

JANUARY 2004

## Capacity Problems with the UN Peacekeeping System

# PEP

## BRIEFING NOTE

[www.effectivepeacekeeping.org](http://www.effectivepeacekeeping.org)

1705 N STREET NW  
WASHINGTON, DC 20036  
(202) 828-0110

**A Partnership for Effective Peacekeeping (PEP) Publication**

The PEP is a non-partisan policy working group that brings together the humanitarian, human rights, peace and security, think tank, and academic communities in support of greater peace operations capacity. The PEP promotes public policy solutions to improve national and international peacekeeping infrastructure, and works to build the political will to support such policies by: providing an open forum for discussion of peace operations issues; serving as an information resource for media and policymakers; and engaging in educational efforts that facilitate greater understanding of peace operations. The PEP does not exclusively support any one particular solution for the capacity problems that prevent effective peacekeeping operations. Rather, the PEP facilitates the exploration of all potential pragmatic and achievable solutions in a candid and 'outside the box' atmosphere.

### Introduction

The responsibilities of United Nations peace operations have greatly expanded and become much more complex since the end of the Cold War, yet the resources allocated and the support necessary to satisfy those responsibilities has not expanded with the need. In recent years the UN has been forced to work under severe budget constraints, imposed on the UN during the 1990s by isolationist elements in the United States Congress. The budget constraints, combined with other systemic shortcomings, have greatly reduced the effectiveness of peace operations to staggeringly low levels. The UN has recognized the difficulties it faces. The August 2000 Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations (known as the Brahimi Report) identified many areas of the UN peace operations system that need dramatic improvement or complete overhaul.

One of the goals of a peace operation should be to project credible force, so that those who would "spoil" the peace by continuing or restarting conflict are stopped. But too often the mandates and the goals specified by the UN Security Council for the mission are not realistic. Furthermore, the equipment and the skill level of the troops contributed by member states are often not adequate to the task. Generally, this is because most peacekeeping troops come from developing countries that do not have professional militaries. These sorts of military forces are simply unable to deal with a 'worst-case' situation, but that is what peacekeepers are most often confronted with in the internal civil conflicts of today.

Due to a lack of political will, the U.S. and European nations are not usually willing to place their troops in UN peace operations in areas outside their 'national interest'. In effect, this means most peace operations in Africa are off-limits for the NATO-class troops of the developed countries. The political will issue impacts developing countries as well. For domestic political reasons, national troops serving as UN peacekeepers are frequently prohibited by their home government from using lethal force, regardless of the mission's mandate, rules of engagement, or the reality of what is required in the given situation.

Peace operations of the nineties have often been located in conflict areas where there was a stalemate and where the parties were not necessarily committed to ending the confrontation. If hostile parties are not serious about resolving their conflict without violence and peacekeepers are sent in anyway, but not equipped or mandated to create a post-conflict situation, rather than simply maintain one, the result has most often been failure.

### Cases in Point

Such situations may arise when a possible genocide is taking place, such as in Rwanda in early 1994 when UN forces were instructed to withdraw rather than protect those being massacred during the genocide, or when there is a stalemate between warring parties, such as when the UN peacekeepers in Sierra Leone were kidnapped and held captive by RUF (Revolutionary United Front) forces because they were not allowed to adequately defend themselves. It also happened in the former Yugoslavia, where UN forces at Srebrenica were helpless to prevent a major slaughter of Bosnian Muslims.

From these cases and others, the Brahimi Report identified a crucial lesson—the UN cannot always be totally neutral when operating under conditions where

conflict still simmers. It must be prepared and ready to respond *impartially* to violence with sufficient force to protect innocent civilian lives. Impartiality and neutrality both require that peacekeepers not take sides in the conflict. But strict neutrality is a dangerous constraint, leaving peacekeepers helpless to act in the face of atrocities, often committed right in front of them. When peacekeepers are acting impartially, however, though they do not take sides, they can and should act to uphold the rule of law, just as a referee upholds the rules of the game on the soccer field. When peacekeepers practice impartiality, they can and do act against those who are targeting innocent civilians, as well as peacekeepers, for violence.

Yet in early 2003, peacekeepers serving in MONUC, the peace operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, were helpless to stop the massacres of thousands of civilians targeted by the various roving gangs of thugs and child soldiers common to the region. It took a European force led by the French to bolster the chance for peace in the area. In mid-2003, Liberia exploded back onto the world's list of concerns, as violence again claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent Liberian citizens. The U.S. dithered for weeks over whether to assist African countries with a peacekeeping mission, and eventually decided not to. Although the requested U.S. involvement was minimal, and the chance for success good (based on what the British were able to do in Sierra Leone with only 800 troops, and other cases), President Bush seemed unable to resolve differences between the State Department and the Department of Defense. In late 2003 the UN stood up a new peacekeeping operation in Liberia, following the departure of Liberian president Charles Taylor. While the operation benefited from the lessons of the Brahimi Report, in early 2004 deployments by member states to the UN mission in Liberia was still lagging. Consequently, violence still plagued much of Liberia months after the U.S. sent two ships to the country, and many weeks after the UN peacekeeping mission started.

### **The Political Will Problem**

One of the biggest problems, and the most difficult to overcome, is garnering enough political will from member states of the UN to support peace operations. Political will refers to the need for member states to seriously commit resources to the objective of ensuring security and peace in areas of unrest. Without the support of member states, and the recognition that peace operations are a vital responsibility for the UN, peace operations will continue to fail.

Unfortunately, domestic national interests too often interfere with a coherent approach to UN peace operations, even though this ignores the relevance peace operations pose to national security, as well as to the greater humanitarian good. There are fundamental political fissures between different regions of the world that allow peace operations to be used as a political tool. The conflict of member states interests (especially within the UN Security Council) has had an enormous impact on the UN in terms of peacekeeping operations. Domestic interests have resulted in the failure of UN peace operations to be fully or correctly mandated, prepared, or able to engage properly in an effective and successful mission.

### **The Mandate Problem**

Peace operations can be hindered in terms of their responsiveness and initiative by strict and narrow mandates dictated by the UN Security Council. The UN and its activities are only a reflection of its member states. Thus, UN peace operations can only progress as far as the member states want and allow them to. The Security Council in the past has drafted and passed resolutions containing broad mandates for missions without first accruing sufficient troop and equipment commitments from member states to properly implement the resolution. This often leaves the Secretary-General scrambling, begging member states to donate troops and other personnel and equipment. It also ensures that troops arrive in country without being properly equipped and ready to take on their mandate, which creates large logistical problems right from the start of the mission. The Brahimi Report has identified mandates as critical to the overall success or failure of UN peace operations.

### **Financing Peace Operations**

Financing is another major problem for peace operations. All member states are obligated to pay their share of peacekeeping costs under a formula that they themselves have agreed upon. Unfortunately, in mid-2003 unpaid peacekeeping assessments total approximately \$1.1 billion. These arrears are debilitating for current and future peace operations. Quite often, the UN is unable to pay troop-contributing nations the agreed-upon rate for their

contribution to a mission. This makes it all the more difficult to secure troops for the next mission. Purchases of equipment for rapid deployment of troops for missions are incomplete because of budget troubles. The UN frequently juggles money from one account to another to pay for basic needs such as electricity bills, again because of shortfalls caused by member states failing to pay legally obligated dues.

During the 1990s, the U.S. was by far the largest culprit, owing billions of dollars and coming close to losing voting privileges. Although Congress and the Bush administration have dealt with much of the arrears problem, the Bush administration's antipathy for UN peace operations is now provoking another crisis. The administration continues to ask for less money for peace operations, and reportedly is using heavy-handed diplomacy at the UN to bring about the closing or scaling back of many peace operations. The history of post-conflict situations suggests very strongly that some operations, such as East Timor, may require more time to solidify the peace gained during the past few years. In fact, successful peace operations can require five to ten years of commitment before peace becomes likely to hold permanently.

### **The UN System for Peace Operations**

UN peace operations are currently conducted on an ad hoc basis. The UN does not have a standing military or police force that can be ready to deploy on short notice, which precludes any real type of rapid response. UN peacekeeping forces take months to organize, deploy, and effectively establish themselves in the conflict area, allowing further escalation of the conflict. For peace operations to be effective, rapid deployment of forces is vital, and is the only way to save the most lives. Some experts believe that if the UN had had the ability to deploy forces within thirty days of the realization that genocide was taking place in Rwanda in April 1994, hundreds of thousands of Rwandans could have been saved.

The Brahimi Report also noted that the vast majority of the time lag problems are not the fault of the peacekeepers themselves, but rather actors and causes beyond their control. For peace operations to become more effective, the managerial structure and capacities of the UN and the UNDPKO (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations) must be changed. It is simply not possible for a staff of less than 10 at UN headquarters in New York to effectively or properly manage nearly 50,000 personnel in the field, serving in missions throughout the world. Nevertheless, that was the case during much of the nineties. The UN has recently, in line with Brahimi Panel recommendations, improved in this area, with more staff for the DPKO, including the civilian police division. More remains to be done.

The DPKO needs the capability to conduct fact-finding missions and gather field intelligence. At this time there is no intelligence and information analysis program for peace operations. As a result, leaders of peacekeeping missions are left without adequate information necessary to conduct the operation. The effectiveness and efficiency of missions could be greatly improved by having an intelligence and information analysis capacity already in place. Greater capacity to conduct public information activities is also needed—too often, the supposed beneficiaries of UN peace operations (civilians in post-conflict zones) have no idea what the UN is doing.

Often when peace agreements are signed, DDR (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) components are included. The United Nations, the international actor most likely to monitor peace agreement compliance, lacks substantive DDR programs. These programs are also dependent upon having adequate personnel, equipment, and political will to support such operations.

### **The Nature of Conflict has Changed**

The nature of conflicts today is much different than during the Cold War, and therefore the nature of UN peace operations is in turn more complex than the "first generation" peace operations. In the past decade the vast majority of deadly conflicts have been internal rather than state vs. state. These conflicts have also primarily involved civilians (as victims, refugees, internally displaced populations, 'freedom fighters', etc.) rather than paid soldiers. The civilian components of peace operations have thus become more relevant and prominent. Civilian components of peace operations include electoral assistance and governance support as part of a broader strategy of international security.

Another important civilian component of peace operations is rule of law operations, including CIVPOL—the UN civilian police. This has followed from the understanding of the critical need to restore the rule of law in post-

conflict situations, a process that must begin immediately following the cessation of hostilities. Police inherently are more integrated with the local populace of a society than military soldiers and interact with the people more. There is a growing consensus that the use of CIVPOL to train and recruit local police (to abide by international human rights standards) is a high priority in peace operations. While military forces can create an overall secure environment in terms of stopping open conflict, they are not well suited to policing a society. Yet post-conflict societies often feature the partial or complete failure of the judicial system, including police, courts and prisons. Without the rule of law, little else can move forward. Development and reconstruction will be hampered by the lack of everyday security, and the general population will likewise not be able to feel safe and return to work and school in such a situation. Someone must investigate crimes, deal with traffic accidents, and arrest those who break the law. Those who have been arrested must be afforded a fair trial, and should be held in humane conditions.

Unfortunately, the UN CIVPOL system faces many of the same problems that the military component of peace operations faces, and other unique problems as well. CIVPOL recruitment for operations is even more difficult than for troops, since police are not waiting in barracks ready to deploy. They are on the streets, fighting crime, and therefore serving on a UN mission generally creates a capacity gap within the home state. Consequently, CIVPOL are offered to UN peace operations on an individual basis, usually in fairly small numbers. Large CIVPOL operations, such as those in Kosovo and East Timor, will have police officers from over 50 different countries, coming from societies with different policing traditions and behavioral cultures, something that creates its own set of problems. Furthermore, the UN has an inadequate system for getting courts and correctional facilities up and running in a post-conflict state. In order for the rule of law to be truly restored, police, courts, and jails must all be restored at once. Continuing violence and unrest in Haiti show how concentrating almost exclusively on the civilian police, without enhancing local courts and penal systems, can lessen the chances for permanent peace, by leaving crucial parts of the governance system unreformed.

### Reactive Instead of Preventive

A critical point to make about peace operations is that they have largely been a *reaction* to an international conflict, rather than a preemptive measure to restrain violent conflict. The only UN peace operation not to be “reactive” was in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1995-1999). The United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) was a unique operation that monitored border areas for any activity that could undermine confidence and stability. UNPREDEP activities included reporting illegal arms flows, preventing violent clashes, assisting in humanitarian distribution, and providing community services. Because the former Yugoslavia is known for its ethnic tensions and violent outbreaks UNPREDEP took decisive measures to prevent the spread of the violence. Unfortunately, the mission’s extension was rejected by China’s veto and the UNPREDEP force had to withdraw. Not long after, massive waves of violence ensued in Macedonia.

### Conclusion

The need for serious change is obvious when examining past peacekeeping operations. Current resources will be used inefficiently if there is not adequate reform. Failure in addressing the current problems of peace operations will only result in more death and human suffering. The urgency of the need for change is compounded in the light of recent events in Afghanistan, Iraq and in other conflict-ridden areas of the world. Clearly, post-conflict zones that are left unattended can pose serious risks to the national security of nations halfway around the world, as among other things they become breeding grounds for criminal activity and terrorism. These problems cannot be disregarded. The implementation of the recommendations of the Brahimi Report are incredibly important in making UN peace operations capable of ensuring peace and security in every corner of the world. Yet they are only a start. The Member States of the UN must begin to look seriously at what can be done to enhance the ability to wage peace, if the need to wage war is to ever be averted.