



It's time for POC advocates to walk the talk

ENABLING THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN UN PEACE OPERATIONS

Countries wishing to improve the implementation of Protection of Civilians (POC) mandates in UN peace operations must deliver fit for purpose enablers to bridge the gap between POC mandates and the inadequate commitments to fulfil these.

A large group of Western peace operation donors and African troop contributors is arguing for a more robust role for UN peace operations regarding the Protection of Civilians (POC). The view of these 'POC advocates' is largely reflected in the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) that highlights POC as a "moral responsibility" of the UN.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Countries supporting ambitious POC mandates should, in addition to contributing with boots on the ground, provide operative enablers for POC mandate implementation to serve as force multipliers for POC in the specific mission settings.
- The contributing countries should guarantee that enablers are neither constrained by national caveats nor by nonsensical UN-imposed rules and bureaucratic procedures.

Western countries possess a range of critical enablers for more effective protection of civilians

"As the Panel argued, wide and universal participation in missions is also vital to their effectiveness and credibility. Within Member States lie capabilities that can improve mission presence on the ground, risk assessments, communication, mobility and engineering. I call on all Member States to contribute to peace operations by providing practical and political support".

Report of the Secretary-General on the Recommendations of the High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations

POC is a cross-cutting challenge that spans a range of activities, including mediation, prevention, monitoring, early warning, and physical protection. POC can be safeguarded by local actors and authorities as well as by external actors, and often through civilian means. Still, the ability to effectively provide military responses to imminent threats to civilians in contexts where UN peacekeepers are mandated to supplement or substitute other protection efforts remains of central concern to POC advocates.

On the other hand, a group of primarily Latin American and Asian troop- and police contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs) question the feasibility of issuing increasingly ambitious POC mandates for a growing number of missions which, in the words of the HIPPO report, *"operate in remote and austere environments where no political agreement exists (and) face ongoing hostilities"*. The 'POC sceptics' criticise the lack of the resources and capacities needed by the missions to meet the ever-growing expectations, without which they are set up to fail.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN UN PEACE OPERATIONS

POC is integrated in the mandates of 14 of the 16 current UN peacekeeping missions and applies to 98% of deployed peacekeepers today (107,565 uniformed personnel as of 30 April 2015). If mandated to do so, peacekeepers are expected to engage to protect civilians also in open conflict settings through the use of force.

The debate about POC mandates versus resources and feasibility, particularly relating to the use of force, will endure. Meanwhile, those who advocate for robust POC need to recall that their position is more likely to be embraced by the sceptics if underpinned by tangible actions: if they are serious about their position they should start 'walking the talk' by offering practical support for enabling POC.

POC-enablers may comprise various ways of enhancing mission capabilities and can also be delivered by countries seeking alternatives to large-scale troop deployments – ranging from assessments and planning capabilities to teaching and training, medical units, specialised technology, and airlift contributions. In the words of the HIPPO report:

"Protection of civilians is a core obligation of the United Nations, but expectations and capability must converge. Member States must be serious about the capabilities provided to deliver on POC mandates".

POC advocates can consider four overall categories of such capabilities:

1. Providing the right personnel

The UN will continue to require significant numbers of traditional peacekeepers including motorised and mechanised infantry. However, effective POC also requires peacekeepers suited for (and willing to conduct) more specialised expeditionary and reconnaissance activities. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has also, in some instances, called for a distinct over-the-horizon force to support missions with POC on the ground as well

as a strategic reserve that can deploy rapidly when civilians are under threat. The HIPPO report echoes this call.

Establishing safe zones and setting up protection and deterrence presences in remote locations requires, among others, combat engineers, mobile logistics units as well as mobile and flexible force protection personnel.

Other types of personnel that can enable a mission to implement POC include strategic planners; logisticians; force protection experts; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance staff; conduct and discipline advisors; gender advisors; and human rights experts.

UN peace operations also need medical staff and support to expand the scope and numbers of medical support facilities. This includes mobile medical units and Medevac/Casevac capacities to accompany expeditionary POC activities.

2. Ensuring adequate mobility

Lack of airlift capacity remains a serious capability deficit, which directly hinders POC mandate implementation. For the individual peacekeeper, light, flexible and durable equipment for expeditionary activities is needed, including load-carrying equipment and flexible base technologies, which can enable peacekeepers to establish a presence wherever civilians are under threat.

The UN also desperately needs combat and transport helicopters for deterrence and enhanced mobility respectively, as well as fixed wing aircraft for both strategic and tactical purposes. Ideally, these capacities should be deployed as self-sustaining units with maintenance and ground staff. The lack of armoured personnel carriers (APCs), medium and heavy armoured tactical trucks, combat engineering vehicles and other armoured vehicles also puts peacekeepers at risk and undermines their ability (and willingness) to protect civilians under threat.

3. Applying the right technologies

At the level of mission management, Force Commanders need better Command and Control systems to more effectively manage campaigns addressing multiple threats to civilians. At the operative level, this requires infrastructures that enable interoperability between communications and weapons systems, with one example being the mobile communications servers and Modular Command Posts recently deployed in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Intelligence is another critical POC-enabler that could benefit from more advanced technologies, such as Signals Intelligence to intercept communication relating to attacks on civilians (and/or UN personnel). Similarly, better aerial surveillance capabilities to detect movements of civilians and armed groups and



Chadian peacekeepers serving with MINUSMA patrol Tessalit, northern Mali. ©UN Photo

ensure situational awareness for troops, including at night, are needed. Models for providing intelligence without compromising the national security interests of those supplying the information are emerging in Mali. Here, Western countries produce intelligence in more or less 'closed systems' and make it available to MINUSMA.

Sensor-based detection systems can help peacekeepers identify Improvised Explosive Devices and can help improve force protection for temporary and forward operating bases. For expeditionary activities, sophisticated optical equipment is needed, including night vision equipment, as many attacks on civilians occur at night.

4. Training and capacity development

Training is crucial for educating peacekeepers about POC policies, procedures and obligations. The recent launch of a DPKO/Department of Field Support policy on "The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping" and the "Implementing Guidelines for Military Components of United Nations Peacekeeping Missions" has also increased the need to revisit the POC training resources used by Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs). UN training material on POC does exist but it remains unclear to what extent and how this material is actually used by TCCs.

The increased demand for mission-specific training offers an opportunity for Member States to expand their direct collaboration on POC training, and respond to the HIPPO report's call for global training partnerships. The support could focus on assisting missions

by developing and delivering mission-specific and scenario-based pre-deployment training to major TCCs and PCCs as well as mission leadership. More broadly, a methodology for developing and using scenario-based training could be developed in collaboration with TCCs/PCCs and DPKO.

The HIPPO report points to a range of actions needed to ensure more effective implementation of POC mandates, which the panel considers the *raison d'être* of UN peacekeeping. When it comes to the provision of POC enablers, the responsibility is largely with the UN Member States. In the absence of the appropriate enablers, some troop contributing countries oppose putting their peacekeepers in harm's way, and when failing to protect civilian populations, little of what a mission may otherwise achieve matters. Providing the appropriate enablers thus helps reinforce the standing, approval and authority of UN peace operations more broadly.

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Coverphoto: A Rwandan peacekeeper from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) Formed Police Unit speaks to residents while patrolling the streets of Gao. ©UN Photo

