for instance, France and Italy in Lebanon 2006, the UK in Sierra Leone 1999, Brazil within MINUSTAH in Haiti 2006, the EU in DRC). This suggests that the future effectiveness of UN operations will depend in substantial part on the participation of such states.

Even tougher is when the UN is deployed in a context where it is operating with opposition from the state, or at least the absence of real consent. Opposition from the state is a different challenge altogether, which arguably may transcend the limits of UN peacekeeping – witness the strategic muddle that constitutes UN engagement in Sudan. Such missions operate within the normative space articulated by the concept of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ principles.⁵ Here the explicit objective is exactly the opposite of ‘extension of state authority’; namely, to limit the authority of a state that is either incapable or unwilling to protect the livelihood of its citizenry within its borders. Given the severe operational problems many of these missions have, most visibly in the Darfur case itself, a central question the UN will have to resolve is whether relying on the same set of bureaucratic

sub-agencies and operational frameworks poses risks.

Peacekeeping as a Tool of ‘First Resort’

Peacekeeping has suffered from becoming the response of first rather than last resort. The decision to deploy a UN peacekeeping operation should follow a considered discussion of strategic options, and rigorous analysis of alternatives. These include: mediation missions (such as in the Middle East); civilian observers (as utilised in Nepal, and previously in the Nuba mountains in Sudan); and civilian observers with over-the-horizon protection (as with the OSCE’s Kosovo Verification Mission). Other options include military observers (Israel-Syria); police, training and rule of law missions (the UN and EU in the Balkans); logistical support to and oversight of national police capabilities (as in the current experiment in Chad); preventive deployments (Macedonia); and partnership with multi-national forces (East Timor) or member state-supported forces under UN command (Lebanon summer 2006.) Too often, however, the requisite analysis has not preceded the recommendation to mount a large multi-dimensional peacekeeping operation, and hence other interim measures have not been tried.

Whatever the strategy and mode of operation, well crafted mandates matched to political strategy and resources matched to mandates are critical determinants of success. These were central lessons of the ‘Brahimi Report’, largely abided by from 2000 to 2005 but neglected of late – with consequent rising tensions between the Security Council, troop contributors, and the Secretariat.⁶ Such tensions could be ameliorated by investment in informal and semi-formal modes for strategic dialogue between the Secretariat and member states. For instance, the political and military advisors of member states could perform a vital ‘challenge’ function through scrutiny of the Secretariat’s draft mission concepts of operations (ConOps.) This would be beneficial so long as that process includes not just Security Council members but key troop contributors; and that the Secretariat retains the right to

propose, and with it (as Brahimi also emphasised) the ability to say ‘no’, or ‘yes, if.’

‘Yes, if’ is a particularly important response when the Security Council is contemplating peacekeepers for missions where one actor on the ground implacably opposes negotiated settlements. Opposition from non-state actors does not intrinsically transcend the limits of peacekeeping; international support to a recognised and viable state is another form of ‘a peace to keep’, one that UN peacekeeping operations have supported through the extension of state authority operations.

Mission functions have proliferated in recent years

Alternatives to heavy peacekeeping should not be viewed as easy options, however. Making them work requires rapid deployment and strong political backstopping from the Security Council. Both are aided if states with advanced military capabilities contribute more directly to UN operations. It is no disservice to leading troop contributors to say that greater contributions are required from other states if (i) a sufficient supply of specialised assets is to be maintained; and (ii) a political consensus on peacekeeping is to last.

Delivery on the Ground – and Preparing for Exit

Strategy, mandate and resources are one part of the challenge; delivery on the ground is another. Here, a central issue is that mission functions have proliferated in recent years, and this has impeded prioritisation. It is crucial to develop a common sense framework for thinking about priority roles for missions and others involved in early recovery. These are grounded in a key conclusion from lessons learned: that the basic condition for the exit of an international security presence is the consolidation of national political institutions and processes.

Missions contribute to that goal in three core ways. First, through transitional security functions, designed

to create and secure space for politics, where methods include guaranteeing ceasefires, demobilising combatants, observation, protection of civilians, and defusing tensions. Second, missions can help to implement a peace agreement, or extend state authority, or both, thus supporting national political institutions and processes. Third, peacekeeping missions are increasingly laying the foundations for secure development by supporting security sector reform and fostering rule of law institutions, together with other organisations. International support of the rule of law is in its infancy though, and a hard look at policy and organisational division of labour is warranted.

Although political stability is the acid test of progress, it can be

reinforced by early economic, social and institutional recovery. Performance in the terrain of early recovery requires broad collaboration. Some critical goals of broader early recovery efforts include restoration of effective public finance management, vital to the functioning of government; economic recovery, especially in the provision of jobs to youths and restoration of the agricultural sector (often neglected); delivery of social services, preferably by local government, often with support from NGOs or UN agencies; and capacity building in the civilian arms of the government.

Early recovery would be enhanced by building (small) standing teams to support mission leadership for the co-ordination of early recovery; by improved strategic planning, possibly

through adaptation of a 'light' version of the Integrated Peacebuilding Strategy alongside existing post-conflict needs assessment processes; and by closing the gap in financing for early activities through donor reform, and expanded use of the Peacebuilding Fund to support political and rule of law activities of missions. Also needed is greater creativity and flexibility in co-ordination models; to date, the focus on integration of UN mechanisms has displaced a focus on integration of strategy, which requires deeper engagement especially with the international financial institutions.

Moving Forward – a Three-Track Strategy

Coping with current pressures, while building an ever more effective



A member of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti stands guard in front of the National Palace after demonstrators, celebrating the birthday of the former President, take to the streets. *Photo courtesy of the UN.*

peacekeeping mechanism, requires action along three tracks.

First, the United Nations will have to tackle three sets of cases currently on its docket with vigour and creativity. Most of all, it will be important for the UN's most important member states and peacekeeping contributors to work together in a concerted manner to shore up fragile political settlements and fragile operations in the UN's largest theatre, the DRC. Full-blown collapse of that operation would send a political shockwave through UN peacekeeping from which recovery would be slow – to say nothing of the real humanitarian and regional stability consequences. Similarly, careful management of the ongoing process in Somalia – which now joins an effort to bolster Somali state military capacity, UN logistical support to the AU's operation and a political process – is going to be necessary if that country is not to reprise its role of temporary graveyard of UN peacekeeping and US support thereto.

Full-blown collapse of the DRC operation would send a political shockwave through UN peacekeeping

Similarly, the UN Secretariat, the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the relevant leading nations in the cases in question will have to collaborate to prepare the ground for a successful and stable exit from large-scale operations in those cases where that is feasible. Of particular salience at the time of writing are Haiti, Liberia and East Timor. While the question must be assessed case by case, the prospects for responsible exit would be enhanced in each case, and overall costs reduced, by three sets of commitments: *enhanced economic support*; *political oversight*, perhaps through new Peacebuilding Commission country-specific mechanisms; and *security guarantees* – in the form of pre-authorised and pre-committed rapid reaction or over-the-horizon forces,

provided by member states or regional organisations. Advanced commitment to return rapidly in the face of deteriorating conditions can have an important deterrent effect.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the UN's mediation and political performance in three cases – the Middle East, Afghanistan and Iraq – will heavily shape the strategic environment and support for the UN. The Secretary General and the Department of Political Affairs should prioritise support to and oversight of performance in these political missions.

On a second track, the Secretariat should initiate those reforms that are within its remit, through its 'New Horizons' action plan; and engage with member states in the Security Council and General Assembly on those requiring new authorities or new financing. The Security Council has already begun to examine its own performance through the UK/French initiative and the Peacekeeping Working Group. Although no formal co-ordination of these processes is required, movement both on the member state and Secretariat tracks will add salience to each effort.

Priorities for institutional reform include: increased investment in pre-training and pre-equipping forces for UN deployment (building on the existing work of the G8-based Global Peace Operations Initiative); giving the Department of Field Support the necessary budgetary authority for advance procurement of standard components of mission start up (which involves regulatory change), including transport; investment in logistics systems that move past mission-by-mission to the global level (or more likely region-by-region by using hubs); addressing the civilian capacity gap through (small) standing teams and predictable centres of capacity/excellence;⁷ government investment in police reserves and rule of law personnel that can be deployed to UN operations; and adjusting the decision-making relationship between UN headquarters and the field to ensure that choices on risky operations have full political support. All of this will require developing innovative structures to allow member states to engage with

operational decision-making on a mission-by-mission basis, without compromising UN command and control.

The positions taken by the new US ambassador to the UN create grounds for substantial optimism

All of these efforts will help. But to make peacekeeping more effective and more efficient for the long term will require those governments with the most advanced operational capabilities to wield them more consistently in support of UN operations. This is necessary if UN peacekeeping is to meet the challenge of new, complex missions in contexts of hardened spoilers, regional conflict dynamics, extremist groups, or if UN peacekeeping is to perform more consistently and more effectively in such functions as the extension of state authority. It will require greater consensus between governments on the limits and possibilities of peace operations, as neither current nor potential force contributors will offer personnel or assets unless they have confidence in how they will be employed.

Although these issues have been on the agenda since the Brahimi Report of 2000, the political space for deliberation about them at the UN has been sharply constrained ever since. Notwithstanding the contradictory pressures of the financial crisis, 2009 provides a new political moment in which to review these issues and make at least some forward progress on them. The positions taken by the new US ambassador to the UN create grounds for substantial optimism.

Conclusion

Movement on the strategic track should be constructed in a manner that reflects the UN's main strategic advantage as a peacekeeping actor: it is the only organisation through which the forces of the permanent five nations (P5) and all the major powers, including the rising and regional powers, can jointly

participate in providing stability. Western-based mechanisms such as NATO and the EU are implementing Security Council mandates in important cases, and regional organisations such as the AU offer some advantages in their respective areas. Nevertheless, only the UN offers the option of a politically diverse but operationally capable mission – but only if the P5 and other major powers invest in UN operations.

To meet the challenges ahead, UN peacekeeping will need a new coalition of support. Broad support for UN peacekeeping is important because an assessment of future conflict trends suggests rising, not falling demand, and increased, not decreased complexity. New operations will likely face opposition from hardened and sophisticated ‘spoilers’,

sometimes with international backers, and be called upon to play a primary or supporting role in extending the authority of weak or contested governments. Capacity and political factors ensure that much of the upcoming demand will land on the shoulders of the UN.

UN peacekeeping will need a new coalition of support

The good news is that a broad majority of UN Member States still see the importance of making peacekeeping work, and work better. Moreover, several of the major and rising powers have renewed interests in peacekeeping

– including China, which has expanded its contributions, and the US, where the new administration has signalled that effective peacekeeping is a priority in its multilateral policy. ■

Dr Bruce Jones is Director and Senior Fellow of the New York University Center on International Cooperation and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, where he directs the project on Managing Global Insecurity. Dr Jones has served in several capacities at the UN, including Senior Adviser in the office of the Secretary-General. This text is drawn from the Sixth Folke Bernadotte Memorial Lecture by Bruce Jones, held at the Royal United Services Institute on 21 May 2009.

NOTES

- 1 President Barack Obama, ‘Inaugural Address’, 20 January 2009, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/>>; President Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan’, 27 March 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/>.
- 2 For a useful study on the effectiveness of peacekeeping see, Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 3 Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 153. See also the 2006 update at <<http://www.humansecuritybrief.info/2006/access.html>>.
- 4 Fund for Peace, ‘Failed States Index’, *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2009), pp. 80-83.
- 5 Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and For All* (Washington, DC: Brookings Press, 2009).
- 6 UN General Assembly and Security Council Report (A/55/305-S/2000/809), *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, 21 August 2000. This document is commonly referred to as the Brahimi Report.
- 7 Center on International Cooperation, *Rapid Deployment of Civilians for Peace Operations: Status, Gaps and Options*, 2009, <http://www.cic.nyu.edu/peacebuilding/docs/Deployment_annex_links.pdf>.