

# The High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations

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Mandates of recent UN peacekeeping operations have shown substantial innovation in the thinking of the UN Security Council. The authorization of a Force Intervention Brigade, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, a focus on strategic communication and intelligence, and peacebuilding mandates in the midst of on-going conflicts, have all expanded the scope of activities of UN missions beyond what the UN peacekeepers are accustomed to. These developments have prompted questions over the future direction of UN peacekeeping: whether the UN has the capabilities to command, support and implement more robust operations; what are the implications for the existing Capstone Doctrine and the peacekeeping principles – consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate;<sup>1</sup> and more generally, what are the limits of UN peacekeeping.

After a period of steady growth from the late 1990s, the UN peacekeeping seemed to have started contracting towards the end of the last decade. Three large-scale operations in Kosovo, Timor-Leste and Liberia were slowly drawing down, planning their exits and transitioning to peacebuilding activities. Moreover, the global financial crisis of 2008 presented a sobering moment also for international peacekeeping. Experiences with stabilization missions in Iraq and Afghanistan contributed to a broad disillusionment over large-scale and potentially protracted international interventions. However, this development did not last long and peacekeeping has now been steadily in more demand. The Security Council is also increasingly more willing to deploy peacekeepers where there is no peace to keep. This has been met with some reluctance, particularly by states from the global South.

Since the turn of the century both practice and scholarship have stressed the importance of protection of civilians as a peacekeeping priority; inclusion of gender perspectives in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security; and linking peacekeeping activities to peacebuilding and political processes. Links with special political missions—which have received less attention in policy debates—are particularly important. How all these recent advances in the thinking about peace and security could be impacted by new developments in peacekeeping and what implications the new peacekeeping reality has on the identity of the UN as a whole, is particularly important to address.

## Policy response

At the June 2014 open debate of the UN Security Council on ‘New trends in UN peacekeeping operations’, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that he had asked the Secretariat to initiate work on a review of UN peacekeeping. He outlined what he deemed as four key aspects of the changing peacekeeping environment, namely: peacekeepers are increasingly mandated to operate where there is no peace to keep; operations are being authorized in the absence of clearly identifiable parties or a viable political process; peacekeepers are increasingly facing asymmetric and unconventional threats in more complex environments; and there is a renewed commitment of the Security Council to peacekeeping. The Secretary-General asked for a consideration on the limits of UN peacekeeping. In the debate that ensued, member states repeatedly spoke of four developments they saw as crucial in discussions over the flagship UN activity: robust operations including offensive mandates, use of new technologies, cooperation with regional partners and interested states, and peacebuilding and support for states in the midst of on-going conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently it was decided that (1) the review will consist of two parallel but interrelated efforts on the part of the UN Secretariat and the High-Level Panel, and that (2) attention should be given both to the peacekeeping operations and the special political missions (SPMs). At the end of October, a high-level panel was appointed under the leadership of the Nobel laureate Jose Ramos Horta (Timor-Leste).<sup>3</sup> The 17-member panel includes six women. All five permanent members of the Security Council are represented. In addition, there are three representatives from Africa (Tunisia, Ghana, Burundi), three South Asian members (India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka), three major financial contributors (Norway, Canada, Australia), as well as representatives of Brazil and Jordan. Regardless of an attempt to ensure a regional balance, the panel members were appointed in their personal capacity.

The panel met for the first time in mid-November and was encouraged by the Secretary-General and other senior UN figures to be bold and creative in its recommendations. Members are expected to produce a joint report by no later than June 2015. The Secretary-General will submit this report to the Security Council and

1 United Nations Peacekeeping: Principles and Guidelines (Capstone Doctrine), Department of Peacekeeping, 18 January 2008.

2 UN Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.7196 (2014), 11 June 2014.

3 Initially the panel had 14 members with only 3 women. Following criticism, the Secretary-General remedied this imbalance.

the General Assembly, together with his own recommendations. It is anticipated that the General Assembly will consider both the report and the Secretary-General's recommendations during its autumn 2015 session.

The report of the previous high-level panel, the so-called Brahimi report,<sup>4</sup> has had a considerable impact on the reform and direction of UN peacekeeping in the decade that followed its release. It is thus anticipated that the report of this panel will have a similar impact on the direction of UN peace operations in the decade to come.

### Key elements of the terms of reference for the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations

The panel will look at both UN peacekeeping operations as well as special political missions, collectively referred to as UN peace operations. As the UN is conducting several related reform processes, the panel needs to ensure positive synergy between its own work and the Global Study on the Implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325, and the review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture. Members of the panel are also asked to consider how peace operations are impacted by the changing global context, in particular, how they are confronted with cycles of repeated violence, weak governance and recurring instability.

The terms of reference specifically mention the changing roles of peace operations. Peacekeeping operations are increasingly mandated to operate where there is no peace to keep, which in turn exposes the field personnel as the target of attacks. UN peacekeepers are often called on to protect civilians and in some cases have been provided with robust mandates and capabilities to counter threats, including asymmetric and unconventional attacks. SPMs have frequently been deployed to similar contexts, trying to broker agreements with parties that are fragmented and unwilling to engage in negotiations. They often accompany regionally mandated enforcement operations. The line between SPMs and peacekeeping operations is thus not stark. Contemporary peace operations more closely resemble a spectrum of mission models than a simple binary between peacekeeping and SPMs.

In recent years the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Field Sup-

port have undertaken a wide variety of reforms aimed at professionalizing and modernizing peacekeeping operations and SPMs. However, a number of challenges remain. At the political level there is a lack of consensus on key issues of policy and doctrine. These include outer boundaries of peace operations; use of force; conditions for the deployment of peace operations; accountability; peacebuilding and stabilization mandates and linkages; mission planning and management; and funding and backstopping arrangements for SPMs.

In the preparation for the work of the panel, the Secretariat identified a number of key areas to address:

- Mandates, doctrine and tailoring missions to country context and the role of mandating bodies;
- Political frameworks, inclusive processes, including women's participation in peace processes, and Good Offices;
- Operating in volatile security environments;
- Peacebuilding, stabilization and the restoration and extension of state authority, including the role of women in post-conflict peacebuilding;
- Authority/accountability/responsibility;
- Mission and contingency planning, start-up, transitions and exit strategies;
- Partnerships;
- SPM resource and managerial requirements;
- Promotion and protection of human rights and protection of civilians;
- Required uniformed capabilities to meet operational demands for peacekeeping;
- Troop and police performance, accountability, rules of engagement and caveats;
- Gender/women, peace and security issues should be considered as a matter of priority in each of these areas.

This list is intended as a guideline to the panel, however it does not restrict its work. The panel is defining its own working methods. Throughout the process, the panel is expected to meet with the Secretariat, missions, Member States, civil society, academic institutions, and think tanks. It is also encouraged to consult with Member States through regional consultations with capitals as well as with Permanent Missions in New York.

4 United Nations, Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (Brahimi report), A/55/305-S/2000/809, August 2000.

#### About the author

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