

Global Peace Operations Review



September 2015

A monthly newsletter from the Center on International Cooperation

GLOBAL PEACE OPERATIONS REVIEW

The **Global Peace Operations Review** is an interactive web-portal presenting in-depth analysis and detailed data on military **peacekeeping operations** and civilian-led political missions by the United Nations, regional organizations, and ad-hoc coalitions. The web-portal is a product of the [New York University Center on International Cooperation \(CIC\)](#) and a continuation of its long-standing print publications the *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations* and the *Review of Political Missions*.

Providing the most comprehensive overview of multilateral contributions to **peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and post-conflict peacebuilding**, the *Review* aims to initiate and inform discussions on the comparative advantages and appropriateness of different missions, and through constructive analysis to further strengthen existing partnerships necessary for them to succeed.

Through the **Country & Regional Profile pages**, the *Review* provides background information and regularly updated key developments on peace operations and the contexts in which they operate. The analysis is further enhanced by the provision of detailed data on each of the UN's peace operations, and headline data on missions fielded by regional organizations and ad hoc missions, which can be accessed in full through the **Data & Trends** section. Data on non-UN peace operations was compiled by the [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute \(SIPRI\)](#). For more details, please see our [Data guide](#). The **Strategic Summary** provides an overview of main developments in mission settings over the past year and presents analysis on trends and the impact these may have on shaping peace operations of the future. Thematic essays presented in the In Focus section unpack issues critical to peace operations, providing analysis and guidance on possible approaches.

The Library section enables readers to download full text .pdf files of past editions of the *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations* (2006-2012) and the *Review of Political Missions* (2010-2012). For those interested in conducting their own analysis using the data generated for these publications, we have provided spreadsheets of all the **statistics** used to compile these reports.

Scope of the Global Peace Operations Review

The *Review* covers more than one hundred multilateral peace operations active in the previous year including missions fielded by the UN, AU, EU, ECOWAS, OSCE, OAS and coalitions. It uses a **broad definition of peace operations** that includes multilateral and ad hoc military and police missions, as well as civilian led political missions. Neither type of mission has a simple definition. Alongside more straightforward peacekeeping missions, the *Review*, mindful of the need for peace operations to adjust to the changing nature of conflict, also includes peace enforcement operations that employ the use of force and engage in active combat.

Under political missions, we include multilateral civilian-led missions that have political engagement in the form of launching and supporting political processes at their core. This includes, for example, the EU's Special Representatives and the African Union Liaison Offices that support the implementation of peace agreements and accompany political processes. We have excluded missions, such as EU delegations and other liaison offices that may engage in political activities, but as their core function serve more as regular diplomatic or developmental presences. Along the same reasoning, we have also excluded election observer and human rights monitoring missions.

Disclaimer

The Center on International Cooperation is solely responsible for the content of this publication. Any errors of fact or analysis, and any and all judgments and interpretations about missions and operations discussed herein, are those of CIC alone.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interviews

A Message from Peaceland : Change the Way UN Peace Operations Interact with Local Actors	4
---	----------

Séverine Autesserre

Joachim Koops and Paul D. Williams: Oxford Handbook tells the History of UN Peacekeeping's Successes and Failures	9
--	----------

Joachim Koops and Paul D. Williams

Thematic Essays

How Can the UN Move Towards More People-Centered Peace Operations?	15
---	-----------

John Karlsrud

Can Attack Helicopters Save U.N. Peacekeeping?	19
---	-----------

James Traub

Related Publications	25
-----------------------------	-----------

INTERVIEWS

September 2, 2015

A MESSAGE FROM PEACELAND : CHANGE THE WAY UN PEACE OPERATIONS INTERACT WITH LOCAL ACTORS

PEACELAND

Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics
of International Intervention



©SÉVERINE AUTESSERRE

Séverine Autesserre

LOCAL PEOPLE SHOULD BE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT, WITH INTERNATIONAL INTERVENERS ADVISING FROM THE BACK SEAT.

In her book *Peaceland*, political scientist [Séverine Autesserre](#) (Barnard College, Columbia University) analyzes the everyday practices, narratives and habits of interveners in peace operations and how these often-unconscious factors influence and sometimes impair the effectiveness of international efforts. In this edited transcript of an interview with CIC Research Assistant Rahel Kroeker, Autesserre talks about *Peaceland*, its relation to the [High-Level Panel on Peace Operations \(HIPPO\) report](#), and the ways in which UN peace operations can be improved in order to achieve sustainable peace.

Rahel Kroeker: What motivated you to write *Peaceland*?

Séverine Autesserre: *Peaceland* is based on my experiences as a humanitarian aid worker, a consultant to the UN and other peacebuilding organizations, and an academic researcher. My goal in the book was to understand why peace interventions so often fail to reach their full potential. During my time working in conflict and post-conflict environments, I found that interveners often perpetuated behaviors and practices that were clearly ineffective or counterproductive. For instance, we know that expatriates shouldn't live in a bubble isolated from local populations, and yet when you look on the ground, interveners often do not interact enough with ordinary people. *Peaceland* tries to understand why these things happen, and why people who genuinely mean to do their best often perpetuate ineffective practices that harm the success of a peace operation.

My other main goal in *Peaceland* was to shine a spotlight on the peacebuilders who reject the dominant ways of thinking and working, because these exceptional individuals and organizations are much more effective at building peace.

RK: How do you define peacebuilding, interveners, *Peaceland*, and measure the effectiveness of a peace operation?

SA: Expanding on [Boutros Boutros-Ghali's definition](#), **peacebuilding** means any and all actions that help promote peace during and after a conflict. It encompasses any kind of action that my interviewees said 'helped or were supposed to help bring peace'. This includes peacemaking, peacekeeping, traditional conflict-resolution programs, political and military efforts, certain development and humanitarian initiatives, as well as certain human rights projects. **Interveners** are the expatriates (the foreigners) who work in peacebuilding. *Peaceland* is a metaphor for the world of international peacebuilders – a world that has its own rituals, narratives,

practices, habits, ways of working, and pecking order. I decide that something I study is **effective** when a large majority of people involved in it – both international interveners and local beneficiaries – see it as having promoted peace.

RK: Some critics say you've lumped together too many types of interveners as "citizens" of *Peaceland*.

SA: Of course there are enormous differences between the inhabitants of *Peaceland*, but we all know about these differences, while we often overlook the similarities. I remember once interviewing a provincial minister in Congo and he was constantly talking about the UNGOs as if [the UN and INGOs] are the same thing. Another time, I was talking informally with an ordinary citizen and he was telling me about 'this soldier who works for this NGO'. I told him no soldier is working for an NGO. These local people are very savvy and they know the difference between NGOs and the UN, but they were trying to communicate something else: there are similarities among the interveners in terms of habits and narratives. The acknowledgement of these similarities reveals many interesting insights.

RK: *Peaceland* identifies a rift between intended beneficiaries and interveners of peacebuilding missions. You describe how the "construction of knowledge" and the politics of knowledge are one of the major explanations for this rift. Can you elaborate?

SA: In the international peacebuilding system, thematic and technical expertise – how to do conflict resolution, intercultural reconciliation, organize elections, and promote gender equality – are valued much more than local knowledge. You see this in the way the management systems of INGOs, NGOs, diplomatic and donor missions work. People are almost always recruited on the basis of their technical and thematic expertise. The consequence is that the large majority of foreign peacebuilders I interviewed had little preexisting knowledge of their country of deployment. When trying to understand their place of deployment, most interveners end up relying on what I call "dominant narratives": stories that people tell about the conflict and that everybody believes. The dominant narrative on the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), for example, is that the main cause of violence is the illegal exploitation of mineral resources, the main consequence is sexual violence, and the central solution is reconstructing state authority. In Darfur the dominant narrative is Arab versus African. In Timor-Leste it is East versus West. These dominant narratives are so simplistic that they overlook the myriad other causes of violence and lead to programs that are counterproductive and sometimes even fuel the violence.

RK: What are some ways that the walls between interveners and local communities are built and maintained?

SA: Foreign peacebuilders share the experience of being outsiders living and working in environments that are very unfamiliar and where they have no family. Very often they are afraid for their lives, they don't necessarily understand local languages, and they know that people may die if they make an error in their work. It's a high-stress job. This shared experience explains why, despite knowing it would be good for them to socialize with local people, they often just want to be with others who speak their own language and who can understand what they are going through. Foreign peacebuilders go to the same bars, the same restaurants, and they tend to have many more friends within the expatriate community than in the local communities. That's how we get an expatriate bubble.

Daily routines also reinforce these boundaries. Safety precautions such as living in a compound, for example, or having to drive with doors locked and windows closed can have the unintended effect of creating a further divide between interveners and local communities. Another important factor is the very goal with which foreigners arrive on the ground: 'We are here to help the population'. When you say you are 'here to help', you automatically put yourself on higher moral ground and construct an image of yourself as being superior to the local people. This divide and the constant emphasis on the eminence of interveners sours the relationships between peacebuilders and their local counterparts. As a result, local people frequently reject or evade the international initiatives designed to help them.

Of course, there are exceptions. There are expatriates who try to socialize with local people, who speak local languages, and who integrate into the local communities. And these people are much more effective in their daily peacebuilding work. But they are far fewer.

RK: How can the imbalance of technical and local knowledge be addressed?

SA: Rather than only recruiting people based on their technical and thematic expertise, we should also select employees based on their local expertise. Further, we can replace expatriate staff with local people in many administrative, logistical, and procurement positions. And at least some local employees should be recruited from the specific communities targeted by the peacebuilding project in question. Lastly, the current practice is that foreigners decide, and local people assist and advise; I think that should be reversed. Local people should be in the driver's seat, with international interveners advising from the back seat.

The [Eastern Congo Initiative \[ECI\]](#) has followed this kind of approach. ECI's first staff in Congo was an expatriate who spoke perfect Swahili, perfect French, and had been in Congo already for several years. For her first assignment, she was tasked with spending up to a year trying to hire a Congolese director and talking to local people about what would be ECI's best contribution to resolving the problems in Eastern Congo.

RK: How can the boundaries between interveners and local counterparts be overcome?

SA: We could encourage combined facilities where international interveners share office space with local organizations. I saw so many local organizations that were facing problems because their printer was broken or their phone line was cut and they didn't have money to fix these things. Sharing resources could help fix such problems and would also encourage socialization that, in turn, would facilitate breaking down boundaries.

Encouraging after-work socialization is also very important. Social and professional events are often only for the expatriates. They could be opened to local staff and partners, and specific events for networking could be organized. When hiring and promoting expatriate staff, we should consider their ability to connect with local communities and foster relationships as well as their knowledge of local languages and their understanding of local cultural codes. Because when interveners don't understand the local context and don't speak local languages, it's very difficult for them to interact socially with local people. But when they do speak the language and understand the cultural codes, then it's much easier for them to socialize after work and build productive relationships.

Local communities also have to meet international interveners halfway. I've heard of colleagues who, upon arriving in a community, had a kind of local mentor. Someone who said, 'Ok, I'm going to tell you how things work here and I'm going to tell you when you're making a cultural faux pas.' That's very helpful. You need these kinds of people because they help expatriates integrate into local communities.

RK: There might be concerns that some of the solutions you propose are too time-consuming.

SA: It would be time consuming, but not overly so. Yes, it would mean that interveners have to slow down. But, when we consult local people, they actually ask for international interveners to slow down. They say they're willing to bear the cost of that, that they would much prefer to have an intervention where people at least take some time to think about what they're going to do. The consequences of acting first and thinking afterwards are so damaging that it's often better to not act until we're sure that we are going to help the situation rather than make things worse. This idea builds on the work of the [Listening Program](#), which I love and keep citing in my book.

RK: The High-level Panel on Peace Operations [HIPPO] report calls for more "field-focused" and "people-centered" missions, especially in its section on engaging with communities. How can this improve the relationship between interveners and local people?

SA: I love that HIPPO talks about the importance of understanding local dynamics through discussion with local people. That's the central point of my first book, [The Trouble with the Congo](#). The report says that local conflicts matter and we need to understand local dynamics in addition to national and international dynamics. And if we want to understand that, we need to talk to local people and engage them beyond the small elite of local individuals who speak French or English. The report emphasizes that we need to work more in partnership with local people and include them in the design and planning of peace efforts. We need to pay more attention to local cultural and linguistic cues and country expertise, and support more local conflict resolution initiatives – again a huge point of my first book. We need to add some downward accountability mechanisms and not ignore local capacities for peace. All of these are definitely steps in the right direction.

To me what really matters is how these recommendations will be implemented and interpreted on the ground. Unfortunately, the report itself has just five paragraphs on "Engaging Communities". I am aware of the constraints that the authors were facing, but I would have wanted much more emphasis on community engagement. At the same time, we don't need a high-level panel to tell people to go have a drink with their local counterparts after work. Change can come from the top and the bottom. This report is a way to drive change from the top, but every international peacebuilder on the ground can make change happen from the bottom as well. It's a daily choice and a daily responsibility for them to decide: Do I want to be a Peacelander, or do I actually want to be one of the exceptions that make things better?

RK: Can the mindset change proposed by the HIPPO report impact how other organizations work on the ground?

SA: The panel's report is for UN missions, but I stress in the book that UN peacekeeping missions are just some of the many organizations that employ these problematic everyday practices, habits, and narratives. Other UN agencies do this as well, as does the whole aid community: NGOs, donors and diplomats. We would need a high-level report for every single one of them, and have change coming from the bottom for each of them as well. But recommendations like those found in HIPPO can certainly motivate change across all actors in *Peaceland*.

RK: HIPPO is dedicated to “Nyakhat and Others” – Nyakhat being a little girl in South Sudan who sought the help of UNMISS for her blind father by walking “four hours through harsh and dangerous terrain”. The report begins with her story and ends with a paragraph on Nyakhat’s hopes and expectations for the UN to bring peace. Does this framing reinforce the paradigm of the “here to help” narrative and the inequality of power relations between host populations and interveners?

SA: I always tell my students to start with a story – I do get that. I think the broader point with this kind of framing is that it really depends on what you do with the story. Is the story ‘Oh let’s all come and help Nyakhat? If so, then yes, it reinforces the ‘Ethics of Care’ and it reinforces paternalistic discourses. But if the story is rather ‘Let’s all do everything we can so that Nyakhat (when she grows up) can help herself and her country, and be in the driver’s seat,’ if we are saying that she can build peace in her community and we’re going to come in support of her, then that’s a completely different story.

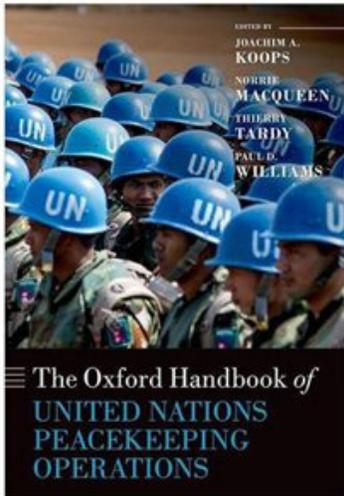
And I sincerely hope that my *Peaceland* book will not only help change the way these issues are framed, but also encourage more equitable power relations between host populations and interveners on the ground.

Severine Autesserre is an Associate Professor of Political Science, specializing in international relations and African studies, at Barnard College, Columbia University (USA). She works on civil wars, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and African politics. | **Twitter:** [@severinear](#)

Rahel Kroeker was a research assistant at the Center on International Cooperation | **Twitter:** [@rahel_melody](#)

September 15, 2015

JOACHIM KOOPS AND PAUL D. WILLIAMS: OXFORD HANDBOOK TELLS THE HISTORY OF UN PEACEKEEPING'S SUCCESSES AND FAILURES



© OXFORD

Joachim Koops and Paul D. Williams

“THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE HANDBOOK IS THAT PEACEKEEPING IS MUCH MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN WE ALL ASSUME.”

The [Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations \(2015\)](#) provides in-depth analysis of all UN peacekeeping operations since 1948 until 2013 as well as thematic chapters on UN and non-UN peacekeeping trends and developments. The following is an edited transcript of an interview by Alexandra Novosseloff (CIC Senior Visiting Fellow) with two of the four editors: Joachim Koops and Paul D. Williams. Their conversation about the Handbook and peacekeeping is a contribution to an ongoing debate about current UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations concerning the recommendations of the [High-level Panel on Peace Operations \(HIPPO\)](#) report for improving the effectiveness and outcomes of peacekeeping and peace operations in general.

Alexandra Novosseloff: You have just published a major work of historical and contemporary research: *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2015)*. How did this book come into being?

Joachim Koops: I think we've all thought about the gap in the peacekeeping literature and the selection bias for some time. We felt a handbook could perhaps provide a good basis for a more comprehensive and nuanced debate on peacekeeping's successes and limitations. I remember when, as an undergraduate working on my first term paper on peacekeeping, there was no single book that dealt with all UN operations. So after my PhD, it was always something I wanted to do. A concrete opportunity arose more than four years ago when Thierry Tardy and I got together for a workshop in Geneva and decided to give it a try. However, we realized that such an endeavor would be impossible without Paul and Norrie [MacQueen]. We were extremely fortunate to have had such a great editorial team and an extremely knowledgeable group of more than 50 contributors, all of whom got together to dig deeply into every single UN peacekeeping operation launched between 1948 and 2013. We tried to apply more or less the same framework for each chapter in order to allow the reader to compare the successes, failures, and other aspects over the course of each operation, systematically, across more than six decades of peacekeeping. The framework includes a brief historical background to each conflict the UN sought to address with the mission in question; the mission's mandate; what the mission set out to do and how it changed; a quick overview on how the mission unfolded; and finally, the mission's achievements and to what extent there were lessons to be learnt for the wider body of knowledge on peacekeeping operations.

Paul Williams: We also decided on the addition of a few thematic chapters. We believed it was important to not only have the history of peacekeeping as the story of the individual missions, but also to look at some of the key themes that link many of them. So we have chapters on trends in peacekeeping operations, international law, inter-organizational relations in peacekeeping, and the distinction between peace operations and humanitarian interventions. One chapter also discusses the question of success vs. failure. Inevitably, particularly when politicians or the broader public discuss peacekeeping, missions are very quickly going to be judged as either successes or failures. Hence we also included a chapter on the complexities and challenges of evaluating missions. And then we added the editors' introductions, because even though we don't all agree with the idea that there are distinct chronological generations of missions, we still wanted to make it clear that peacekeeping missions take place in a particular historical context and follow a particular historical debate.

JK: We deliberately wanted to have a chronological story told with each mission in succeeding chapters to allow readers to draw their own conclusions about recurring themes, successes and failures. Also, which lessons learned from previous missions were implemented – or, failing that, which missions seemed to have merely repeatedly reinvented the wheel. There was a big debate among all four co-editors whether we should provide one definite definition of success and failure for all authors to follow, or whether we should allow contributors to follow their own views on success and failure. In the end we opted for plurality, since anyone who has dealt with the challenge of evaluating peacekeeping knows how nuanced – and controversial – any debate on evaluating success or failure turns out. Hence we asked [Paul Diehl and Dan Druckman](#), who wrote an excellent book on the difficulties of evaluating peace operations, to write a chapter on this for our thematic parts of the handbook. We then let the mission contributors more or less decide for themselves how they would determine and judge the success or failure of a mission.

AN: At the end of these four years, what is your own evaluation of where UN peacekeeping stands today? What are some of the main accomplishments, achievements and challenges for the years ahead?

PW: A few things stand out. Number one: roughly seventy years after the UN invented peacekeeping, it's still around. So the first question to ask is what are the reasons that explain the durability of UN peacekeeping as an institution? There is often no real better alternative when it comes to international forms of conflict management, despite all the changes we've seen in the global governance arena and debates about UN reform.

The second conclusion for me is that often the United Nations has to deal with some of the most challenging and protracted conflicts on the planet – both in a geostrategic and a local political sense. So in one sense it is remarkable that there is actually any good news to report about UN peacekeeping. We need to keep context in mind. The tendency for the UN to have to deal with crises that nobody else wants to own means there's a sort of selection bias: by definition, wherever a UN peacekeeping mission ends up being deployed, it's probably because other alternatives are judged to not really be feasible or legitimate. Or, no one wants to expend the resources themselves to solve the problems.

A third conclusion is that there has never been a bigger need for UN peacekeepers. Over a 70-year period we're currently at record numbers of peacekeepers. So it is a good time to conduct a deeper analysis of lessons learnt from the past.

That leads to my fourth overall conclusion: we have got to remember that peacekeeping operations are just instruments. They're not political strategies of conflict resolution. A continual theme that emerges is that political success really revolves around having a strategy for reconciliation and conflict resolution between the belligerent factions. Peacekeeping operations can be an important

part of that political strategy, but they're never synonymous with it and should never be a substitute for it. So I think that the failures we've seen in UN missions are usually quite predictable, and have tended to follow occasions when we've deployed missions in the absence of a clear political strategy. One of the starkest examples from the Handbook is the mission in Syria: four months in duration, trying to monitor a nonexistent ceasefire with belligerents that aren't committed to really working towards a peace in a genuine sense. Finally, UN peacekeeping is a reflection of the story of international politics more broadly – it's a story about why geopolitics has unfolded in the way it did.

JK: Picking up on that, look at the history of peacekeeping in terms of what it can tell us about the global history of conflicts. Since the beginning of peacekeeping in 1948, which emerged with the still-unresolved Palestine-Israel conflict, you can see that every major explosion of conflicts across the globe was always at some point followed by a blue helmet peacekeeping operation. So in many ways the history of UN Peacekeeping – the deployments in the Middle East and Kashmir in the 1950s; Cyprus and Congo in the 1960s; Central America, Central Asia, the Balkans and particularly Africa since the 1990s – is also the history of major and often intractable conflicts. Peacekeeping was used particularly during the Cold War as a tool by the major world powers to insulate regional crises from spreading to the (nuclear) global level, but it was also employed in complex conflicts and regional crises that remain unresolved to the present day. Thus, UN peacekeeping operations in Kashmir, Cyprus, the Middle East or Congo still remain in place where all other political efforts continue to fail.

Another interesting result emerging from our study of the entire history of almost 70 UN peacekeeping operations is that nothing in contemporary peacekeeping is truly 'new'. In fact, many things that we now think are novel in the 21st Century already have been tried in the 1960s and 1970s. The Handbook shows that in Cyprus, for example, there was an attempt to create a safe area around the Nicosia airport – something that was later picked up in Bosnia with the tragic outcome that resulted. We also have currently a strong debate about the use of force in UN Peacekeeping missions that go beyond the narrow idea of 'using force in self-defense'. Again, however, it was already in the context of the Cyprus operation in 1964 when [former UN Secretary-General] U Thant first formulated guidelines for peacekeepers on when force could be used not just for defending peacekeeping troops, but also to defend the mandate. The idea of temporary administrations – i.e. the UN being directly responsible for the territorial administration of a country – which was applied in its most challenging version in Cambodia in the early 1990s, as well as Kosovo and East Timor a decade later, had already been tried by the UN Temporary Executive Authority/UN Security Force in West Guinea in 1962. Similarly, this force also foreshadowed the importance of policing tasks, something that would become an ever more important part of UN Peacekeeping in the post-Cold War era. Finally, the much-debated relationship between the UN and regional organizations first manifested itself in a tiny mission in the early 1960s in the Dominican Republic, wherein a small operation tried to keep the US-led Organization of American States mission in check.

So, in the Handbook we try to show that many issues that are discussed now, and seem new, have already been tested in various ways and there are important lessons to be learnt from them.

The central message of the Handbook is that peacekeeping is much more successful than we all assume or talk about in current debates. Also, while it might not be a particularly new conclusion, we also show in the Handbook that the most successful operations were those where major powers backed it, had a regional strategy, and worked together regionally despite their differences to solve that conflict. In these cases peacekeeping, particularly when combined with a high level of flexibility on part of the troop contributing countries and UN senior leadership to react to changing situations on the ground, was very successful.

Let's take for example the operation in Tajikistan, with its rather violent and regionally problematic civil war in the mid-1990s. A terrible conflict, with an estimated 50,000 killed and up to 1.2 million civilians displaced. In current peacekeeping literature, it remains a rather obscure case study. Yet it was highly successful, at least in terms of security stabilization. You had Iran, Russia, and the West, as well as a variety of regional organizations, working together for one strategic purpose. You had a contact group that politically put pressure on the different warring parties and worked rather effectively together. UNMOT, the UN's blue helmet operation, adapted from its beginnings as an observer mission to a DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration] mission and then phased into peacebuilding. So for us, the advantage of having a handbook that focuses also on 'lesser-known' operations is clear: it provides the reader with the full picture and full spectrum of failures, but also the successes of UN Peacekeeping throughout history.

AN: The book was finished before the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report was released. In relation to what you have written in the Handbook, what struck you about the HIPPO recommendations and its major conclusions?

PW: From our research I would strongly recognize and endorse a few key themes that also came up in the HIPPO. Number one, what they call the primacy of politics; I completely endorse that. It comes through very clearly that in the absence of an effective political strategy, peacekeeping missions can at best do something called damage limitation. They can limit the worst symptoms of violent conflict but they can't resolve its underlying causes.

A second thing that stands out to my mind, although it wasn't a major focus of the Handbook, is the importance of designing a bureaucracy that can help deliver the political tasks that peacekeeping operations are being mandated to deliver in the field. Part of the story we tell in the Handbook is the growing professionalization of UN peacekeeping. A little-known fact for people who don't engage extensively in peacekeeping research is that there wasn't even a Department of Peacekeeping Operations at the UN until 1992. A good point of reflection from the HIPPO is that bureaucratic systems need to be designed to deliver the political tasks in the mandate. This means being sensitive to what peacekeepers in the field conclude, rather than developing all the key decisions in New York.

A third point would be regarding the mandates themselves. We organized the Handbook to make clear what specific mandates were given to each mission. I would tend to agree with the HIPPO report's conclusion that if mandates are simply long lists of tasks – and they have become increasingly long lists of tasks – then this is not a very helpful way of defining effective strategies. What we need is some element of prioritization. We need a way of thinking about the allocation of resources to particular tasks, and also we need to think about the relationship between lots of different mandated tasks operating simultaneously. In the Handbook it becomes clear that the most effective missions were those with senior political leadership that could draw connections concerning the various aspects of the mandate. These missions were able to prioritize what was most important, because they were able to see connections between different types of mandated tasks and allocate their limited resources around them.

Finally, concerning the HIPPO, I would strongly agree with the emphasis on partnerships, questions about the reasons for peace operations, and who the real beneficiaries should be. I think we get lost if we see this as a story about New York or other bureaucratic centers. We have to remember that the primary purpose has to be dealing with the local effects of armed conflict on the ground, and that the ultimate goal should be to improve the situation of the people on the receiving end. So it's the 'peace kept', or the local

populations that peacekeepers work with, that should be our top priority. To my mind that's something the UN still hasn't got right and needs to think much more about. **How do we best engage with local populations to deliver results on the ground?** And how, really, can we design tasks and mission mandates that work with good ways of engaging a local population rather than against them?

JK: We were very honored and pleased that the HIPPO panel actually requested and used some of the handbook's chapters during their regional consultations, and we sincerely appreciated the exchanges with some of the panel members. I think overall we have to be very honest and frank about what peacekeeping can and cannot do, and whether we maybe want to dampen expectations of what blue helmets can achieve even if it contradicts our own wishes or impulses. Of course we would like to see blue helmets protect civilians from threat in every single situation. But I think it's important to have a more honest debate about the limits of the Protection of Civilians (POC) mandates, especially given some historical examples and contemporary challenges.

Second point concerning the HIPPO: partnerships. Partnerships between the UN and regional or other organizations have increased in terms of numbers, intensity and institutionalization. We have between the UN and the EU, for example, one of the most densely institutionalized relationships that exist between two autonomous organizations, with action plans, steering committees and also activity on the ground. Similarly, the UN has advanced significant cooperation schemes with the African Union and even NATO or the CSTO. But the interesting point here again that is often missed is that sometimes it's not a partnership but two entities with diametrically opposed interests. And that's something also to be aware of when we talk about coordination, and the problems of collaboration between the UN and international organizations. So perhaps we have to be a little bit more careful when we use the term 'partnerships' when describing the wide range of complicated inter-organizational relations.

Finally, I read with great interest that the HIPPO report also talks about the failures in having some kind of standing capacity, a nucleus element, some kind of start-up capability ready to deploy rapidly for peacekeeping operations. If you look at any peacekeeping operation that was assembled under time pressure and the resulting slow trickling in of troop contributing countries – as has been the case in the majority of all UN operations – it becomes clear how speedy deployments can make or break an operation. Yet, again, what is often forgotten in these contemporary debates is that during the last 70 years we've already had 14 multilateral attempts to establish a rapid reaction force for the UN. And as the Handbook chapter on the **UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea [UNMEE]** shows, there has been one successful example of trying to come close to the idea of a 'UN army', if not standing, then at least on standby: the Standby High Readiness Brigade for UN Operations (SHIRBRIG), which contributed to the planning and deployment of UNMEE in 2000. Indeed, the co-author of the UNMEE chapter, Patrick Cammaert, used to be SHIRBRIG's Commander and later became an avid supporter of enhancing and expanding the brigade as an effective rapid reaction force. Unfortunately, for a variety of understandable and not so understandable reasons, SHIRBRIG was dismantled in 2009. The fact that the HIPPO report now talks once more about the need for a rapid reaction force highlights the ongoing importance of connecting historical dots, and the need for improving existing instruments, rather than dismantling them too quickly. SHIRBRIG could not only have been a useful rapid reaction tool, but it was also used as a 'rapidly deployable headquarters' in the Liberia mission (UNMIL) in 2003 and conducted pre-mission planning for the Sudan and Ivory Coast operations. As the current situation and the HIPPO report make clear, future challenges to UN Peacekeeping will require even more strong planning capacities and robust, cohesive and well-trained rapid reaction forces.

AN: Our conversation has pointed out major challenges and necessities for improving peacekeeping, but also the successes and potential of peacekeeping missions. Where does this leave us?

PW: One of the things that stands out quite clearly concerning global military expenditure is how few financial resources have really been devoted to the world of UN peacekeeping and other forms of conflict management. We spend a pittance on giving peace a chance, and huge sums on preparing for war.

JK: An exercise that really puts the underfunding of UN peacekeeping in perspective is to remind ourselves of what other countries spend in total on conflicts that are in their direct strategic interest. For example, on Afghanistan alone the U.S. used to spend 3.5 billion dollars per month. That's half of the entire annual UN Peacekeeping budget spent in a single month, by one UN member, on one single country.

AN: For Afghanistan, at the height of the mission, the U.S. expenditure was the equivalent of the UN peacekeeping budget.

PW: And yet, despite the relative lack of positive resources, UN peacekeepers have still been able to deliver. The various chapters in the Handbook highlight many impressive results and achievements despite relatively constrained and limited resources that have been spent on UN peacekeeping. Concerning the rise in peacekeeping budgets over the last few years, it is important to note that expenditures have risen in large part because of the locations where we've been deploying peacekeepers and the difficulty of getting supplies delivered in areas where there are no good roads, no good airports, etc. If UN peacekeeping had historically been deployed only in places like Cyprus, we would have had a much smaller budget. But when the history of peacekeeping includes deployments in Congo, Western Sudan, Northern Mali, etc., then I think that's important to remember.

JK: A final remark: The UN has over the last 67 years deployed 71 missions around the globe, in other words, more than one mission per year, addressing the most intractable conflicts around the world. And it had to do so despite a variety of political, structural and resource constraints. Now imagine what peacekeeping could achieve if it was given all the resources it would need – which would still be far less than the resources deployed by coalitions of willing or unilateral state-led missions. The success of UN peacekeeping would probably shock us all.

***Alexandra Novosseloff** is Senior Visiting Fellow at the [Center on International Cooperation of New York University](#). She is the author of three chapters in the Handbook: UNIFIL, expanded UNIFIL, ONUCI. | **Twitter:** [@DeSachenka](#)*

***Joachim A. Koops** is Dean of Vesalius College, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Research Professor at the VUB's Institute for European Studies and Director of the Global Governance Institute (GGI). | **Twitter:** [@JoeKoops](#)*

***Paul D. Williams** is associate professor in the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University. | **Twitter:** [@PDWilliamsGWU](#)*

***Norrie MacQueen** is an Honorary Research Fellow, School of International Relations, University of St Andrews. | **Twitter:** [@NorrieMacQueen](#)*

***Thierry Tardy** is a Senior Analyst at the European Union Institute for Security Studies. | **Twitter:** [@thierrytardy](#)*

THEMATIC ESSAYS

September 23, 2015

HOW CAN THE UN MOVE TOWARDS MORE PEOPLE-CENTERED PEACE OPERATIONS?

John Karlsrud

©UN MULTIMEDIA



A slew of recent reviews, such as the high level panel on UN peace operations report (**HIPPO report**), the 2015 review of the UN peacebuilding architecture and the **2030 agenda** for sustainable development, have all put people at the front and center of the international community's efforts to bring about peace, security and development. These reports focus on the need for **responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative** political settlements to achieve sustained peace.

This follows increasing criticism that the UN and other international peacebuilders are more focused on placating national elites and their masters at headquarters in New York, Brussels and Washington, rather than the people they are mandated to protect. Séverine Autessere and **other scholars argue** that international peacebuilders are more intent on **following their professional prescripts** than responding to local needs, focusing on tangible outputs such as buildings, institutions, laws and technical assistance, resulting in a **top-down approach**. These critics argue that the UN should instead focus on helping establish more **accountable, inclusive and responsive** states that can respond to the needs and views of the people. These need to be articulated by the people through formal, as well as **informal political institutions**. To really help people and the states they live in, UN peace operations must respond to the challenges facing these **states of fragility** by fostering more inclusive and responsive societies.

WHAT HAS THE UN BEEN DOING?

The focus on protection of civilians (PoC) has undoubtedly had a positive impact on the willingness and ability of UN peacekeeping to take a more people-centred approach over the last decade or so. However, as Jean Arnault also convincingly **argues**, a spinoff effect is that missions have been mandated to protect civilians in a robust manner, often without a corresponding long-term political strategy. Although the PoC strategy has three pillars, the main focus has been to protect civilians from physical violence, with an emphasis on military capabilities and the willingness to use them (or the lack thereof).

On the positive side, this has also increased attention at UN headquarters to what peace operations do at local levels. For instance, it has led to the inclusion of new capacities to better understand local conflict dynamics and perceptions. One example includes the **community liaison assistants** and the community alert networks first deployed by UN stabilization mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and now being rolled out in several other missions. Another example is the set of guidelines on **understanding and integrating local perceptions** issued by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in 2014. DPKO is currently also working on a set of guidelines for supporting and enhancing state/society relations at the local level.

A third example is the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, UNMISS, which began setting up Country Support Bases before the crisis in 2013. These bases should enable improved state presence and service delivery on the local level. UNMIL in Liberia serves as a fourth example, having set up **Justice and Security Hubs** and **County Security Councils** that increased the presence of national authorities on local levels and facilitated the transition and exit of the peacekeeping mission.

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN CONFLICT

The **HIPPO report** argues for “a renewed resolve on the part of UN peace operations personnel to engage with, serve and protect the people they have been mandated to assist” (p. viii). Conflict-affected countries more often than not also struggle with centre-periphery tensions, along with a self-serving elite that knows how to engage with and influence international actors, but who neither necessarily represent, nor have the best interest of the general population in mind.

The main interlocutor in peacekeeping and peacebuilding is the host state, and states are the primary units of the UN. The focus on strengthening state authority is thus an inbuilt reflex of the system. Host states may thus view efforts to consult more broadly and deeply as infringements on their sovereignty. For peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts to succeed, however, it is absolutely necessary to build more inclusive and participatory states that are responsive and accountable to their people. In tandem, it is crucial to **build institutions and trust** in those institutions. Missions need to support inclusive politics but also more inclusive economics. As the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Liberia, Karin Landgren, convincingly **points out**, there is a need to move away from an enclave economy that only benefits a small elite.

The key tenet of the HIPPO report and the peacebuilding review has been the primacy of politics – and politics that is grounded in the will and needs of the people of conflict-affected countries on national and local levels. As the peacebuilding review points out, the engagement of external peacebuilders – focusing their efforts on building national capacity and extending state authority – can add tension rather than build peace: “in a context of fragmentation, it is possible that an attempt to rebuild or extend central authority could lead not to peace but to deepening conflict” (p. 16).

The Secretary-General’s **follow-up report to the HIPPO** argues that the UN should be “more responsive and more accountable to the needs of countries and people in conflict” (p. 3). This was also singled out by the Secretary-General as one of three key priorities at the launch of the report. The follow-up report goes on to deal with expectation management and strategic communications to “foster public support”, but this is only part of the picture. To achieve **inclusive political settlements**, people need to be consulted and feel consulted, not only informed. However, there is little in the report on how UN peace operations should be more accountable to people’s needs. This is disappointing, as the HIPPO raised expectations for a more reflective stance on the topic.

SO HOW SHOULD PEACE OPERATIONS BECOME MORE PEOPLE-ORIENTED?

UN peacekeeping operations have long had significant presence outside of the capitals of the countries they are deployed to. Their civil affairs officers have often been the only presence in remote locations, and in some countries such as Kosovo and East Timor, the UN missions have been the government on the ground.

Civil affairs officers, military liaison officers, gender advisors and in recent years community liaison assistants can all reach out and talk with local communities and their representatives. When doing this, missions need to be careful to not only talk with elites,

but also to identify credible voices among youth, women and civil society, as well as traditional, religious and academic leaders. A frequent challenge faced is that the same person can be a traditional leader, a businessman and a member of an armed group. Officials may not be the most influential members of society, and could have much to gain from the legitimacy that external peacebuilders confer. Extra care should thus be taken not to appear partial only to local authorities. It is vital to reach out to minorities and those who may not be represented.

Missions could, **and should**, use experts, social anthropologists and others who have a deeper knowledge of the country. Community liaison assistants and community alert networks are useful new innovations, National professional officers have always been a valuable source of knowledge and analysis, and can act as **brokers** between the mission and local communities when appropriate. **Surveys** should be carried out at regular intervals to establish baselines for monitoring of opinions and progress, and building appropriate plans on the results. **New tools** and technologies have made it easier to do quick opinion polls and offer a way to better understand the needs and challenges of affected populations.

Currently, the **civil affairs section** of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is working on a set of guidelines to improve engagement with local populations. Reflecting the concern highlighted in the peace operations and peacebuilding reviews, the language is shifting from the standard mandate of “extending state authority” to “enhancing and supporting local-level state/society relations”.

As Cedric de Coning, Paul Troost and I argue in an article in the *Stability* journal, this work needs further support from member states, civil society and other stakeholders if they want peace operations to succeed in states emerging from conflict. Should UN peace operations address issues of state/society relations, such as inequality, marginalization and lack of social cohesion? Some member states would probably answer no to this question. However, in order to succeed with the task of sustaining peace in their countries, the answer is undoubtedly yes.

The task is far from easy. Exclusion, discrimination and instrumentalized politics are often at the source of the conflict, and strong interests would like to keep it this way. Leadership may be under duress because of long-time resource and capacity constraints, which also increases the chance of leaders falling prey to corruption, collusion with organized crime and self-serving maintenance of the status quo.

TOWARD PEOPLE-CENTRED PEACEKEEPING?

When member states meet next week to discuss future UN peace operations, they should acknowledge and respond to the challenges that the HIPPO report and the peacebuilding review have identified, and the proposals they have made for how to better include the needs and aspirations of people affected by conflict.

UN peace operations cannot continue to be the option of last resort, muddling through on a minimum of resources and responding to the needs of members of the UN Security Council. Peace operations need to be perceived to be doing something, responding to and dealing with the actual needs of the people and the root causes of conflict. Politics must take primacy, as the HIPPO panel has proclaimed. That dictum should be heeded by member states in the discussions during the next month, in respect of the people who still await peace on the ground.

The Secretary-General's report does mention in several instances the obligation to heed the needs and aspirations of the people. The list of issues it should ideally cover is endless, and other important dimensions of peace operations have fared no better. Nevertheless, the fact that the report picks up on this component should be seen as a will to improve in this particular area. To help the UN succeed, it is necessary to continue to push and support UN peacekeepers and peacebuilders in their pursuit of more people-oriented peace operations, not only by developing guidelines but also by putting these into practice. This will greatly improve the chances of success for peacekeeping operations, and provide more value for money for their funders too.

*John Karlsrud is a Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Fellow at Center on International Cooperation, NYU and Senior Research Fellow and Manager, Training for Peace programme, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). His latest articles include **"Towards More People-Centric Peace Operations: From 'Extension of State Authority' to 'Strengthening Inclusive State-Society Relations'"** in **Stability**, and **'The UN at War: Examining the Consequences of Peace Enforcement Mandates for the UN Peacekeeping Operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali'** in **Third World Quarterly**. | **Twitter: @johnkarlsrud***

September 28, 2015

CAN ATTACK HELICOPTERS SAVE U.N. PEACEKEEPING?

©UN PHOTO/CHRISTOPHER HERWIG



James Traub

Does U.N. peacekeeping matter? President Barack Obama believes that it does — and he has advocated the cause more forcefully than any of his predecessors since George H. W. Bush, who once looked to the U.N. to help forge a “new world order.” The catastrophes of Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia purged that dream forever; but from literally his first day in office, when the United States paid off its outstanding arrears at the U.N., Obama has championed peacekeeping as a low-cost and effective means of policing turbulent places. His administration has spent the last year rounding up fresh commitments from troop-contributing countries; at the U.N. General Assembly session this week, Obama will convene a group of more than 50 heads of state who have made such pledges and will announce them like so many swells at an annual philanthropic dinner.

The one odd feature of this otherwise admirable ritual will be that the United States is not, itself, much of a donor. While the United States is by far the largest donor to peacekeeping operations, paying for 28 percent of the budget, it ranks 74th on the list of troop-contributors, with just 82 military and police officers seconded to peacekeeping operations. (Bangladesh places first with 9,432.) In other realms, including nuclear nonproliferation and climate change, Obama has been quick to recognize that the United States must ante up in order to induce others to do their part. In this case, as American officials are quick to note, the United States is an outsized contributor to global security through its contributions to NATO, its large counterterrorism footprint, and the like. Obama, in short, believes that peacekeeping is good for the United States, but not good for the United States to do.

Other countries apparently have accepted the argument that the United States is already doing its part and have therefore agreed to up their own game. American officials I spoke to said that the pledges to be made at the peacekeeping summit, which will include virtually all European countries as well as major non-European troop contributors, will be specific and substantial — including not just infantry battalions but attack helicopters, transport planes, counter-IED units, hospitals, and over a dozen engineering companies. Some will be made available on a rapid-deployment basis, currently a serious gap in peacekeeping capacity. “These new capabilities can prevent mass killing and ensure that peace agreements are more than words on paper,” said Obama at the U.N. today.

If nations make good on their promises — a very large “if” — “it could really be a sea change for us,” a U.N. peacekeeping official said to me. For years, the U.N. has taken whatever troops it was offered and lived with the consequences, whether fecklessness or even sexual abuse. Now the U.N. may for the first time have surplus capacity. In that case, as an American official points out, “the U.N. will have an opportunity to repatriate the worst performing units” — and to warn contributors in advance that they will do so.

Beyond filling gaps in capacity, the Obama administration is hoping to precipitate a series of changes that will make peacekeeping more predictable and more robust. Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, pointed out to me that the

U.N. has never had the chance to think about force generation in a forward-looking way. Now, owing to the American initiative, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has assembled a list of future as well as current operational needs, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has supported a proposal to establish a unit devoted to strategic force generation.

In addition, in May, a group of troop-contributing countries meeting in Rwanda issued the so-called “**Kigali Principles**” vowing, among other things, “to be prepared to use force to protect civilians, as necessary and consistent with the mandate” and “not to stipulate caveats or other restrictions that prevent us from fulfilling our responsibility to protect civilians in accordance with the mandate.” The U.N. has increasingly been prepared to use force to defend civilians; in 2013, the Security Council broke with a tradition of impartial peacekeeping by authorizing an “intervention brigade” to fight rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo who had been massacring villagers. The Kigali Principles formalize that commitment. They have been endorsed by many African and European nations, though not by the South Asians, who provide the largest number of peacekeepers and are notorious for imposing such “caveats,” which often stipulate that lethal force may be used only for self-defense.

THE CRISIS OF PEACEKEEPING

U.N. peacekeeping, by its very nature, is always in crisis, but the crisis is even worse now than usual. Peacekeepers are expected to do far more, in far more difficult places, than they were in the past. The U.N. now fields almost 130,000 uniformed and civilian personnel, up from 75,000 only a decade ago. While once the U.N. could hold to the pretense that it does not do peacekeeping where “there is no peace to keep,” peacekeepers have increasingly been placed in anarchic settings where the objective is less monitoring a shaky peace than “conflict management,” as a June [report](#) by the High-Level Independent Panel on U.N. Peace Operations (HIPPO) puts it. Two-thirds of peacekeepers now operate in active conflict areas, including Congo, the Central African Republic, and Burundi.

At the same time, the European forces that once formed the backbone of many tough peacekeeping missions have vanished. The highest-ranking Western troop-contributing country is Italy, which ranks 26th with 1,103 soldiers and police officers, almost all of them in Lebanon. The U.N. can call on tens of thousands of lightly armed African or South Asian peacekeepers but is desperately short of “niche capacities,” including engineering, airlift, medevac, intelligence, and surveillance. In short, the U.N. Security Council is sending peacekeepers into ever more perilous settings and asking them to do more without providing the wherewithal to help them succeed. As the HIPPO report puts it, “there is a clear sense of a widening gap between what is being asked of [U.N.] peace operations today and what they are able to deliver.”

Inside the U.N., there is an overwhelming sense of futility surrounding the vast missions in Congo, Darfur, and particularly in South Sudan — where peacekeepers were sent to help a new nation struggle to its feet and have now been thrust into the middle of a civil war between two rival camps of the government. The available remedies, including the useful technical fixes proposed by the high-level panel — improved training for peacekeepers, more carefully limited mandates, more predictable financing, and the establishment of a modest stand-by capacity for rapid deployment — don’t hold out the prospect for fundamental change. Obama’s pledging conference really is the best news for peacekeeping in years.

But it is important to understand what those new engineering brigades and heavy weapons can and can’t do. What they can do is help peacekeepers protect civilians and themselves and prevent host governments from being overrun by insurgent forces. As a U.N. peacekeeping official puts it, “You can’t deploy into a setting like Mali without being able to see over the horizon or over-the-

horizon visibility and protect against IEDs. Otherwise, a lot of peacekeepers are going to get killed or injured.” Both American and U.N. officials say that they now have sufficient pledges to meet current and immediately foreseeable needs — not only for infantry and helicopters but for crucial “niche capacities” like engineering, medical care, and airlift. If true, that’s a big deal.

IS FORCE ALONE ENOUGH?

I’ve been reporting from conflict zones and peacekeeping settings for 15 years. I don’t doubt that robust mandates and well-equipped soldiers make a difference. On a visit to Sierra Leone in 2000, I was very impressed with the spit and polish of the Indian contingent I spent time with — until I returned home and read that they had been **taken prisoner** by rebels with the Revolutionary United Front. The troops had neither the mandate nor the firepower to fight back. The government might well have fallen had the British not sent 700 paratroopers to Freetown, the nation’s capital. The humiliation marked a turning point for the U.N., which fired the Indian force commander, added new troops, and instructed them to fire on rebels who threatened either them or civilians. The rebellion died out, the government stabilized, and the peacekeepers went home.

Force matters — but only under the right circumstances. I’ve also spent time with Pakistani troops in eastern Congo who were spoiling for a fight with local insurgents and Rwandan ex-génocidaires. In Congo, the U.N. has sometimes rolled over, as when they **allowed** M23 rebels to take the major city of Goma without interference in 2012, and sometimes fought back, as when the “intervention brigade” defeated M23 the following year. Robust peacekeeping saves lives, but it does not change the underlying situation.

The most important book to be written about peacekeeping in recent years is *The Fog of Peace*, a memoir by Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the head of the U.N.’s Department of Peacekeeping from 2000 to 2008. Guéhenno writes about Congo at great length and with great sadness. He writes that his hope in dispatching troops there was to “change the political dynamics on the ground” by persuading spoilers that “the commitment of the international community was stronger than they had anticipated.” That never happened, in part because diplomats were unwilling to be as forceful with Congo’s political leaders as the peacekeepers were, at least intermittently, with troublemakers. Guéhenno writes that “military operations became a convenient distraction, which allowed the Security Council to neglect the politics of Congo.” At bottom, Guéhenno concludes, “robust peacekeeping is an empty concept if it is not supported by a robust political posture. The United Nations does not have the capacity to enforce peace.”

Peacekeeping, at best, buys diplomats time and space to cajole, threaten, or bribe domestic political actors into behaving in such a way that enhances their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens — and thus drains support from the insurgents. That has happened in some places, including Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d’Ivoire. It has not happened in Congo, or in South Sudan, where political leaders have conscripted their tribal followers in a brutal battle for supremacy. In these and other settings, **writes** Richard Gowan, a peacekeeping expert affiliated with the Center on International Cooperation (of which I am a fellow), blue helmets “have to try to defend civilians from precisely the governments and security forces they are meant to partner with.” Gowan argues that the U.N. must be prepared to consider “the nuclear option of withdrawing peacekeeping forces more rapidly in those cases where national leaders grow too confrontational or autocratic.”

Guéhenno’s experience leads him to much the same conclusion, though with an important proviso. Congo might have been best served, he writes, by a withdrawal of peacekeepers, but only if it had been accompanied by “a much earlier and more much more strategic engagement in the politics” of the country. The HIPPO panel, staffed by U.N. insiders, does not recommend any nuclear

options. It does, however, endorse Guéhenno's view that the core capacity of peacekeeping is political, not military. The panel used the term "peace operations" to refer to the entire spectrum of diplomatic, economic, and military engagement, arguing that "the primacy of politics should be the hallmark of the approach of the United Nations to the resolution of conflict." The panel proposed that peacekeeping missions only be dispatched "in support of political solutions" and offers as many suggestions for beefing up the U.N.'s diplomatic and mediation capacity as for improving military readiness. What the panel did not say is that political failure is not a matter of technique but of will. It's far easier for the Security Council to send peacekeepers to a trouble spot than to agree to apply pressure on political leaders whom some members of the council invariably view as allies.

NECESSARY, BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

Samantha Power knows all this. Providing more troops and niche capabilities, she said, "is not sufficient, but it is necessary for a lot of the reforms we need." And since the kinds of political solutions that make effective peacekeeping possible are not in the offing in many of the most dangerous settings, it's irresponsible to wait. "Peacekeeping fundamentally deals with symptoms," she acknowledged. "But we have to deal with the fact that people are dying and getting raped right now." I can't argue with that proposition.

Peacekeeping can only deal with symptoms; but a secondary question is whether it can even do that in the kinds of settings that most concern the United States and the West. The scale of the killing and mayhem in the nightmare zones of sub-Saharan Africa — where so much peacekeeping has been concentrated — constitute a pressing moral obligation as well as a genuine, but secondary, national security interest. The United States has good reason to try to stop the Central African Republic from descending into complete anarchy. It has, however, a much more compelling interest in preventing al Qaeda from gaining control over northern Mali. Can robust peacekeeping even work in such places?

Mali is the wild frontier of peacekeeping. After a combination of indigenous rebels and Islamists from al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb threatened Bamako, the nation's capital, in early 2013, France dispatched 4,000 troops, along with fighter jets, to defend its former colony. Once the insurgents had been pushed back into the hinterland, the French forces gave way to MINUSMA, the U.N. peacekeeping mission, staffed with 10,000 uniformed personnel. The former colonial master administering a beating and then handing off to the U.N. was a pattern familiar from Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and other ex-colonies. But because the terrorist presence made Mali a threat in the way that those settings had not been, MINUSMA includes over 1,000 soldiers from 14 European countries, chief among them the Netherlands and Sweden. Mali is thus both a test of whether U.N. peacekeeping can work in a setting that includes Islamic terrorists as well as local insurgents, and whether the new European commitment to peacekeeping that Obama has encouraged can make a significant difference in a place that matters greatly to the West.

For the moment, MINUSMA is teetering between survival and disaster. Peacekeepers have been **killed** by IEDs and by coordinated suicide bombings. Better equipment and technology would certainly help. Peacekeepers in open-bed pickups are sitting ducks for ambushes; up-armored vehicles and counter-IED technology would save lives and raise morale. However, so long as North Africa remains a breeding ground for al Qaeda, and perhaps the Islamic State, the peacekeepers in Mali will find themselves fighting an enemy far better armed and more dangerous than the M23 rebels — and also willing to die rather than compromise. Mali still may be a bridge too far.

COUNTERTERRORISM AND BLUE HELMETS

The HIPPO panel bluntly concluded that U.N. peacekeepers “lack the specific equipment, intelligence, logistics, capabilities and specialized military preparation required” for military counterterrorism operations and should not be asked to undertake them. That may be slightly too categorical a distinction. Any imaginable mission in the Middle Eastern or North African conflict zones that pose the greatest threat to the West will involve, as it has in Mali, confrontation with terrorists as well as with the usual insurgents. In practice, it will prove impossible to limit the U.N. to more conventional peacekeeping efforts while assigning the counterterrorism work to someone else.

The U.N. may have to face the question of what role it can play in the fight against Islamic terrorism, sooner rather than later. What will happen in Libya if the [peace agreement](#) forged by U.N. mediator Bernardino León actually holds and both sides look to an outside force to police the agreement? Or Yemen? Or even Syria?

The answer may be that as the ratio of Islamic extremists to indigenous insurgents goes up, the utility of U.N. peacekeeping goes down. When I asked Samantha Power what kind of force she could envision in a setting like Libya, she suggested a multinational coalition or regional force; one possible model would be the African Union force (logistically supported by the U.N.) that now patrols Somalia — another setting in which counterterrorism operations are a priority. The U.N. Security Council would authorize a non-U.N. force — though one wonders who would volunteer to go. The Arab League has [announced](#) that it will form a joint military force to intervene in neighboring states wracked by insurgency. Right now, however, a coalition of Arab armies are busy making war in Yemen. Peacemaking may not be their métier.

Like counterinsurgency and other refinements of violence, peacekeeping looks better from far away than it does from close up. It sounds antiseptic and sometimes feels heroic, but it’s mostly a desperate form of coping. We no longer believe in a new world order. We are stuck with the one we have, with its collapsing states, rising extremism, and geopolitical friction. In that terribly fallen world, it is absolutely true, as Samantha Power says, we cannot wait for the light of reason to dawn. President Obama deserves credit for doing what he can to strengthen this frail instrument. But we have to remind ourselves that force rarely solves problems and sometimes makes them worse. We resort to it so often because we lack the will, and the understanding, to cure the diseases that plague nations.

This article was originally published by [Foreign Policy](#) on September 28 2015

James Traub is a fellow at the Center on International Cooperation. “[Terms of Engagement](#),” his column for [ForeignPolicy.com](#), runs weekly. | **Twitter:** [@JamesTraub1](#)

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

September 28, 2015

ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY ASPECTS OF THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS (REPORT OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE)

Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

September 28, 2015

UNITED STATES SUPPORT TO UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS

As articulated in the 2015 National Security Strategy, the United States has a critical national security interest in mitigating state fragility and preventing, containing, and resolving armed conflict.

September 28, 2015

UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS: PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES (“CAPSTONE DOCTRINE”)

UN Peacekeeping principles and guidelines

September 28, 2015

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL PURSUANT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 53/35: THE FALL OF SREBRENICA [A/54/549]

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fall of Srebrenica.

September 28, 2015

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO THE ACTIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DURING THE 1994 GENOCIDE IN RWANDA [SG/SM/7263]

Kofi Annan emphasizes commitment to protecting civilian population

September 28, 2015

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO THE ACTIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DURING THE 1994 GENOCIDE IN RWANDA [S/1999/1257]

An independent inquiry into the actions the UN took at the time of the Rwandan genocide.

September 11, 2015

THE FUTURE OF UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HIGH-LEVEL INDEPENDENT PANEL ON PEACE OPERATIONS

Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects

Comprehensive review of special political missions

Strengthening of the United Nations system

Global _____
Peace Operations

Review

The creation of the Global Peace Operations Review was generously supported by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the German Foreign Office, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



@PeaceOpsCIC

peaceoperationsreview.org

Center on International Cooperation
726 Broadway, Suite 543
New York, NY 10003
cic.nyu.edu