NEW TRENDS IN UNITED NATIONS-LED PEACEKEEPING: CANADIAN AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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Introduction

As Canada has announced that it will seek a United Nations (UN) Security Council seat in 2021 and that it intends to renew its historical commitment to UN peacekeeping operations, the Centre for International Peace and Security Studies (CIPSS) at McGill held a day-long on October 21, 2016 to conduct a timely reflection on the current state of UN peace missions and its implications for Canada’s multilateral engagement. The conference brought together a diversity of voices from different sectors including academia, government and civil society (see a full list of participants in the Annex). To foster discussion and debate, the conference’s four panels were organized as interactive conversations among panelists as well as between panelists and the audience. Issues discussed included:

1. The expansion of peacekeeping mandates, notably through protection of civilians and “robust” peacekeeping (Panel I)
2. The access, safety and security of UN peacekeepers and of the humanitarians working alongside them (Panel II)
3. The role of new contributors to peacekeeping and the prospects for a Canadian return to UN peace operations (Panel III)
4. The political dynamics between the Permanent 5, funders and troop contributing countries (Panel IV)

Three main conclusions may be drawn from the discussion:

1. UN-led peace missions ought to be thought primarily as political interventions. The military instrument is inefficient, and even damaging to local populations, unless diplomatic work and local reconstruction and reconciliation efforts are given priority in creating the conditions for political and socioeconomic stability, justice and development. Critically, the protection of civilians, as the paramount objective of UN-led peace missions, cannot be ensured in the long run by having blue helmets using force and taking sides in deep-rooted conflicts.

2. As it reengages with UN-led peace missions, Canada should be responsive primarily to the organization’s urgent needs as defined by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Secretariat, both in terms of the resources provided and the theatre(s) of intervention chosen. The temptation to pick a country where Canada has strategic interests, or where a military operation could benefit Western allies, should be balanced against the necessity to fill the huge gaps in personnel, equipment and expertise that plague perhaps less fashionable or headline-grabbing UN-led peace missions.
3. Canada can also contribute to resolving some of the most pressing political questions that are raised by contemporary interventions. Most prominently, issues of accountability, especially in instances of sexual violence or sanitary contamination, ought to be taken up at UN headquarters under the leadership of progressive countries. It is impossible for local populations under stress to recover from violent trauma and destruction unless the external actors who take it upon themselves to redress their situation are also held accountable for malpractice.

I - The expansion of peacekeeping mandates: protection of civilians and robust peacekeeping

Security Council mandates increasingly allow UN peacekeepers to use force not only in self-defence but also to protect civilians. Today, over 97% of uniformed peacekeeping personnel serves in UN missions that have a Protection of Civilians mandate. In some cases, like in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, use of force has also been authorized to assist government forces against rebel groups. The rise of “robust peacekeeping” has sometimes blurred the line between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. This panel reflected on the connections between these evolutions, the debates that they raise and their implications on the ground.

Moving away from military interpretations of mandates Panelists argued that peacekeeping mandates incorporating “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P), “Protection of Civilians” (POC) or “robust peacekeeping” components should not be interpreted purely militarily. Military intervention should be a last resort after a range of political activities have been undertaken. Peacekeeping operations should be seen as political rather than military interventions; if these missions are politically successful, then civilians on the ground will be protected. In this context, one participant argued that “robustness” does not have to be associated with military action, but can be thought of as a more effective implementation of mandates. Participants also pointed out that R2P is not limited to situations of armed conflict and places the bar high for military intervention.

The panel particularly stressed the need for non-military interpretations of POC, which does not require military intervention and can be conceptualized as the protection of civilians on a more day-to-day basis. Growing out of a commitment to human security in the 1990s, POC encompasses three tiers of protection: 1) Political engagement, 2) Creating safe environments, and 3) Providing physical protection. According to some participants, the equation of POC and military intervention has hijacked the debate, when in fact it refers to a whole range of activities. For instance, non-governmental organizations also partake in non-violent POC. The panel noted that a POC concept that is differentiated from R2P and freed
from military connotations would be politically appealing to a larger number of states within the UN. This is key in a context where the support of member states, in particular the host government and regional neighbors, is critical for the success of POC mandates on the ground, as these states provide access and logistics. The example of the Canadian approach to POC was raised, as Canada requires five conditions to be in place to support POC mandates: 1) Clear mandates, 2) Capabilities, 3) Training, 4) Political will, and 5) Oversight and accountability.

The danger of offensive operations The panel generally agreed that offensive operations, such as those undertaken by the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), should not be carried out by UN-led operations. The importance of political rather than military solutions was reiterated, as without political solutions these offensive missions are nothing more than “expensive band aids”. In addition, participants argued that, if the UN engages in offensive operations, it becomes a party to the conflict and therefore becomes a legitimate target, which makes it much more difficult to protect civilians on the ground. Further, in a context where UN forces withdraw after an offensive, armed groups that were targeted by these operations may come back and retaliate against the local population. Therefore, offensive operations not only increase the risks that peacekeepers face, they also have a potential larger human cost. Finally, in a place like DRC, the peacekeeping mission and the offensive mission may pass each other the buck when it comes to protecting civilians, with the very real possibility of mutual undermining.

The panel also discussed the importance of how these offensive missions are perceived by local communities and the meaning of “impartiality”. For instance, are local communities able to differentiate between the traditional peacekeeping mission and the offensive component when these operate side by side? One participant cautioned against a narrow understanding of impartiality, noting that peacekeepers failing to react to attacks against civilians by armed groups could also be undermining their impartiality, by creating the impression that they condone these attacks.

Following up on the HIPPO report The panel addressed the recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), which argues that politics should drive peace missions, a recommendation that echoes many of the panel’s observations. Panelists were asked why, if everyone agrees that peacekeeping missions should have a political rather than military focus, this is not better implemented. Some stressed the complexity of international and regional interests that surround situations in which the UN is involved, and that in fact in most cases it was difficult to get international and regional agreement. The panel also discussed the HIPPO’s recommendation for more people-centered peacekeeping missions, in particular by stressing the problems raised by the lack of accountability. The 2015 Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians were mentioned as a positive development in that regard.
II - Access, safety and security for peace operations and humanitarians working alongside them

One of the recommendations of the HIPPO report is for peace operations to better interact with local populations. At the same time, UN missions are implementing increasingly stringent security measures that place UN employees in fortified compounds away from local populations. This “bunkerization” has also been observed among humanitarian organizations working in the same environments. There are concerns that attacks against both UN personnel and humanitarian workers are increasing in many places, and that these organizations are intentionally targeted by armed groups. This panel reflected on how the evolution of UN peacekeeping missions affect the access, safety and security not only of UN peacekeepers and workers but also of humanitarian actors operating alongside them.

Are humanitarian actors more targeted today? The conversation opened with a debate on whether humanitarian workers are increasingly the victims of targeted attacks. Some on the panel argued that, while there is a common perception that violence against aid workers has increased, available data do not necessarily support this conclusion. While there has been an increase in the absolute number of attacks, this could be due to the overall rise in the number of aid workers in the field and/or to the fact that there are better systems in place to report these incidents. In a context where aid workers often operate in dangerous environments, attacks could also occur because they are “in the wrong place at the wrong time”. Panelists also noted that there has been a proliferation of less experienced humanitarian organizations that may not adopt appropriate security measures.

One panelist, however, pointed out that the idea that attacks against humanitarians are increasing seems to be supported by the siege mentality that has developed in many NGOs and within the UN. The panel noted that this siege mentality may not reflect more insecurity but could be due to security training, which fosters a sense that danger is everywhere and often discourages both NGO and UN workers from exploring their surroundings and interacting with the local population. As both UN and aid workers tend to receive higher compensation packages for being deployed to environments that are labeled as dangerous, this could also create incentive to overemphasize risk.

Better interaction with local populations The panel discussed the concept of bunkerization, which refers to the retrenching of both UN and NGO operations behind fortified compounds with armed guards, and the possibility of interaction with local populations in this context. While one of the recommendations coming out of the HIPPO report is for better interaction between UN missions and the people they are meant to serve, this seems to run in contradiction to bunkerization measures, which sometimes prevent workers from leaving securitized compound at all.
The panel critically engaged with the concept of “better interaction”, noting that interaction between UN personnel and local populations does occur but is often negative, creating resentment among the latter. Examples of negative interaction include serious cases of sexual exploitation by peacekeepers and aid workers, but also simple day-to-day encounters, such as the experience of SUVs driving quickly down roads, spraying water and mud on bystanders. In a context of bunkerization, this can become the only way local populations perceive interveners. One panelist argued that, while better interaction between local populations and UN/NGO workers would be an improvement, feelings of resentment were not only due to individual actions but also to the fact that, in some situations, these populations perceive UN missions and related NGO projects as serving great power agendas rather than their own needs.

**Local perceptions matter** The panel addressed local perceptions of both UN and humanitarian actors, discussing in particular whether local populations are able to tell the difference among NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, and between aid and military activities. Are the increasingly blurry lines between humanitarian and military efforts in many settings leading to more targeting of aid workers? Some argued that local populations often have a sophisticated understanding of the identity of different actors and can use this strategically. In this context, some organizations may be able to operate in places where others do not have access. One panelist also pointed out that we should not assume that attacks against aid workers are meant as attacks against the aid organization in general: sometimes people can also be targeted for individual actions that have nothing to do with how humanitarian actors more widely are perceived.

The UN’s “integration mission” model was discussed in this context, as it gathers military, political and humanitarian efforts under one umbrella. Some aid organizations have embraced the model while others have tried to distance themselves from it. The panel noted that there is mixed evidence as to whether integrated missions pose risk to aid workers. One participant argued that data show that the presence of peacekeepers negatively affects aid worker security, and that peacekeeping operations present in the same context as humanitarian operations makes aid workers more at risk. However, this could be because peacekeeping missions are deployed in generally more dangerous environments, or that aid workers present “soft targets” for potential attackers.

**The need for accountability** The panel then shifted the focus away from the security of UN and aid workers to the safety of the local populations they interact with and the question of accountability. One panelist noted that “humanitarian exceptionalism” often creates a sense of hubris, with external actors assuming that they operate outside the legal context of the country in which they are operating. While accountability is often raised in the context of individual action by aid or UN workers, accountability is also an issue in the case of
the UN as an organization, as the example of Haiti demonstrates. Though the UN is increasingly recognizing its responsibility in starting the cholera epidemic that followed the 2010 earthquake, it has claimed immunity from potential reparations.

III - New contributors to peacekeeping and Canada’s role

The composition of UN missions has dramatically changed since the “golden days” of UN peacekeeping in the early 1990s. Today no Western state is found among the top contributing countries, and the top-ten contributors of uniformed personnel to UN missions come from Asia and Africa. Rising powers such as India, Brazil and China have all increased their contributions to UN missions in recent years as part of a strategy to raise their global and regional standing. In addition to new troop contributors, recent UN peace operations have also increasingly involved regional organizations. Better and closer cooperation with the African Union, in particular, features prominently in the HIPPO report. This panel reflected on the causes and implications of this new division of labor in peacekeeping.

The growing role of the Global South

The panel noted that there has been a clear shift towards the Global South in terms of troop contributions. While the 1990s represented the peak of European and Canadian involvement as peacekeeping contributors, it is now Asian and African countries that provide most troops. This was attributed to the involvement of many Western countries in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as negative mission experiences in Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda. One panelist noted that, although the UN has significantly more capacity than in the 1990s – in terms of number of troops but also internal capacity within DPKO – senior officials in Europe and North America have lingering memories of unsuccessful missions that lacked the needed resources. With the engagement of new actors and the re-engagement of old actors in peacekeeping, the panel raised the possibility that not all actors may share the vision promoted in the HIPPO report, which could lead to fragmentation around peacekeeping policies in the future.

Why states contribute

The panel reflected on the motivations of troop contributors, noting that states have different reasons for contributing and contribute in different ways (e.g. through military peacekeepers, police, doctors, equipment...). Making blanket statements about new contributors thus seems impossible. States can provide peacekeepers for a variety of reasons, including to improve their image internationally; to gain operational experience; to gather intelligence in counter-terrorism settings; and to test their ability to project force. In the case of Canada, the decision to reengage in peacekeeping could also be a strategic move following the announcement that Canada will run for a seat on the UN Security Council. Germany seems to have followed a similar strategy, as it started its deployment of troops in Mali followings its announcement of running for a seat.
Canada’s return to peacekeeping While being cautious about overemphasizing Canada’s return to peacekeeping, the panel turned to the potential effects of increased Canadian participation. It noted the added value of Canada’s “whole of government” approach, exemplified by the ‘Peace and Stabilization Program,’ which is housed in Global Affairs Canada but entails collaboration with the Justice Department, National Defense and the RCMP. The Canadian military’s emphasis on engaging with politics and development (which came out from Canadian experience in Afghanistan) resonates with the UN’s integrated mission model, which has taken integration even further.

The panel noted two additional advantages that Canada could provide as a peacekeeping contributor. Canada is unique in its capability to provide Francophone troops, which is particularly relevant in a context where many peacekeeping missions are conducted in Francophone Africa. Canadian experience in Afghanistan was raised as another potential advantage, though panelists cautioned against adopting similar counterinsurgency strategies in situations like Mali. The role of the UN in counter-terrorism was discussed in this context. Though the HIPPO report concluded that the UN is not fit for carrying out kinetic counter-terrorism missions, one panelist argued that the UN is de facto operating in environments that involve counter-terrorism. The UN should therefore be given appropriate capabilities to safely operate in these environments while preserving its distinct advantages, such as the ability to engage with all sides of the conflict.

The role of regional organizations: Finally, the panelists debated the merits and drawbacks of UN peacekeeping operations carried out by regional organizations. One panelist asserted that regional peacekeeping has mostly negative implications, arguing that although regional organizations may have a strong knowledge of the conflict, they also have connections with its parties and cannot have impartiality. However, there could be a role for some mixing of regional organizations and peacekeeping organizations, as long as there is still a single chain of command. Alternatively, another panelist presented a much more positive view of regional organizations’ role in peacekeeping, adding that regional forces are physically closer to the conflict and can deploy troops more quickly than the UN. For example, the African Union was the first actor to enter Burundi in 2003 and it paved the way for the UN. Furthermore, African states may be willing to deploy troops in more complicated situations that imply some level of fighting and robust engagement. Although regional powers may be biased, they are also the actors who have the highest stakes in the success of peace operations.
IV- Who controls peacekeeping? The Permanent Five, funders and troop contributing countries

Peace operations are authorized by the Security Council, staffed by troops from the Global South and overwhelmingly funded by the P5 and a number of other wealthy countries, such as Japan and Scandinavian states. Today 55% of the UN peacekeeping budget comes from the P5, 39% from developed non-P5 and 6% from developing non-P5. In contrast, developing countries provide the vast majority of UN peacekeeping troops. This creates a system in which no single state or group of state bears responsibility for the success or failure of peacekeeping missions. In this context, this panel addressed political dynamics between the P5, TCCs and funders.

Multilateralism and peacekeeping The discussion opened with a critical reflection on whether this division of labor was responsible for the poor performance of many peacekeeping missions, and whether it makes sense to talk about the “inefficiency” or “dysfunctionality” of UN peacekeeping. Panelists noted that the language of inefficiency turns peacekeeping into a bureaucratic endeavor when it is in fact a fundamentally political one. The decision to use military force in pursuit of international security is political and does not simply involve coordination among different state capitals and power centers, especially given the structural inequalities between groups of states. To blame the multilateral nature of the UN for the fact that UN peace operations are not always optimally “efficient” is to miss the politics of the mandating system in the first place. Furthermore, it is not clear what a more “streamlined” process would look like: should the Council consider realistic limitations regarding funding and troop availability in its mandate? Or should the Council think first about what response the conflict ideally requires?

To illustrate the complexity of political dynamics around UN peacekeeping, one panelist cited the example of Sudan. Many countries faced domestic political pressure to respond when confronted with the situation in Darfur in the early 2000s, but none wanted to intervene directly. Therefore, the matter was moved to the UN, leading to the deployment of a hybrid UN/AU mission, even though Sudan presented a non-permissive environment (as the Sudanese government made it clear that it would not support the mission). The mandate was ambiguous and there was no clear commitment by the Security Council. The panelist highlighted the fact that, although the Council could foresee the failure of the UN mission, states decided to go ahead with it as they needed to appear to be “doing something”.

Better consultations? The panel addressed the question of consultations between troop contributors and the Security Council, in a context where TCCs call for more consultations but the P5 often claim that troop contributors come unprepared to existing ones and do not actively participate. One panelist noted that these consultations are inherently
problematic as they are intended to legitimize decisions that have already been made. For these consultations to be meaningful, structured and sustained engagement would have to be institutionally embedded within existing decision-making models. This may happen if a state like China, which is increasing its contributions to peacekeeping, actively pushes for reform.

**The shifting role of China** The panel reflected on the potential role of China in peacekeeping more generally, noting that China straddles the categories of funder, troop contributor and P5 member. As its involvement in peacekeeping grows, China is politically adjusting its positions at the UN. During debates on the peacekeeping budget in 2016, for instance, China sided with Western powers and donors rather than with the G77 as it usually does, as it now must commit more money to peacekeeping operations. The panel also mentioned that China has been rumored to want to take the head of DPKO, which France has held for years. Such a move would arguably chip away at the monopoly that the P3 have had on the most influential posts in the UN (such as the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Management).

**Reimbursement for TCCs** The panel closed with a discussion on reimbursement for troop contributors, and whether states that provide troops do so for “mercenary” motives. Panelists agreed that this line of argument was shaky, and often came from Western countries that do not put their own forces in harm’s way. Not only is peacekeeping reimbursement minimal in comparison to defense spending for countries like Egypt, India and Pakistan, but reimbursements are frequently delayed and missions underfunded. The notion that there is lots of money involved in UN peacekeeping is inaccurate, as UN peacekeeping has a budget of only $8 billion, in comparison to the global military expenditure totaling $1.6 trillion. While generally condemning the view that states engage in peacekeeping for financial gain, one panelist explained that a country for which it is even plausible that a profit could be made from UN peacekeeping reimbursement must fit the following criteria: 1) Possess small armed forces; 2) Have a small military expenditure; 3) Have large supply of cheap but functional equipment; 4) Choose to provide fewer deployment benefits. This profile does not reflect most TCCs from the Global South.
Annex – Participants

Arthur Boutellis, International Peace Institute
Megan Bradley, McGill University
Katharina Coleman, University of British Columbia
Simon Collard-Wexler, Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations
Philip Cunliffe, University of Kent & Editor of International Peacekeeping
Jim Della-Giacoma, Center on International Cooperation
Walter Dorn, Canadian Forces College
Larissa Fast, Humanitarian Conflict & Response Institute, University of Manchester
Michael Lipson, Concordia University
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David Michalski, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF)
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Marie-Joëlle Zahar, Université de Montréal
CONFERENCE

New trends in United Nations-led peacekeeping: Canadian and global perspectives
Friday October 21, 2016

9.30am-10.45am
The expansion of peacekeeping mandates: protection of civilians and robust peacekeeping

11am-12.15pm
Access, safety and security for peace operations and humanitarians working alongside them

1pm-2pm
Keynote address: Roland Paris

2pm-3.15pm
New contributors to peacekeeping and Canada’s role

3.30pm-4.45pm
Who controls peacekeeping? The Permanent 5, funders and troop contributing countries

McGill University
Thomson House
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