

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes. Several dots are highlighted in red, including one in North America, one in Europe, one in Africa, and one in Asia.

Peace Operations in a Changing World Order

Unpacking Core Challenges

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- Contrary to the popular assumption that increasing multipolarity is detrimental to cooperation and consensus on peace operations, emerging powers have for the most part expressed a positive sentiment towards peace operations. Traditional and emerging powers have common interests in conflict management in many key regions.
- In the past few years, debates about peace operations have been riddled with misconceptions that have often led to a counter-productive and poisoned exchange in policy circles. By focusing attention on the exceptional cases, the discussions become unnecessarily polarized. In the long run this may lead to the baby being thrown out with the bathwater.
- Many of the current operations require risk-taking, while only a limited number of contingents are able and willing to take these necessary risks. Acknowledging and dealing more openly with the risks that peace operations entail is vital.
- There is an unbalanced approach to burden sharing in peace operations and an oversimplification of what constitutes an equitable division of labor in the eyes of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs). The peace operations architecture would be healthier if the imbalance between Financial Contributing Countries (FCCs) and TCCs were decreased.
- Regionalization will not be sufficient to meet the future challenges facing peace operations. There are few »regional solutions to regional problems«. While more investment, respect and ownership for regional organizations are needed, one should not expect these organizations to solve regional issues on their own.



Introduction

The New Geopolitics of Peace Operations Initiative has examined how the shift in power away from the West to a larger number of actors who are often referred to as »emerging powers« may influence the future of peace operations. The initiative aimed to achieve a better understanding of the points of view of emerging powers and TCCs by organizing regional dialogue meetings around the globe, and as a result to obtain a clearer picture of the future direction of peace operations. While it is commonly assumed that the shift towards multipolarity in the international system may be detrimental to cooperation and consensus, as actors compete for influence and at times have divergent interests and views, the dialogues point to far more convergence and consensus than is generally expected. Most actors, including emerging powers, have largely expressed a positive sentiment towards peace operations as useful tools for the maintenance of global peace and security. Furthermore, there are indications that traditional and emerging powers have common interest in many key regions, such as Africa, where as a result they are not likely to obstruct conflict management. Cooperation may prove to be more difficult only in areas where interests conflict or in areas that are perceived to be the exclusive domain of either emerging or traditional powers.

Yet results from the dialogue meetings also point to a number of persistent challenges that lie ahead for the international peace operations architecture. This policy brief aims to explore four such major challenges, namely: (1) a poisoned debate about peace operations that divides actors rather than encouraging solutions; (2) flawed approaches to dealing with the risks that peace operations entail; (3) an unbalanced and inequitable approach to burden sharing; and (4) overreliance on regionalism as a solution for austerity and capacity gaps.

Challenge 1 – The discussion is poisoned

The dialogue meetings showed that the debate about peace operations is sometimes distorted by inconsistent use of language and terminology and by a number of misconceptions. In the past few years, this lack of a common language has contributed to the debates about peace operations in policy circles becoming increasingly counter-productive and poisoned.

The first such misconception is that peace operations are equated with armed interventions and are in essence synonymous with war. Western countries have indeed often referred to their counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and even their armed intervention in Libya, as peace operations. Although the Force Intervention Brigade of the UN Peacekeeping Operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) is much less contested, it also combats rebel groups. Whether or not these missions should actually be called peace operations, they are very different from other peace operations in general and hence represent exceptional cases. Yet, these exceptions have dominated the debate on peace operations in recent years. In practice, by far the overwhelming majority of peace operations are deployed with the consent of parties, without the use of force except in self-defense, and as a neutral, impartial force. Most operations involve the deployment of military personnel to monitor cease-fires and help with the implementation of peace agreements, e.g. in the fields of Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and institution building. In addition, more than ever peace operations involve the deployment of civilians and police officers. These operations have nothing to do with the kinds of operations undertaken in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, or even in the DRC.

Another widespread misconception is that peace operations are not wanted by the local population or neighboring countries. Critical scholars have argued that local populations often do not accept peace operations because they see the operations as reflecting Western imperialist agendas and view the peacekeepers as occupational forces. Although such criticism primarily refers to the atypical cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, even in these cases it is contestable. In general, governments and populations welcome the presence of peace operations in their country. In fact, if they lose faith in an ongoing operation, it is often because they complain it does not do enough. Also our dialogue meetings indicate that the regions that host most operations (Africa and the Middle East) are generally the least conservative towards what they expect from peace operations. In Africa, robust peace operations are accepted and in many cases preferred to more traditional missions.

A third misconception is that peace operations are rarely successful and are generally a waste of money. There is a consistent body of quantitative and qualitative litera-



ture that provides evidence to the contrary.¹ Also from the dialogue meetings it appeared that, despite the failures of Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and again Afghanistan and Iraq, the majority of peace operations deployed are seen as being quite successful and are reducing on average the recurrence of violence. Nowadays, a visit to countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Namibia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, East Timor, Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo would show that the situation has changed a lot for the better, and much of this improvement is attributed to the deployment of a peace operation.

Of course, there is still a lot of room for improvement; however, by focusing the discussion on the exceptional cases, discussions become unnecessarily polarized and negative. In the long run that may lead to the baby being thrown out with the bathwater, while current crises do not afford the world the luxury of sitting on its hands.

Challenge 2 – Flawed approaches to dealing with risks of peace operations

In the dialogue series it became clear that acknowledging and dealing openly with the risks that peace operations entail is another major challenge. Most obviously there is a strong risk aversion among many TCCs in operational terms, as they want to prevent casualties among their troops deployed at any cost. They fear that casualties will undermine political support at home. Among Western security establishments, in particular, there is still a lack of trust in UN-led operations. While the UN has improved a lot with regard to troop safety and command and control since the failures of the 1990s, the skepticism has remained, probably to a large extent because many western countries currently lack first-hand field experience following its dramatically reduced presence in UN-led operations.

Furthermore, the risk of potential ›collateral damage‹ is also a shared concern and is reflected in approaches and concepts in the West, but also in India with the ›minimal use of force‹ and in Brazil's using ›non-lethal force‹. Finally a variety of emerging powers and Southern TCCs

are wary of an escalation in violence and avoid risks in mission areas due to their continued strong adherence to the principle of non-interference and sovereignty, and the fear that they will be drawn into the conflict.

In spite of this multi-faceted widespread risk aversion, in the past two decades a variety of missions were deployed in highly volatile regions in Africa with very robust mandates – in most cases for good reasons and for lack of better alternatives. This has resulted in a precarious imbalance. Many of the current operations require risk-taking, because, for example, the protection of civilians under imminent threat does not allow troops to shun risks. At the same time, only a limited number of contingents are able and willing to actually take these necessary risks.

This precarious imbalance becomes even more problematic if one realizes that:

- those contingents that are more willing to take risks usually also come from countries that have a bigger interest in a given conflict, and as such are less impartial (see Challenge 4).
- political decision makers in New York and in the capitals of TCCs are generally less supportive of a robust posture than the troops on the ground, who are often prepared to act robustly if they receive the needed political backup, partly because they view this as actually less risky.
- this aversion to taking risks focuses primarily on troops, because of the political attention they receive, while it seems much less pronounced when it comes to the deployment of civilians to high-risk missions.²

Challenge 3 – Unbalanced and inequitable approach to burden sharing

A third challenge facing peace operations is an unbalanced approach to burden sharing and an oversimplification in the West of what constitutes an equitable division of labor in the eyes of TCCs.

A common complaint voiced during the dialogue meet-

1. For a good overview of the current body of scholarly literature see: Roland Paris, ›Peacekeeping works better than you may think‹, <http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2014/08/12/peacekeeping-works-better-than-you-may-think/>.

2. See for example: J  ir van der Lijn and Jane Dundon (2014): Peacekeepers at risk: The lethality of Peace Operations (<http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRIPB1402.pdf>), p. 7.



ings is that the growing expectation on peace operations is not matched by additional capacity or financial support for the UN. Operational environments have become increasingly complex, mandates have become broader, and missions are often deployed in areas where there is no peace to keep. Meanwhile it seems that the West is keeping its commitments as low as possible, not only in the form of troop contributions, but also when it comes to the financial investments needed to meet the demands and the broad scope of modern peace operations. The contradiction between the expectation that peace operations will continue to play a central role in international conflict management and the lack of willingness to invest in them is also dangerous for the legitimacy and continued effectiveness of operations. The debate about Peacekeeping Overstretch within the UN may be less prominent today, but the structural stress on the system remains. If the demand for increased capacity is not met, a reevaluation of the proper scope of new and existing operations will have to be undertaken.

The division of labor in UN peace operations, with traditional powers providing financial contributions and making the decisions, while the main TCCs merely provide troops and lack any decision-making power, is also often criticized. More than the division of labor between those who pay and those who deploy, the resulting lack of mutual understanding and the limited influence of TCCs is problematic.

The common Western assumption that the TCCs are seeking greater influence and power in the international system, and that they want to change the international system, is an oversimplification. TCCs express their overall commitment to the current aims and concepts used in peace operations and do not intend to make any drastic strategic changes. However, many TCCs perceive insufficient responsiveness on the part of the Security Council and the FCCs to the problems that the TCCs face on the ground, and this causes much of their frustration over influence and troop reimbursements.

Differentiating between the aims of military and diplomatic communities in TCCs is crucial for understanding what they view as an equitable division of labor and influence. Diplomatic communities within some emerging powers do indeed seek influence in order to advance specific national interests in peace operations. Military personnel in TCCs, on the other hand, generally want

their countries to be consulted more proactively by the UN secretariat so that they can shape mandates to better fit the reality on the ground. Since TCCs place their troops' lives in harm's way, this military request for input is understandable and probably conducive to the success of missions.

Similarly, the call to increase UN reimbursements for TCCs is not just the result of a quest for financial gain. Over the past decade, not only have the demands on TCCs increased, but the reimbursements were barely adjusted until this year. As a consequence, for an increasing number of countries the reimbursements had become insufficient to cover the costs of operations. Moreover, particularly in Africa, the demand for higher reimbursements stems from frustration with a perceived lack of respect. Participants in the dialogue in Africa made clear that the lack of consultation and the persistent criticism over the quality of the troops from the region, despite significant improvements, was an increasing source of frustration. In Africa, the stagnation in reimbursements was seen as part of a lack of appreciation and respect for the hard work being done.

Challenge 4 – Regional solutions to regional problems is no silver bullet

Regionalization will not be sufficient to meet the future challenges facing peace operations in a multipolar world. Traditionally, an unwritten rule of UN peace operations was that they should not include contingents from neighboring states. In contemporary operations, like those on the border between North and South Sudan and in Mali, this rule is no longer observed. In addition, regional organizations are increasingly seen as a way of avoiding the deployment of a UN operation or Western involvement. The argument is increasingly made for ›regional solutions to regional problems‹. This concept is meant to give more ownership over the missions to the regions where they are deployed. It also coincides with the ambition of regional powers not to have external powers meddling in their ›backyards‹. At the same time it is advantageous to external decision makers, as they do not have to justify the deployment of their troops in far-off places where there is no apparent national interest at stake. Yet, the trend towards regionalization of peace operations encounters both conceptual and practical obstacles and limitations.



In practical terms, the regions that host the majority of operations lack the capacity or the political will to deploy their own regional peace operations. In Africa there is a clear aim to develop such a capacity through the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture. However, the Africa Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have limited military capacity in the field of key enablers and logistics. Furthermore, there is still a lot of organizational competition between the AU and the RECs, as well as disagreement over strategies. Moreover, the AU and the RECs currently lack the civilian capabilities needed for peace building, which may take some time to acquire. Consequently, many participants in the dialogue meeting in Africa expected, in spite of the long-term goal of ›African solutions for African problems‹, that the international community, and the West in particular, will be required to maintain ownership and provide support in the short to medium term. Also, in the Middle East, regional organizations such as the League of Arab States have not been able to effectively deploy peace operations for decades, because they lack both political support and the necessary capacity. In the Middle East dialogue meeting, participants made abundantly clear that they did not support the idea of ›Arab solutions for Arab problems‹, as they view Middle Eastern conflicts as global in nature, and were in fact concerned that the West would cease both engagement in and deployments to the region.

In addition to the practical lack of capacity, regional organizations and stakeholders are also not always the most legitimate and best-placed actors to resolve conflicts within their regions, as they are often driven by national interests and lack impartiality. One should question whether it is wise to deploy troops from neighboring countries that try to protect their ethnic kin, economic investments or gains, or political influence, as they may be partisan and undermine the impartiality of missions. Moreover, although regional hegemony are often willing to take the lead, they are more directly involved in regional power politics and therefore again less suitable for the job.

Facing the challenges

A variety of specific suggestions about how to make peace operations fit for the future emerged from the dialogue meetings and will be listed in detail in the concluding SIPRI report on the New Geopolitics of Peace

Operations Initiative. In the following section we synthesize four policy implications that specifically address the four core challenges identified in this brief:

- *Reinvigorate dialogue:* While it is very important to discuss controversial peace operations, these should not poison and polarize the debate on the mainstream peace operations. Moreover, the dialogue meetings pointed strongly to a need for better synchronization of the debates among, on the one hand, the United Nations in New York and its member states, and, on the other, among political, military, diplomatic and civilian communities in and between the different member states. The current understanding of terminology varies dramatically and therefore hinders a more constructive international conversation. Stakeholders need to find a common language to discuss norms, concepts and the criteria for their success. The ambitious new peace operations review and the parallel review of the Peacebuilding Architecture that the UN Secretariat has embarked on are excellent steps forward. However, they need to be part of a broader approach, which includes a parallel intensive process in and between the capitals around the world, and includes other stakeholders such as academia and civil society. Finally, such dialogues could also contribute to increasing regional exchange and cooperation among TCCs, and between TCCs and FCCs.

- *Acknowledge and deal with risks in a level-headed manner:* Both at the UN level and in the capitals of the TCCs, of the FCCs and of members of the Security Council, there is a need to acknowledge and discuss more openly the risks associated with peace operations, as well as the way stakeholders are willing to deal with these risks. Risk aversion per se is not the problem as it keeps actors from embarking on military adventures. However, when the Security Council decides to deploy missions in risky conflict settings, these missions require suitable personnel in sufficient numbers. The respective mission must receive the necessary political backing and operational room for maneuver, and it must be able to use force when appropriate to fulfill its mandates, in spite of the fact that this may lead to operational risks.

- *Rebalance operations:* The peace operations architecture would be healthier if the imbalance between FCCs and TCCs were to decrease, as this would contribute to a better common understanding. Continuing austerity measures are likely to obstruct new



and existing peace operations in meeting the demands placed upon them. Therefore, FCCs, and Western countries in general, need to rethink their levels of financial investment in peace operations; but emerging powers and TCCs also need to think creatively about how they can increase their financial contributions. In addition, larger operational contributions to UN operations by FCCs, and the West in particular, would be an important ›gesture‹ to the current TCCs, showing that the FCCs and the West are also committed to UN peace operations. This would also increase the FCCs' understanding of the challenges the TCCs face in the field. In addition, the West and the FCCs cannot expect to continue to occupy the current numbers of decision-making positions if they do not contribute troops themselves. A central role in decision-making presupposes the willingness to put one's own troops at risk, but it also calls for field experience in order to make realistic decisions. Lastly, improving the way the UN Security Council operates, more so than changing its composition, could also contribute to a more balanced approach.

■ *More realism about regional organizations:* There is a need for increased investment in regional organizations, and they must be shown respect and granted ownership. Regional initiatives should be stimulated to increase regional cooperation, on among others training centers and joint policy initiatives at the UN in New York, and in the field when states from the same region are deployed in the same mission. Yet, regional organizations cannot be expected to solve issues in their respective regions on their own. Not only do most regional organizations lack sufficient capacities and capabilities, but regionalization of peace operations is no silver bullet either. In fact, external involvement in peace operations is crucial to ensuring that operations are sufficiently impartial. The absence of immediate national security interests in a specific peace operation may be an obstacle to winning domestic support and to the willingness to take risks, but it is an invaluable asset for operations in the field.



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