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.

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WHEN SHOULD BLUE HELMETS WALK AWAY FROM A CONFLICT?

Richard Gowan

The renewed crisis in South Sudan is turning into a decisive test for the United Nations. There is a growing international outcry over reports that local forces raped and killed civilians almost in front of UN peacekeepers. The Security Council has struggled to persuade the South Sudanese government to accept the deployment of an additional 4,000 troops with a robust mandate to stabilize the capital, Juba. Having initially rejected the proposal, which has strong African support, President Salva Kiir now seems willing to at least consider the reinforcements. There are tensions in the Security Council over how to handle Kiir: the U.S. wants a tough line, but China and Russia insist on respect for that South Sudan’s sovereignty.

Kiir and his advisers profoundly distrust the UN. According to a leaked South Sudanese document they believe that “The UN Secretary General [Ban Ki Moon] has constantly advanced negative views against the Government of the Republic of South Sudan and its leadership,” and even pursued a “regime change strategy.” This is unjust. A few outside analysts have advanced ambitious and probably unworkable plans to turn South Sudan into an international protectorate on the Kosovo model. But the UN is largely struggling to stay on top of the crisis and get aid to the suffering, rather than plotting to overthrow Kiir.
The grim reality is that, far from being in a position to depose the president, the UN has little choice but to work with him and his allies. The alternative could be a severe increase in violence, with peacekeepers in the firing line. This is neither a new or unique dilemma. In “The Peacekeeping Quagmire”, published by the Georgetown Journal of International Affairs exactly a year ago, I argued that the UN’s “greatest strategic weakness” in South Sudan was its ties to an insecure and often aggressive leader such as Kiir.

Yet, as I noted then, peacekeeping forces have ended up in similarly dangerous relationships with other leaders, including Sudan’s Omar al-Bashir and the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Joseph Kabila. While Kiir may be in the news today, there are also growing fears that Kabila’s efforts to quash political opposition and secure an unconstitutional third term as president in the DRC this year will also lead to serious violence – and once again, a large UN peace operation will be on the frontline trying to keep order.

These crises are a reminder that, in trying to understand why UN peace operations succeed or fail, it is necessary not only to look at the technical details of their mandates and functions (DDR, SSR, and so forth) but also at political personalities and dynamics. The 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) argued that the UN must emphasize the “primacy of politics” in all its peacemaking efforts. But what happens when politicians are fundamentally unwilling or unable to work constructively with international peacekeepers? As I argued last year, and still believe today, there may be times and places where the UN has to walk away from countries where local political elites set ethically unacceptable conditions for keeping blue helmets on the ground, whatever the dangers of retreating.

This line chart shows the increase in the number of uniformed personnel deployed (red line) and UN authorized levels of uniformed personnel (blue line) of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) from its inception (August 2011) to present.
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In January 2015, protests broke out in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in response to an attempt by President Joseph Kabila to circumvent constitutional term-limits and run for a third term as head of state. Security forces killed dozens. Kabila backed down but many Congolese and foreign observers thought this retreat is only temporary. The violence raised concerns not only about the DRC's political future but also about Kabila's relationship with the United Nations.

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The UN has deployed peacekeepers in the DRC since 1999 and in July 2016 had more than 18,000 troops and police on the ground. It oversaw the president's two previous electoral victories in 2006 and 2011, although his supporters were widely believed to have rigged the latter. UN troops have assisted the Congolese army, which has an ugly track record of human rights violations, in efforts to defeat militias in the east of the country. Yet if the UN and Kabila have developed a symbiotic relationship, it is also an abusive one. The President and his advisers have accused the peacekeepers of failing to fight hard enough in the east and accused the UN of "neo-colonization".

The UN Stabilization Force in the DRC (MONUSCO) has become an emblem of the flaws of the UN's broader peacekeeping project. The organization in July 2016 had more than 101,000 uniformed personnel worldwide, a record. Some of the largest and highest-profile UN missions, including those in South Sudan and Darfur, are trapped in quagmires of endemic violence and dysfunctional politics. UN contingents are often under-equipped and under-motivated, reducing their tactical impact. Yet the UN's greatest strategic weakness in these cases is that it has become entangled in fractious and arguably unethical relationships with national leaders who, driven by greed or fear, have little real interest in stable, open and inclusive political systems.

The DRC is by no means the worst case. In South Sudan, President Salva Kiir has marginalized the UN mission (UNMISS) since the country slumped into civil war in December 2013. In July 2016, the peacekeepers are sheltering an estimated 200,000 civilians on their compounds but can do little more. In Darfur, troops and militias loyal to President Omar al-Bashir regularly harass peacekeeping patrols. UN officials have allegedly covered up cases where government troops have attacked international personnel.

The Security Council has regularly renewed the mandates for these missions and the UN continues to work with Kabila, Kiir and Bashir. Having aspired to instill democracy and good governance in countries like the DRC and South Sudan, the UN has ended up propping up unreliable and even autocratic leaders in the absence of better alternatives. Peacekeepers have to try to defend civilians from precisely the governments and security forces they are meant to partner with.

It might be honest to declare defeat in Darfur or announce that the UN will pull out of DRC or South Sudan if national leaders do not engage in less destructive politics. But the risk of renewed chaos after the peacekeepers hangs heavily over the Security Council: Nobody wants to close a mission and see massacres spread as the last peacekeepers leave. How did the UN get into this mess? Can it ever escape it?
FROM ELECTIONS TO AUTOCRATS?

To understand how the UN finds itself in its current predicament, as argued in previous articles, it is necessary to have a sense of both irony and tragedy. The irony is that the UN's dilemmas arise from earlier efforts at democratization and humanitarian protection by the UN a little more than a decade ago. The tragedy is that in cases such as the DRC and the Sudans, UN officials, having lost whatever political leverage they initially had, are stuck trying to mitigate cycles of violence that they can foresee but not prevent. Some historical context is necessary here.

Twenty years ago, the UN's reputation nosedived in the wake of Rwanda and Srebrenica. Blue helmet missions dwindled as alternatives such as NATO took the lead in the Balkans and swaths of Africa, including the DRC, toppled into conflict. Yet from 1999 on, the Security Council and then Secretary-General Kofi Annan collaborated to revitalize UN peacekeeping to manage crises and instill peace, above all in battered African countries such as Sierra Leone and Sudan. The UN also took on small trouble spots elsewhere, like Haiti, Kosovo and Timor-Leste. But Africa has been the priority: over 80,000 of the personnel now under UN command are on the continent.

The new generation of UN missions not only managed to bring a series of bloody conflicts under control but also looked like an effective force for democracy promotion. The peacekeepers facilitated technically impressive elections in cases such as Liberia and the DRC. “Helicopters were deployed, bulletins were printed and electrical generators were sent to remote voting centers,” former UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guéhenno recalls of the Congolese effort in a new memoir, The Fog of Peace. “For the presidential elections, some 50,000 polling stations were opened.” Yet as Guéhenno underlines, the sheer scale of these processes obscured far deeper political challenges to democratization.

Almost everywhere the UN deployed in the early 2000s, it found it hard to grasp, let alone unpick, complex local political alliances and patronage systems. In some cases, power-brokers were able to delay elections for long periods: The UN sent a mission to Côte d’Ivoire with a mandate to prepare for polls in 2004, but was unable to deliver on this until 2010. Elsewhere, national leaders took advantage of elections to consolidate their power and do down their rivals. Guéhenno noted in his book that Joseph Kabila pushed his rival in the 2006 elections, Jean-Pierre Bemba, out of the DRC by force. “At enormous and unsustainable cost,” he adds, “the international community consolidated the presidency through elections and largely ignored the other institutions of state,” limiting parliamentary and legal restraints on Kabila.

This focus on bolstering a leader rather than more credible institutions points to a deeper challenge for the UN. Officials sometimes opt for a version of the Great Man theory of history, emphasizing the personal qualities and weaknesses of the leaders they have to work with. Alan Doss, a UN veteran who led the UN mission in Liberia in 2005-2007 and that in the DRC from 2007 to 2010, concludes that while peaceful states require strong institutions, “strong institutions also require strong men and women capable of making a qualitative difference to the way those institutions function.”

Doss contrasts the “particularly effective” Liberian president and former World Bank official Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (elected on the watch of UN peacekeepers in 2006) with the “reluctant communicator” Kabila. Recent research affirms that leadership is indeed an important factor in shaping weak states. But peacekeepers and aid agencies have arguably invested too much political capital in individual leaders, raising their sense of entitlement and compromising the UN’s impartiality.
Even the widely admired Johnson Sirleaf, a joint winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, has been accused of taking unfair advantage of her position. She appointed three of her sons to senior positions, including a senior position in the Central Bank. The tensions inherent in peacekeepers’ relations with national leaders were much more brutally illustrated in Liberia’s neighbor Côte d'Ivoire in 2010-2011. President Laurent Gbagbo did a fine job of neutering the UN mission in his country, reducing it to a bit part in internal political dialogues. When Gbagbo lost the long-delayed Ivorian elections in 2010, and the UN validated the results, he took the offensive, unleashing mobs on both his political foes and ill-prepared peacekeepers.

The UN mission came close to collapse in 2011 but, reinforced with Ukrainian attack helicopters, eventually helped to restore order in tandem with French forces. Gbagbo surrendered and was later transferred to the ICC. For a brief moment, the UN’s actions seemed to confirm its credentials as a robust defender of democracy.

Yet the Ivorian crisis may have been the exception to a rule: In general, UN missions fail to respond decisively to national leaders’ abusive tendencies. Leaders such as South Sudan’s Salva Kiir have found more effective ways to assert their leverage.

The case of Kiir is striking because he once looked like a natural partner for the UN. Having first deployed peacekeepers to facilitate the end of the intra-Sudanese civil war in 2005, the UN oversaw an unexpectedly smooth independence referendum in the south in 2011. Almost 99 per cent of voters supported secession from Khartoum. The Security Council gave UNMISS an explicit mandate “to help establish the condition for the development in the Republic of South Sudan, with a view to strengthening the capacity of the Government of South Sudan to govern effectively and democratically.” This sounded like vote of confidence in Kiir’s leadership. But their relations with the authorities in Juba soured. The UN worried that the government was growing rapacious and unaccountable. The government complained that the peacekeepers were not doing enough to stop Sudan aiding to revolts on its territory.

James Copnall paints a nuanced portrait of Kiir’s position. “The man with ultimate responsibility for South Sudan,” he writes, “probably never imagined himself running a country.” John Garang, the charismatic leader of the South Sudanese independence movement, died in a helicopter crash in 2005. Kiir has had to keep his supporters satisfied. “Generals and politicians have built multi-story houses in South Sudan and abroad,” Copnall complains, “and drive cars the size of ordinary people’s huts. Corruption has become a defining feature of the new country.” Catering to such an avaricious political base, Kiir bridled at criticism from UNMISS.

These tensions peaked in 2013, when violence between Kiir’s supporters and backers of his former deputy, Riek Machar, spiraled out of control. Kiir scape-goated the UN, accusing it of bidding to form a “parallel government” while his supporters have harassed UNMISS convoys and allegedly shot down one of its helicopters (Machar’s forces have also threatened the UN, and there is a proliferation of armed groups that answer to neither leader). The government and its regional allies cut the UN out of peace talks in Ethiopia. The Security Council ordered UNMISS to focus on protecting civilians – including those on its bases – monitoring human rights and facilitating aid. The dream of close coordination between Kiir and the UN had given way to a more minimalistic focus on saving lives.
COMPROMISE AND COMPLICITY

It is hard to quibble with saving lives in a crisis. But what should the UN do over the longer term when its relations with national governments have gone off the rails? In many cases, international officials choose to temporize, hoping that they can nudge abusive leaders towards better governance over time. The leaders themselves may find this irritating (Joseph Kabila has refused to meet top UN officials for months at a time) but they do have incentives not to cut off relations completely. The presence of a peacekeeping force offers them some extra security and, perhaps most temptingly, may facilitate international aid. As Giulia Piccolino and John Karlsrud point out, the UN finds itself in a state of “mutual dependency” with these abusive leaders. If Bashir, Kabila or Kiir were to turn against the UN completely, peacekeeping would become impossible. But they would also lose “the opportunity to blame the international peace operation for everything that is not working.”

Nonetheless, abusive leaders can extract a high price from the UN for maintaining even the tenuous cooperation. In the DRC, Kabila has pushed the peacekeepers to assist a series of military offensives against militias in the east of the country. The UN has frequently worried that these are likely to cause unjustifiable human and political harm, and international NGOs have highlighted the presence of notorious alleged war criminals in Congolese officer corps. But UN officials have argued that it is necessary to play along to limit the damage of these adventures. “We were left with no choice, either we were in or we were out,” an anonymous official explained to Human Rights Watch after one notably brutal operation in 2009. “We believed that being on the inside would give us a better chance to protect civilians.”

The UN has tried to place some conditions, such as the vetting of senior personnel, on its Congolese military counterparts, creating new frictions. Kabila’s relations with MONUSCO reached a nadir after the UN failed to halt rebels from seizing the city of Goma in late 2012. The following year, the Security Council tried to regain his trust by mandating a special brigade to neutralize militias in the eastern DRC. Kabila also agreed to enter a regional political dialogue aimed at resolving the east’s problems, and the brigade was initially successful. Yet by early 2015, both the military and political processes were losing steam as Kabila prepared for the 2016 elections.

At least Kabila and MONUSCO remain nominally on the same side. In Darfur, the Sudanese government has sometimes treated the joint UN-African mission (UNAMID), launched with Western backing in 2007, as an enemy. The government views the UN with suspicion, believing that it aims to dismember the state. The International Criminal Court’s 2009 decision to indict President Bashir for war crimes in Darfur further poisoned relations. In early 2014, Foreign Policy released leaked UNAMID emails about attacks by the Sudanese military and pro-government irregulars on its personnel. The army even threatened to bomb a UN convoy. Yet the investigation found that, fearing a rupture, “the UN leadership has routinely withheld information linking Khartoum to threats – let alone violence – against UN personnel.”

UN officials insist that their presence does still provide some security for imperiled Darfuris. But this leaves deeper strategic questions open. At what point do efforts to maintain relations with abusive leaders and regime become morally and politically unsustainable? Does such collaboration contribute to protecting civilians over the long term, or does it simply allow abusive rulers to fortify their positions?
CONCLUSION: TIME TO GO?

UN officials are fully conscious of these dilemmas. They are able to identify how they might have been avoided. If the UN had not rushed to early elections in so many cases, or focused less on national politics and more on local conflict dynamics, it might not be in so many quagmires today. It should not have cultivated certain leaders so naively. The Security Council should never have sent peacekeepers to some places, like Darfur, at all. There are important lessons from these past mistakes for current and future UN deployments. But while the organization has recently been tasked with stabilizing Mali and the Central African Republic, it still has to grapple with its “legacy operations” in the DRC, the Sudans and West Africa.

Having tried to parlay with Bashir, Kabila and Kiir, the Security Council and UN officials are losing patience. While divisions between the West, Russia and China have complicated diplomacy in the Security Council, in March 2015 it established a sanctions regime for South Sudan that could be used to freeze Kiir’s assets. In February the same year, MONUSCO suspended its backing to a Congolese anti-militia operation over the involvement of two generals accused of human rights abuses. The U.S. has also leant on Kabila, with President Obama calling his Congolese counterpart to discuss how his “legacy as a leader who brought the DRC out of war and set it on a path of continued democratic progress would be consolidated by free and fair elections in 2016.” (A date for these polls remains to be set.)

If Kabila ultimately concludes that he cannot run for a third term in office – or hold onto power by a ruse such as delaying the polls – it will send a signal that national leaders cannot ignore international opinion and the UN indefinitely. But there is no guarantee that his successor will be vastly more accommodating towards the UN: the Congolese elite is divided between relatively pro-Western moderates and hardliners who might prove tougher on MONUSCO. If Kabila does go, it will also make Bashir and Kiir even more suspicious that the UN plans to oust them as well.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Kabila and Bashir launched parallel campaigns to downsize the UN forces on their territory in late 2014. The Congolese president proposed cuts to MONUSCO of a quarter (6,000 personnel) or more. Bashir called for plans for a complete end to the “burden” of UNAMID. In both cases, the Security Council responded with smaller cuts, but the UN set up a working group with the African Union and Sudanese authorities to explore exit strategies for UNAMID. It is likely that the UN’s representatives in the DRC, Darfur and South Sudan will face endless negotiations over further reductions to these missions. A series of gradual reductions could render the peacekeepers less operationally and politically robust, leaving them ever more vulnerable to bullying and manipulation.

The Security Council and UN officials should maintain, and be willing to threaten, the nuclear option of withdrawing peacekeeping forces more rapidly in those cases where national leaders grow too confrontational or autocratic. While it may be hard to imagine pulling peacekeepers out of countries where civilians remain at risk, there have to be moral limits to the sort of regimes that peacekeepers are asked to fight and die for. The longer the UN continues to prop up leaders and governments that treat the organization with contempt, the more that contempt will be deserved.

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THE SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THE ROLE OF THINK TANKS

Elsina Wainwright

To mark the 15th anniversary of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), CIC non-resident fellow Dr. Elsina Wainwright reflected on the role her policy advice played in the deployment of what became known as the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

I vividly remember learning in mid-2003 that the Howard Government was going to intervene in Solomon Islands along the lines of ASPI’s Solomon Islands report. It was exciting that ASPI was contributing to government policy. But I was also apprehensive: while think tank analysts are used to putting forth ideas, they’re far less used to seeing their ideas implemented, particularly with such a policy shift.

I had worked with ASPI Director Hugh White to prepare the paper, along with contributors Quinton Clements, Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, and Greg Urwin, and with Solomon Islands’ perspectives from Sir Fr John Ini Lapli and Sir Peter Kenilorea. Hugh White and I believed Canberra’s longstanding Southwest Pacific policy of providing aid but expecting states to solve their own problems was not addressing Solomons Islands’ political and security crisis. Australia’s interests were engaged by this crisis, the Solomons government wanted Australia’s help, and we believed the policy should change.

ASPI was able to do three things with the Solomons report. First, it provided an input to the government’s decision to intervene. According to the recently-released official history of Australian peacekeeping, Prime Minister John Howard overruled his officials and decided to intervene in response to Solomons Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza’s written request for assistance.

Second, once that decision was made, it needed implementation. The ASPI report provided a ready-made, high-level blueprint. We proposed the operation should be police, rather than military, led: the security challenges facing Solomon Islands were of a kind best tackled by police, and the optics of a police-led operation would be more benign.

Such an intervention would require Solomon Islands’ consent and should be multinational, with regional endorsement and participation. It should have two phases: the first would address the law and order crisis, and the second would be a comprehensive, long-term capacity building program to tackle governance and economic challenges which were fuelling the crisis.

And third, ASPI contributed to public discussion on why Australia was embarking on such an operation and how Australia’s strategic interests were engaged. It helped explain how the crisis could destabilize the broader region, particularly PNG, and how Australia might not be able to insulate itself from any fallout. We also described how Australia, as the largest regional power, had a responsibility—and interest in being seen—to be a good neighbour and assist.
While the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) broadly accorded with the ASPI report, it departed from our recommendations in a few key ways. In particular, we had recommended setting up an ad hoc agency, acting on behalf of Solomon Islanders, to temporarily control police and financing functions. RAMSI, however, left those functions under Solomon Islands government’s control. RAMSI’s minimal model was certainly easier to implement, but it left some of those implicated in the crisis in positions of power and RAMSI exposed to changing political alignments.

RAMSI quickly brought an end to the violence in Solomon Islands. The capacity building phase was always going to be imperfect, difficult and costly. Today Solomons Islands still has real challenges, not least the challenge of an island economy. But RAMSI could never have solved all Solomons’ challenges, as it couldn’t overcome Solomons’ geographical constraints. And nation building has proven enormously hard in every instance globally.

When I moved to a New York think tank in 2008, it became clear that the United Nations policy community and the US State Department stabilisation operations section regarded RAMSI and Australia’s deployable policing capability as real policy innovations, from which lessons could be learned.

**WHILE THINK TANK ANALYSTS ARE USED TO PUTTING FORTH IDEAS, THEY’RE FAR LESS USED TO SEEING THEIR IDEAS IMPLEMENTED.**

Along with other early ASPI papers on East Timor, Papua New Guinea, and the merits of a deployable civilian policing capability, the Solomons report recommended an increased regional focus for Australia and an increased role for Australia’s police in protecting Australia’s interests abroad. It exemplifies how policy contributions can come from outside conventional bureaucratic channels.

An external contribution seemed to work especially well at a moment of policy inflection; perhaps it was easier for a significant change in policy direction to come from outside. ASPI could propose a policy alternative so far from the orthodoxy that it would have been hard to formulate within government. It also would have been easier for the government to disavow if it received strong criticism or didn’t work. With its perspectives from and communication with eminent Solomon Islanders, ASPI could also serve as an indirect intermediary between Australia and the Solomon Islands. Such policy contributions should be one of the key roles of think tanks. There should be more interaction between government, think tanks and academia and the private sector, with more policy contestability and cross-fertilization of ideas, and less territoriality about their provenance. Canberra still trails Washington in this regard.

It was a privilege to be ‘present at the creation’ of ASPI and the expanding foreign and defence policy think tank space in Australia. Under the masterful guidance of Hugh White and ASPI Chair Robert O’Neill, and with tremendous colleagues in Mark Thomson, Peter Jennings and Aldo Borgu, ASPI was an intellectually stimulating and collaborative place to work. Hugh, Bob and the board encouraged policy entrepreneurship, and supported us when there was pushback. It was a pleasure to come to work each day. I’m proud of what ASPI achieved in its early years and pleased it remains such an important voice on Australian strategic policy.

This piece was originally published on ASPI’s *The Strategist* on 29 August 2016.

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EMILY PADDON RHOADS: “TAKING SIDES”: THE CHALLENGES OF IMPARTIALITY IN UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

Alexandra Novosseloff, Emily Paddon Rhoads, and Jason Stearns

Emily Paddon Rhoads’ book “Taking Sides in Peacekeeping: Impartiality and the Future of the United Nations” is an important study of the meaning, reality, and consequences of impartiality for peacekeepers. The issue of impartiality is one of the core principles of UN peacekeeping, but it is also one of the most challenging for those on the ground in multidimensional peace operations. Consent of the host nation and/or the main parties to the conflict is another founding principle and missions cannot deploy without it. But what can a mission do when after they are on the ground this consent becomes weak or is withdrawn when the host government becomes displeased with the UN’s presence? Alexandra Novosseloff and Jason Stearns recently discussed these issues with the author.

Alexandra Novosseloff (AN): What do you mean by impartiality? How do you define it? What is the book’s main argument?

Emily Paddon Rhoads (EPR): Impartiality has been a core norm of UN peacekeeping since its inception during the Cold War. It is a norm in that it prescribes how peacekeepers should behave: namely, that they be unbiased and informed when making decisions or in taking action. It is integral to the identity of peacekeepers, to what peacekeeping is and what it is not (i.e. warfighting), and to the values and principles that the UN seeks to project. It is a form of authority derived not only from a lack of bias but critically from what peacekeepers, like other ‘impartial actors’, are supposed to represent and further in the absence of particular interests. These are largely the values outlined in a mission’s mandate, which relate to the specific mission context as well as to broader norms of international peace and security. It is important to note that impartiality is not a given. My argument is that claims to impartial authority are just that – claims, and as such are disputable. For peacekeepers and the UN to command such authority, there must be some agreement on the underlying values.

I became interested in impartiality because of a change in the meaning of impartiality, how it was talked about and represented in peacekeeping doctrine, at the end of the 1990s. This new conception was more assertive and called for robust uses of force to protect civilians.

The book sets out to analyse the politics surrounding this new, more assertive conception of impartiality – at the global level (UN headquarters), and at the local level (as implemented in the Democratic Republic of Congo), and it considers the implications. I argue that the transformation has deeply politicized peacekeeping at all levels and, in cases such as Congo, has effectively converted UN forces into one warring party among many. While member states generally agree that impartiality should remain a core norm of peacekeeping, there is very little consensus over what that actually means, and thus over the purposes of and actions involved in contemporary peacekeeping. This raises pressing questions about the sustainability of peacekeeping, the acceptance
of peacekeepers locally, and it calls into question the UN's future role and ability to act as the legitimate guarantor of international peace and security if it is perceived as partial, as having taken sides.

**Jason Stearns (JS):** You describe the shift in impartiality as a radical transformation. What do you mean? What does this look like at the UN?

**EPR:** The radical transformation is seen in the roles prescribed for peacekeepers in conflict and post-conflict settings and the basis on which they now claim authority. During the Cold War, it was easier to frame and perceive peacekeepers as impartial mediators or monitors. Their authority was limited to that which the parties conferred upon them in their mandates. They were “passively” impartial, beholden to the wishes and policies of those parties to a dispute, and only in areas permitted by the superpowers. They could smile, or frown, but they couldn’t bite. When an agreement disintegrated or consent was retracted, peacekeepers did not have recourse to defend their mandate and they withdrew. That was how UNEF, the first peacekeeping mission, ended.

The reality today is very different. Starting in 2000, the role prescribed for peacekeepers in many contexts has been more akin to the impartial police officer that enforces the law evenhandedly, penalizing infractions, regardless of who is the aggressor. Whereas traditional mandates did not point fingers and treated parties with moral equivalence, contemporary peacekeepers are expected to make judgments about who is right and who is wrong and to punish perpetrators of violence irrespective of whether the individual or group has given their consent for the mission. That’s a very significant change.

It should be noted that this transformation is not specific to peacekeeping. In other areas of international engagement, claims to impartial authority, which were once based exclusively on terms to which all parties consented, are now premised on a more ambitious and expansive set of human-rights-related norms around which consensus is presumed. For example, through the principle of universal jurisdiction, the International Criminal Court asserts an unprecedented claim to impartially investigate and try alleged perpetrators of international crimes — independently of whether their states have given consent to the organization by ratifying the Rome Statute.

**AN:** Nowadays peacekeeping operations are increasingly sent in countries where there is not such a stable peace agreement. How does this challenge the principle of impartiality? And how can impartiality be maintained when consent of the host nation weakens and the mission become unwelcome?

**EPR:** Changes in the operating environment during the 1990s were critical in bringing about the transformation, the new conception of impartiality. As peacekeepers and other international actors became more heavily engaged in inter-state conflicts in places like Somalia, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia – where peace agreements frequently lacked buy-in or broke down and consent for their operations was tenuous – they confronted difficult questions about the sources of their own authority and how to adjudicate disputes between local competing claimants for authority. Whose consent was necessary? What to do when civilians were attacked? The UN’s future relevance depended on finding answers to these questions. Human rights and protection seemed to offer a basis for claiming authority and for adjudicating between parties. The spread of the idea of human rights over decades implied that these were values on which everyone could agree; peacekeepers, it was thought — perhaps more, hoped — could protect civilians and still be impartial, above politics.
This, as my book shows, has been anything but true. Judgments as to who is perpetrator and who is victim, as well as to who is the protector and who the party in need of protection, are often subjective, fluid and deeply contested by actors on the ground as well as by members of the international community. Politics permeates decision-making at all levels. We still live in a world made up of sovereign, autonomous, self-determining states, a world in which human rights and protection still requires the engagement and, you could say “agreement”, of those states. And so, as you note, consent is still a relevant principle in peacekeeping and missions must work with host states. But that means that there are tensions, visible in most peacekeeping mandates today, which give rise to a number of dilemmas and operational challenges. That’s what the book explores.

**JS:** How do you observe that transformation of the UN's role in the Congo?

**EPR:** The UN mission in the Congo is an interesting case because it has been a standard bearer for more assertive approaches. It was first deployed in 1999 just as the new conception of impartiality was beginning to take hold at the UN. From very early on, we see the transformation reflected in the mandate given to it by the Security Council. Since 2000, blue helmets have been endowed with a Chapter VII mandate to protect civilians and their rules of engagement have steadily strengthened to allow for the proactive use of force. This makes it an interesting case to look at the challenges surrounding the implementation of the “new” conception of impartiality, but also to draw out the linkages with the more global politics of peacekeeping during this time.

**JS:** What are these challenges?

**EPR:** There are many but I will just mention a few. Some of the thorniest challenges concern the mission's relationship to the state. In particular, the mission has struggled with how to reconcile its core task of civilian protection with the necessity of maintaining host state consent and its mandate to support the government. This has been particularly tricky in instances where the state itself or elements of the state pose a threat, if not the greatest threat, to civilians. Similarly, the mission has grappled with how to be both a forceful defender of human rights in the short-term, undertaking robust action against particular groups, and also be accepted as a convener and animator of peace and political processes in Congo that are really the only long-term solution to ending the conflict and reducing civilian imperilment.

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT IMPARTIALITY IS NOT A GIVEN. MY ARGUMENT IS THAT CLAIMS TO IMPARTIAL AUTHORITY ARE JUST THAT – CLAIMS, AND AS SUCH ARE DISPUTABLE.**

There are also challenges, which stem from the broader politics of peacekeeping. Peacekeeping is something of a hydra-headed institution. No single actor is forced, let alone able, to assume the complete costs, political or otherwise, of a UN collective decision. This splitting up of burdens increases the likelihood of political evasion and posturing. Those member states that have the greatest policy influence in Congo and that have authored these ambitious mandates, are rarely the same ones that put forces in the field, and the lines of accountability are weak. Over time this has bred resentment amongst troop contributing countries (TCCs). As a result, they have become more risk-averse, less willing to step into the line of fire. People often forget that during the transition period (2003-2006), traditional TCCs – Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi troops – undertook some of the most robust and forceful peacekeeping action in the UN's history.
JS: Was the UN able to be more impartial during the transition period, than in the post-transition period?

EPR: Yes, in some ways the UN did find it easier to be impartial during the transition. In the absence of an elected sovereign, peacekeepers could be more even-handed vis-à-vis the different parties. There was a coherent strategy, a goal, which the mission, backed by donors, could get behind. Nonetheless, there were a number of cases during the transition, such as Bukavu in 2004, when the mission proved unwilling to use force against certain groups, in particular, against the main signatories of the peace agreement that established the transition, or those allied to them, for fear of losing consent and being expelled. There was also the issue of Rwanda. Close ties between members of the Security Council and Rwanda, meant that the mission did not address Kigali’s culpability in fomenting instability in eastern Congo. This undue deference to Rwandan interests and unwillingness to militarily confront those backed by Rwanda, has engendered and continues to engender local perceptions that the UN is partial.

Following the transition, with the election of Joseph Kabila, impartiality became even more difficult. Kabila has played the sovereignty card very well and prevented the UN from having any real leverage or meaningful authority. From the get go, he made it be known that he was in charge and that MONUC/MONUSCO was there on his terms, and his terms only. So there is a change, there definitely is a change from the transition period to post-transition period, but some of the same political dynamics and tensions are at play across the duration of the mission.

JS: It seems to me that there are cases where the UN is partial because of inaction and there are cases where it is partial because of its action. The former seems to apply more to the transition period in the Congo and the latter to the post-transition during which the UN has partnered with the state and engaged in joint operations (e.g., the Umoja Wetu, Kimia II operations, Amani Leo)....

EPR: That’s an interesting way of framing it. I agree that the UN’s partnership with the state, its mandate to support and strengthen the state in the post-transition period, has rendered it distinctly partial in the eyes of many and made its relationship with other actors, humanitarians in particular, very tricky. However, understanding the mission’s partiality post-transition solely through the lens of “action”, actions taken to support the state, leaves out a number of important political dynamics that have resulted in instances of peacekeeper inaction, compounding perceptions of partiality and further delegitimizing the mission. A good example of this is the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB)- a specialized unit within the UN mission in Congo. Deployed in 2013 with a mandate to ‘neutralize armed groups’ in the east, it is comprised of roughly 3,000 troops from South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi. The FIB has been widely praised for the crucial role it played in helping to defeat the M23. Less acknowledged was the particular set of interests that made such action possible— the forces that made up the FIB were from neighbouring states closely allied to Kabila, two of which had significant beefs with Rwanda. This convergence of interests was not sustained, however, and as a result the FIB has since been reluctant to forcefully engage other armed actors. A recent internal UN report, described the FIB as having assumed a “largely passive and reactive stance” post M23.

That issues of impartiality/partiality arise in the context of partnerships within the peacekeeping system and not solely with external actors, like the state, is important given that regional actors, particularly African states, are increasingly willing to deploy forces and lead broader crisis management processes on their continent. What’s more, in recent years they have emerged as proponents of robust uses of force.
AN: In a way, regionalisation of peacekeeping operations undermines the impartiality of those operations, right?

EPR: Yes, I would say so. The very characteristics that often make regional actors suited to rapid and robust response (i.e., proximity, local knowledge, an incentive to contain violence) can make their lack of bias – real or perceived – all the more questionable. As in Congo, they often have their own political agendas, which can play out through operations and impact UN peacekeepers deployed alongside or following such arrangements.

JS: Do you think, then, that the UN should not partner with the host state? If it gets too afraid it can lead to paralysis?

EPR: Partnership with the state, or at the very least a working relationship with the state, is inevitable so long as host-state consent continues to be a requirement for mission deployment. And I don’t think consent is about to disappear. States just aren’t willing to field forces for that type of operation. The question then is how to balance, how to navigate, these competing and often conflicting priorities. Several policy innovations have attempted to address these challenges. None has completely resolved the issue. For example, the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), which makes the UN’s assistance to non-UN security forces conditional on respecting human rights, has encountered a number of difficulties during implementation. And in Congo, the policy was actually instrumentalized by the government when it appointed two “red-listed” generals to lead joint operations last year. Another innovation example is the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operation’s (the HIPPO report) recommendation for the establishment of political compacts between host governments and the UN (with donor involvement) with a view to bolstering national ownership and managing consent. This is an interesting idea, particularly if it strengthens donor coordination and leverage. However, I am wary of how effective it will be where a mission is already deployed and where the host-state has no intention of honouring its commitments, where consent is only in name. These contexts—where there is no meaningful political process to support—raise some really hard and difficult questions about whether a peacekeeping mission is in fact appropriate, whether support should continue, questions that in my opinion, the Security Council has been reluctant to seriously consider.

AN: The problem is that UN missions are also often deployed because some states do not want to engage on more enforcement action alone or in a bilateral way or because some other states do not have the will to engage politically. Peacekeeping operations have therefore become the last resort and they are far from perfect.

EPR: Indeed, that is one of the main points I make in the book. Peacekeeping missions have in many ways become a last resort, a lowest common denominator response, in places of relatively minor strategic interest but where the Council is under pressure to do something, particularly when there are headlines of suffering. In this way, ambitious protection mandates authorized by the Council offer a way to be seen to be doing something without any real political engagement.

And this has very real consequences, consequences that are not just about how or whether the mandate is implemented. The policies of international actors don’t exist in a vacuum. Stated promises of protection, pronouncements and statements of policy have vastly influential effects on the ground. They raise expectations, create incentives amongst local actors, and encourage behaviour that would not have occurred otherwise. Civilians, for example, who are told that peacekeepers will protect them may be emboldened to take even greater risks. And as I show in the Congo case, armed groups have at various points instrumentalized and co-opted the discourse and practices associated with the mission’s robust mandate to self-legITIZE and de-legITIZE others.
JS: Does the book only highlight the political dynamics? Does it also provide prescriptions?

EPR: First and foremost, the book is about understanding the transformation, the politics associated with it and the implications for peacekeeping and the UN. By bringing to light some of the challenges we've talked about, my intention is not to discredit protection as a goal and it doesn't mean that I think we should abandon such efforts entirely or peacekeeping more generally. My hope is rather that a better understanding of the politics helps to illuminate areas of reform. It definitely reinforces the value of a political, less technical, approach to peacekeeping and to having a clear strategy in contexts where peacekeepers are deployed. But also practically, it points to possible reforms like more equitable burden sharing by widening the base of contributors as well as greater TCC involvement in mandate formulation. Ultimately, though, I do think many of the challenges we see today are likely to persist given the nature of the political dynamics we've discussed. And so, by exposing the politics – by calling a spade a spade – and by considering where this is all leading us, the book is a call for caution, for greater prudence and pragmatism in peacekeeping.

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### TOP 20 UN UNIFORMED PERSONNEL CONTRIBUTIONS

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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This ranking shows the top 20 countries by personnel contributions to UN operations, as of July 2016.
CONTRIBUTIONS

EGYPT

Uniformed Personnel Contributions by Egypt to UN Operations (July 2016)

This pie chart shows Egypt’s contributions of uniformed personnel to UN missions as of July 2016, broken down by number of personnel contributed to each mission.

EGYPT

Major Uniformed Personnel Contributions by Egypt to UN Operations (2005 - Present)

This line chart shows Egypt's total contributions of uniformed personnel to UN missions since 2003 (top line), as well as the five missions to which Egypt made its largest personnel contributions from 2003 to present.
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