



OBSERVATOIRE DU MAINTIEN DE LA PAIX DES NATIONS-UNIES

CR SEMINAIRE – THE CHALLENGES OF MAKING PEACE WHILE MAINTAINING IT

25 mars 2015

N° Chorus 2014 1050 069939 – EJ 1600024120

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The Challenges of Making Peace While Maintaining It: Lessons Learned and Best Practices

A Peacekeeping Observatory seminar co-organized by the International Peace Institute and the Government of France

Paris, 25 March 2015

Meeting Report

On 25 March 2015, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the French Ministry of Defense, and the International Peace Institute, in cooperation with the Foreign Office of the United Kingdom, convened a seminar to support the work of the United Nations Secretary-General's High Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations. The seminar, organized as part of IPI's Peacekeeping Observatory, was intended to provide the Panel with input into the main challenges encountered by peace operations when tasked with supporting political processes. The interactive discussions were focused on how to ensure that an effective political strategy guides the missions' work, in particular when there is no peace agreement and the peacekeeping operation has to engage in good offices while also providing security, stabilization and protection to civilians. H.E. Jean-Yves Le Drian, French Minister of Defense, delivered the keynote speech. Participants, who exchanged under the Chatham House rule, included members of the Panel on UN Peace Operations, senior officials of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), as well as current and former senior field leaders, among whom Special Envoys and Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) and force commanders, and other experts.

There was general discussion that **Security Council mandates** often exhibit two major flaws: they are both too lengthy and not sufficiently tailored to the missions' individual context, giving way to "Christmas tree" and "cookie-cutter" resolutions. One of the main explanations is that they are not based on a nuanced assessment of the situation on the ground, as they are often drafted with little knowledge of the local context. It was also pointed out that the reports of the Secretary-General, which help frame the mandates in New York, are disproportionately influenced by the Security Council's Permanent Members and by regional groupings, whereas field actors should be more involved in the conflict analysis and prescription process. By failing to realistically consider the constraints on the ground and the capabilities of the missions, mandates lack clear and achievable objectives, which damages the UN's credibility. For instance, the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) had for many years the same number of troops as the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) while operating on a much bigger territory. Peace Operations are required to complete multiple tasks, whose hierarchy is not explicitly stated and which are sometimes incompatible with one another. The mandate of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) contains for instance no less than forty one tasks. A review of the mission should be undertaken at least every two years so as to provide the mission with the opportunity

to change its focus if needed. In a way that is reminiscent of the Brahimi report's recommendation to "tell the Security Council what it needs to know, not what it wants to hear," participants stressed the Secretariat's and the mission leadership's need to be frank and firm, stating with precision what capabilities are required for the accomplishment of each mandated task. The Council must in turn take greater responsibility for successful mandate implementation. One participant also suggested that mandates be refocused on political and security priorities, where the mission's real value-added lies.

Many participants emphasized that a common and carefully designed **political strategy** supported by the international community was central to a peacekeeping operation's success, and that military deployment needed to be subordinate to it. While a number of participants underlined the difficulty of carrying out a peacekeeping mandate when there is no peace to keep, it was also pointed out that peace agreements are often misconceived as end states, whereas they only mark the beginning of the often more difficult implementation phase. In any case, the idea of a continuum placing a peace process before peacekeeping and peacebuilding has become outdated, as phases often take place in a different order or in parallel.

A positive example of the use of military means at the service of a political process occurred in MONUSCO during the Kampala negotiations in 2013. At this time and with the help of the Force Intervention Brigade, the mission maintained military pressure on the M23 rebel group, sending the message that if the group did not agree to disarm and demobilize, it would be forced to do so. During the peace negotiations in Algiers, the presence of the force commander of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to assist the SRSG while violence was escalating improved the negotiator's political work. Instead of playing a supporting role, the mission's military component is still too often used as a substitute for an incomplete political process. In Mali for instance, when the implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement stalled and the parties failed to set up a monitoring and evaluation committee, attention was diverted to the accord's military provisions. Technical meetings were convened on the ceasefire, in spite of their futility after the derailment of the peace process. One participant suggested that phased deployment, as advocated in the Brahimi report, could enable the UN to prioritize analysis and political objectives over the use of force.

At the institutional level, the UN needs to strengthen its strategic planning capabilities, possibly through an organ operating above DPA and DPKO that would be tasked to elaborate an all-encompassing political strategy. The Policy Committee in its present configuration is unable to fulfill this function, as it tends to seek consensus among all the departments represented and thus only agrees on the lowest common denominator decisions. Its inability to set priorities is perhaps also due to the fact that the SRSG, who has a more complete vision of the strategic challenges in the field, only counts for one voice out of two dozen.

At the mission level, the UN has made considerable effort in improving civil-military relations, in particular through the integrated mission structures, the creation of the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) and the Joint Operations Centre (JOC), and by making the SRSG the head of all the mission's components. Yet progress still needs to be made, specifically in terms of the level of mutual understanding/integration between civilian and military personnel, which explains for instance that in Mali, the military arm took some time to fully participate in the JOC. The All Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU), an unprecedented military intelligence and analysis capability for a UN mission, was not well understood at the beginning and some cited the risk of it overlapping with the JMAC. ASIFU

remained somewhat underutilized during the mission's first year, until mission personnel came to a better understanding of its unique capabilities.

The crucial role of the **UN police forces** was emphasized, as their work is perhaps more relevant to the nature of the violence encountered in peace operations today, in which spoilers act within society and crowd control skills are increasingly needed. In this context, police and gendarmerie contingents prove a valuable source of information and analysis, in addition to their operational contribution, as was shown in Northern Mali and the DRC. There is, however, no doctrine formalizing their work within a peacekeeping mission, and it was said that their activities should become better integrated with those of the military contingents. Importantly, peace operations also suffer from an absence of guidelines to deal with terrorism and organized crime, from both a political and a security standpoint.

The need for improved **coordination within peacekeeping missions** was stressed by all participants, as the lack of intra-mission cohesion was identified as one of the biggest barriers to success. In the DRC, the negotiations of the Lusaka Agreement took place without DPKO being involved in the process, in spite of MONUC's expansive presence in the country. Missions are designed based on supply rather than demand, and their components often have different and sometimes conflicting goals, which is especially damaging in times of crisis. A "balkanization" of mission management can be observed, as the chiefs of various mission components get their instructions from – and report to – different headquarters offices. To solve this problem, new incentive structures must be created to encourage all staff to work together across organizational divides and rally, under the SRSG's leadership, around the mission's overarching goal, in particular the implementation of the peace agreement, if there is one. Information sharing has been improved through the Senior Management Group and, at the mission level, through the JMAC and JOC. It is also important that peacekeeping missions maintain good relations with country teams, not least because this is necessary to ensure the design of an adequate exit strategy.

The coordination problem is intrinsically linked to the issue of the **leadership** of peace operations. More effort needs to be made to select the adequate leader profiles, not only at the SRSG level but also with regard to the heads of each mission component. The latter must be better trained to understand and cooperate with each other and with the military arm, notably by encouraging mutual understanding of their respective mandates. A number of participants stressed the need in certain cases to separate the head of the peace operation from the UN's preventive diplomacy and mediation role, which would be granted to a Special Envoy working alongside the SRSG. The former must have experience in multilateral diplomacy, be strictly impartial and work at the regional and sub-regional levels, while the latter must display strong competencies in the management of large multidimensional operations. Creating two separate positions could provide each one with additional space and time to conduct his/her mandated tasks. When they are deployed in the same theater, more clarity should however be achieved with regard to their respective roles, and they should make sure to cooperate fully and share information.

The need for peacekeeping missions to strengthen their **analytical capabilities**, both at the political and military levels, was emphasized throughout the seminar. Missions require a more detailed understanding of the causes and the nature of the problems, as well as the strategies of local actors. Mission analysis also tend to be too inward-focused, as their reporting requirements are more centered on the mission's activities than on the situation on

the ground. It was recommended that mission analysis capacities be attuned to regional, national and local analysis capacities and actors. In addition, more freedom of action should be given to peacekeepers when surveying the situation. Analysis should also be more focused on the role and strategies of spoilers in peace processes, on the economics of war and peace, and on conflict dynamics at the micro-local level, which play a significant role in the unfolding of events. Anthropologists and historians could also be hired to increase the mission's understanding of local actors. Finally, analytical capabilities must be matched by the operational assets required to act upon the information received, as missions tend to be too slow to react compared with local actors.

Logistical and operational challenges were discussed, and in particular the need to design more nimble and adaptive peacekeeping missions. Current ones tend to be too heavy and their processes too long and complicated, thus requiring much time and effort to establish camp and begin mandate implementation. This diverts the SRSG's attention from strategic issues and prevents peacekeepers from reacting as swiftly as the current context requires. By decreasing the force's credibility, logistical problems have obvious political implications. In light of recent difficulties in Mali's most high-risk regions, where some of MINUSMA's contingents took a year to be deployed, it was suggested that special measures be created to provide emergency field support and facilitate rapid deployment.

The return of European **troop contributors** to peacekeeping, and with it the provision of unique capabilities, such as combat and transport helicopters and UAVs, is a welcome development. It is necessary to keep attracting Northern countries so as to ensure that they do not only take care of the missions' funding while countries from the global South contribute troops. For this to happen however, solutions to the logistical and operational challenges mentioned above must be found. It was also raised that most troop contributing countries feel that they are not consulted sufficiently during the planning and mandate drafting processes. In addition, more effort is required to enhance peacekeepers' capabilities, performance, its evaluation, and accountability. In case of misconduct, there should be no obstacle to sending those troops back to their home country.

The growing role of **regional organizations**, especially on the African continent, is a particularly important development for UN peacekeeping, since crises have become increasingly regional in nature. Regional organizations were created in a spirit of complementarity rather than competition with the UN, but transitions and cooperation between the two remains a work in progress. The Security Council has a role to play in this regard, notably by ensuring the continuity between UN mandates and the activities of the organizations already involved in the sub-region. Operational standards must also be harmonized, notably those concerning military and police contingents, human rights, and logistics. Greater clarity must be achieved about the organizations' respective roles, and cooperation must be considered in more strategic terms. While progress has been made in this regard with the African Union, an improved understanding between the Security Council and the Peace and Security Council seems necessary. As for sub-regional organizations, there is still room for improvement, especially in terms of ensuring their involvement at the initial planning stages. Finally, it is important to better inform regional actors about the UN peace operation's mandate. Beyond intergovernmental organizations, the UN should endeavor to engage more systematically with nongovernmental organizations present in the theater of operations, as multiple and often overlapping initiatives are run in parallel. To this effect, the mission's

leadership should convene coordination meetings in order to share information with NGOs, and donors should support such coordination efforts.

One of the major dilemmas peacekeeping missions face is the one concerning their **support to the host country**. Security Council resolutions often reaffirm the unity and integrity of the state, and they mandate peace operations to work toward the expansion of its authority. This has the potential to lead to a situation where the local population feels that peacekeepers are deployed to maintain the elites in power, as has been conveyed to the high-level panel during its consultations. Indeed, the state can be just one of the parties to a conflict, and, if so, it holds its share of responsibility for the violence. Power structures and state institutions in a number of countries also can have close links to organized crime. This puts the UN in a difficult position, potentially compromising its impartiality. In Mali for instance, a mandate warranting the expansion of the state's political authority poses challenges, as the state is certainly a party to the ongoing conflict in the North. In the DRC, the government tends to consider the UN mission as an ally rather than a challenge to the current political culture, as they cooperate closely on the neutralization of armed groups. In such contexts, the SRSG must endeavor to position the mission at an appropriate distance between the parties and find the right balance to maximize leverage on all parties. The Security Council should also do more to hold states accountable for their engagement in the political process, just as it should adopt a stricter posture when members of UN missions are declared *persona non grata*.

Support from the host country and constant dialogue with the national authorities is necessary for the mission to succeed. It is not easily obtained, however, as the lack of cohesion between Security Council members can jeopardize the Council's mandating authority. Support from **the local population** is equally important to a peace operation's success, and civil society should be consulted before and while designing solutions. The mission's objectives need to be properly understood by the civilians it is intended to protect. Panel consultations have shown that civil society is rarely well informed about an operation's mandate, capabilities and constraints. Additional effort must therefore be made to educate the people in this regard, to manage their expectations, and to show them where the mission has succeeded in order to increase support. Narrower mandates focused mainly on political and security tasks would enable operations to manage expectations and communicate better. In turn, increased support from the local population might provide the mission with added leverage needed to overcome resistance from the state and the conflicting parties more generally.

It is clear that in the current context, where war, organized crime and terrorism are often simultaneous to an unfolding peace process, all the missions' efforts need to be centered on implementing a clear and manageable political mandate, designed on the basis of sound analysis of the situation on the ground and available capabilities. Peace operations must be designed according to the demand of each context rather than to what the organization and its member states have to offer. This is a prerequisite to gaining credibility while ensuring the cooperation of the conflicting parties and the support of the local population. Finally, coordination must be made a priority within the mission, where silos remain a major impediment, but also with partners at the regional level, as conflicts are increasingly regionalized.