Policy in 21st Century Global Peace Operations: Achievements and Challenges

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Police in peace operations have seen a rapid expansion: Between 2003 and 2010, the demand for UN police officers tripled while for military peacekeepers it doubled. Ever since, it has maintained an historical high of 13,000-15,000 mandated officers at any one moment. This growth in numbers has been accompanied by markedly more complex and ambitious tasks to train and advise local police, to enforce public order with executive powers and to support the reform and rebuilding of entire police services. In terms of recruitment, training, doctrine and the management of operations, this qualitative change in Security Council mandates is even more challenging than the quantitative increase alone.¹

This trend reflects a growing recognition among policy-makers that the institutions of law and order, police in particular, play a central role in protecting human life, fostering stability and building new and sustainable political institutions after war. The 2011 World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development provided further evidence to support this claim as part of its more general finding “that strengthening legitimate institutions and governance to provide citizen security, justice, and jobs is crucial to break cycles of violence.”²

New tools, increased capacity

While not always able to meet the growing ambitions of the Security Council as rapidly and fully as necessary, the UN Secretariat has become more capable to strategically manage and support police in peace operations over the last decade. At least twice, first after the Brahimi Report in 2001 and then as part of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s inaugural reform of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in 2008, member states invested in a considerable expansion of headquarters capacity. Working closely with supportive governments, DPKO launched a new, small Standing Police Capacity (at first 27, now 41 personnel) and began an ambitious doctrine development effort with its Strategic Guidance Framework.

Together with other investments on the part of individual member states and regional groups to improve training and rapid deployment, these advances have strengthened the foundation for deploying and managing UN police operations. Only as a result of these achievements was it possible for the UN in recent years to meet most of its quantitative deployment targets and address the most urgent support requirements when they
arose, such as conducting the in-depth review of the selection, training and doctrine of formed police units that began in mid-2007. While the revised policy for formed police units was issued in March 2010, even today the implementation of its findings, training programs in particular, remains a work in progress, largely because day-to-day operational needs continue to require almost every available resource at headquarters.

**Continuing challenges**

Despite progress, a continuing 17% gap between mandated and deployed personnel suggests that not all is well. As a recent study by the Henry L. Stimson Center found, “UN policing is [...] an enterprise that is overextended, under-resourced and lacking sufficient institutional support.” Reflecting broad consensus in the expert community, the study points to fundamental shortfalls in the operational practice and the institutional base of recruitment, training and doctrine that shapes work in the field. Even after a decade of growing investments in UN led police reform it is clear that police components have had far less impact on capacity and integrity in host-state police services than the international community had hoped. In most missions, too little attention is given to promoting individual and institutional integrity as well as management and administrative capacity. Without parallel efforts to build these institutional foundations, any amount of technical and specialist training is likely unsustainable.

These operational shortcomings result from systematic weaknesses in how police officers and leaders for UN missions are selected, recruited, trained and provided with effective doctrine and political guidance. The UN requires passionate and experienced change agents, officers with exceptional language abilities, technical and management specialists (including non-sworn person-

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**Number of Police Deployed in UN Peace Operations (2003-2012)**

![Graph showing the number of police deployed in UN Peace Operations from 2003 to 2012. The graph indicates a consistent increase in the number of personnel over the years, peaking around 2012.]
nel), but most member state police services are reluctant to offer their most valued members for UN deployments. All too often, the wrong people are recruited to fulfill quantitative targets because the right people are not available. In most police-contributing countries and in UN-provided pre-deployment training, much more could be done to prepare first-time UNPOL officers for missions. Knowledge management and learning within missions is often deficient, and the capacity of the Secretariat to provide strategic guidance to missions is hard-pressed to keep pace with the growing complexity of mandated tasks.5

Breaking the cycle

From Kosovo and Bosnia to Timor-Leste, Sierra Leone and Haiti, experience has shown that providing public order and laying the foundations for an effective and accountable police service are both indispensable and time-critical elements of peacekeeping and early peacebuilding. The same body of research that supports this finding, however, suggests also that the impact of police assistance remains insufficient to live up to the political needs of post-conflict stabilization.

To achieve greater impact, member state governments and the Secretariat will need to break the present cycle of meeting day-to-day operational needs at the expense of tackling strategic challenges. As long as the demand for peacekeeping remains as high as it has for the past decade, this is not going to happen through business as usual.

Endnotes

1 The background and analysis in this paper is based in part on prior, more extensive research published in Thorsten Benner, Stephan Mergenthaler, Philipp Rotmann, The New World of UN Peace Operations: Learning to Build Peace? Oxford University Press 2011; as well as Philipp Rotmann, First Steps Toward a Police Doctrine for UN Peace Operations (2001-2006), Policing & Society 21:1 (2011), pp. 84-95. (Author contact: protmann@gppi.net)


