



Security Nexus Perspectives

CHALLENGES OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

By Muggi Tuvdendarjaa

Keywords: The United Nations (UN), Security Council, General Assembly, Protection of Civilians, Armed Conflict, challenges, peacekeeping.

Abstract: The United Nations provides peace and security throughout the world and has countless achievements and experience in peacekeeping operations. Its main objectives are to maintain international peace and security, take actions collectively, and to promote cooperation among the nations to support the resolution of the issues in the areas of economics, social, humanitarian, and human rights matters. It also acts as the main coordinator among the member nations in achieving these goals. According to many recent published studies by scholars and practitioners, the global security environment is becoming unpredictable, which can be attributed to big powers' strategies as well as the evolution of nontraditional warfare throughout the world.

As one of the biggest international organizations, the UN remains responsible for maintaining international peace and security in this new era. This article illustrates several obstacles that the UN faces including strategic, operational, and tactical challenges.

Introduction

The United Nations does not have any permanent military or police force under its auspices. It conducts peacekeeping operations (PSOs) at a tactical level in support of its member states. The UN Security Council establishes, monitors, and sends PSOs into the field. UN mandates are the primary documents referred to in providing guidance on a wide range of strategies. These mandates are developed at senior political and diplomatic levels, and are the basis for planning, conducting, and controlling the PSOs.

Challenges of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

The following are three types of mandates that peace operations use:

- Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) Women, Peace, and Security.
- Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) Children and Armed conflict.
- Security Council Resolution 1674 (2006) Protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Based on the mandate, military and police forces participating in the PSOs perform specific tasks and follow rules of engagement. During PSOs, military forces protect civilians, provide humanitarian assistance, protect UN personnel and equipment, and maintain security in operation areas as mandated. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) are the legal instruments that set out the conditions and restrictions on the usage of the weapons in operations by the contingent commander of the Troop Contributing Countries. PSOs are conducted by the military, police forces, civilian police, and civilian personnel by the mandates given at the area of operations. This is done to ensure safety and security, develop political and civil-military relations, and enhance human rights, freedom, and humanitarian assistance. During PSOs, humanitarian assistance is usually conducted by humanitarian organizations while military forces act to provide security and share information as required.

Briefly looking at the history of PSOs, initially, peacekeeping operations were aimed at controlling armed conflict and isolating regional disputes. Since the 1980s, however, PSOs have also been used to regulate civil war and local armed conflict. And now, since the 1990s, peacekeeping forces have monitored opposing parties' support for peace activities according to the Charter of the United Nations and the Law of Armed Conflict. PSOs have expanded activities and changed their nature as peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance endeavors. This shift is directly associated with the nature and threat to the peace and security of national and non-national actors at international and regional levels.

In addition to UN limitations and other international and national laws, and customs, PSOs execute missions and activities in dangerous environments, including theaters between adversaries within frameworks for accepted legal, ethical, and other mandates. PSOs require collective efforts as the UN is charged with supporting international organizations, groups, and components with a cohesive goal. Though a total of [4197 peacekeepers have been killed](#) in PSOs in the past, thousands of civilians were protected while national independence, peace and prosperity were maintained. For example, in the past, PSOs successfully resolved armed conflicts in Lebanon, Yemen, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Ivory Coast, and Liberia through peaceful means.

Peacekeeping Operations challenges

Both United National troops and police-contributing countries must analyze all levels of challenges in their respective areas to ensure the effectiveness of UN operations. There are many obstacles noted by scholars, practitioners, and UN official working group reports in this regard. Challenges may be classified on strategic, operational, and tactical levels, and are presented as follows.

A. At the strategic level, the issues are addressed in the areas of leadership systems, legislation, global order, and finance.

Challenges of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

Leadership system. [The failure of leadership, combined with poor management, discipline, and widespread inefficiency, weakness, and insignificance of some traditional PSO approaches indicate the need to reform and improve the structure of UN PSOs. For example, misunderstandings and slow work processes between organizations have negatively affected strategic and operational level activities.](#) This further exacerbates the complexity for peacekeepers to carry out their mandate at the tactical level in areas of operation.

Legislation. The troop and police-contributing countries' non-consensus understanding of PSO Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA), mandates, Rules of Engagement, combined with inconsistencies between decision-makers, mandate developers at high levels, and units implementing the mandates on the ground, raises issues about the effectiveness of PSOs. Unsatisfactory performance and SOFA violations by some host country institutions and authorities, such as restricting the movement of personnel on the ground and disrupting the UN logistic support operations, have led to continuous disruptions. [In 1990, based on lessons learned from Rwandan operations, the United Nations began to focus on protection of civilians, and in 2010 the United Nations adopted the Concept of Civil Protection.](#) In this regard, the UN has conducted research and investigation to monitor the implementation of international humanitarian law by host nation governments in compliance with international humanitarian law. According to some studies, the mandates provide conditions for host nation governments or authorities to avoid obligations to protect civilians and instead entrusts this responsibility to the United Nations. For instance, opposing parties within the Republic of South Sudan, and their supporters, have killed, tortured, and robbed civilians causing them to [flee to the "Protection of Civilian" camps, or escape to Ethiopia, Uganda, and Sudan.](#) It may be concluded that the government of South Sudan was not responsible while the government's security forces were actually to blame for harming civilians.

Global order. The geopolitical and strategic interests of some of the world's most powerful nations, as well as competition for international standing, have affected decision-making at strategic levels of the United Nations, creating conflicts of interest. Between 1948 and 1988, the [UN conducted a total of 13 PSOs with most of the troop-contributing countries being Canada, India, Ghana, and Scandinavian countries.](#) Since 1988, however, western countries have drastically reduced their troop numbers to United Nations missions and stepped up their NATO military missions to pursue national interests. In absence of big powers' influence to maintain international peace and stability, [China has strengthened its position in the UN Security Council by influencing the decision-making processes.](#) China thus has a considerable impact on further international governance and the political order of international security.

If big powers' interests and positions are not balanced on the international stage, some powers may dominate international organizations or take advantage of situations for their own interests. Such an unbalancing consequence may cause difficulty for the independence of smaller nations or for peace and stability in certain regions.

B. At the operational level, issues are identified in terms of the nature of the armed conflict, methods of operation, and readiness.

Nature of the armed conflict. Modern armed conflicts have witnessed small-scale, lightly-armed, high-tech-enabled, mounted groups capable of inflicting great damage in short periods of time. Their form of hostility is hard to identify as they do not model or shaped

Challenges of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

themselves as traditional adversaries do. There is also an evolving threat of violent extremism, transnational terrorism, and transnational organized crime, which bring about unimaginable collateral damage. This has created a need for PSOs to increase involvement in the protection of civilians, and security from terrorists, terrorist groups, and criminal gangs while attempting to build the capacity of government forces to work independently. This environment is difficult for peacekeepers to operate in, unless peace and stability are restored - which rarely happens in these types of operational areas. For example, the extremist activities of "Boko Haram" in northern Nigeria, international terrorism in Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, and the Sahel region, as well as transnational organized crime, have negatively affected PSOs and made no progress in the peace process. The [death toll of at least 462 United Nations and associated personnel who were killed in deliberate attacks in the past 11 years](#) from improvised explosive devices, rocket-propelled grenades, artillery fire, mortar rounds, landmines, armed and successive ambushes, convoy attacks, suicide attacks, and targeted assassinations are telling. It has become increasingly difficult to characterize warfare, armed conflicts, and civil movements that have taken place in such mission areas.

Methods of operation. Today illegal activities of state and non-state actors often emerge within a nation or region in the form of internal riots, falls of legal institutions, crises, and armed conflicts. This shows that monitoring ceasefire agreements and protecting civilians - which are the main forms of traditional peacekeeping operations - are not always effective. PSOs requires a wide range of social and military activities in cooperation with the host country's legitimate institutions to support or restore a host country's government and social institutions in order to make them sustainable and independent.

Readiness. Because the United Nations does not have a standing army or police force of its own, it is not possible to mobilize the military and police forces of multinational member states and send them to field missions in a short period of time. This is an issue not only for the sake of military cooperation, but also for UN civilian personnel management. Hence it is important to train peacekeepers in modern hybrid and unbalanced combat operations through intensive training methods and programs.

C. At the tactical level, issues are identified in terms of a common understanding of the operation, cooperation, discipline, and code of conduct.

A common understanding of operations is crucial for effective employment of UN forces. [The lessons learned from Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia](#) show that some peacekeeping operations have failed due to inactive or weak political and financial institutions, tangible and intangible assistance from UN member states, lack of initiative on important issues, different capacities, lack of resources, and lack of consensus on cooperation in decision-making and mission execution. In recent years, military and police personnel have found it extremely difficult to anticipate and respond to different types of threats. This is because extremists are intensifying activities, illegal cross-border trade, and smuggling. Terrorist groups are carrying out acts of sabotage that are not limited in time, method, and location. Because of this, there are serious issues raised related to [peacekeeping operations in UNMISS](#), for example. In this regard, it is important to develop a [common understanding of operations under a single mandate](#).

Challenges of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

Multilateral cooperation. It remains a challenge to find a comprehensive and effective leadership system that can support the integration of organs of the United Nations and non-United Nations in areas of operation. For example, in the [DRC, Sudan, and Afghanistan, the lack of cooperation between PSO actors has hampered peace and security, and thus all involved face challenges](#). For instance, in the case of the Congo PSO, experts assessed that [if the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs members had worked more closely with the Force commander](#), provided detailed guidance on responsibilities, opportunities, and support, and had also acted in accordance with the stated plan for cooperation with military contingents, the operation could have been conducted with minimal risk.

Discipline or code of conduct. Peacekeepers, police members, and civilian personnel serving in PSOs have engaged in sexual harassment, behavioral misconduct, and misunderstanding related to local customs, mishandling of UN properties, and discrimination based on age, race, and gender. For example, [more than 100 Sri Lankan peacekeepers were repatriated from the PSO in Haiti for sexual exploitation and harassment](#). Another incident in Haiti witnessed [Nepalese Army peacekeepers proclaiming that "the locals are very lazy; they do not cultivate; they do nothing"](#). Haiti's population is high in disease and poverty because they don't care about their health." These statements insulted the people of the host nation and created an unfortunate situation where locals turned against the peacekeepers. There is no negating that such actions can smear the reputation of the United Nations, undermine the success of an operation, and even affect the safety and security of the blue helmets.

Conclusion

The United Nations is the most important independent global organization for maintaining peace and security in the international arena. The successes and achievements of this organization of multinational powers are invaluable. Many member states will continue to appoint monitoring and evaluation teams at all policy levels, prioritizing their assessments and making appropriate legal and organizational or functional changes to encourage the effective participation of member nations.

For example, the nature of the wars, armed conflicts, and civil movements in African countries over the past five years indicate that there is a need to improve and modernize the traditional UN military and police peacekeeping operations to address problems quickly. Increasing the involvement of law enforcement, legislatures, police, and skilled civilian personnel in capacity-building administration and governance capacities could make peacekeeping more effective. There is also an urgent need to improve operational mandates, conduct special research or study on rules of engagement, and clarify the responsibilities and rights of host nations, opposing parties, and the UN itself.

Future approaches to, and development of, UN PSOs depend not only on the multilateral policies but also on member states' commitment. For instance, there is a need to update the pre-deployment training of military contingents utilizing lessons learned from previous missions to ensure that weapons and equipment of the countries serving in the PSOs are not obsolete and that personnel are mentally and physically prepared for operational areas and weather conditions. It is also essential to improve legal frameworks and documents providing

Challenges of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

oversight for PSO participation, rights, duties, and responsibilities. All of this combined will enable more effective and efficient regional and sub-regional organizational participation in peacekeeping operations, as well as enhance collaboration amongst member states at a higher strategic and operational level than is currently witnessed.



The views expressed in this article are the author's alone, and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the DKI APCSS or the United States Government.
October 2022