

# UN PEACE OPERATIONS IN TRANSITION

The UN has vastly expanded its peace operations in the past few years: Conceptually, the classic peacekeeping format is being linked more and more to modern peace consolidation; in quantitative terms, the number of uniformed troops has been increased more than fivefold since 1999, after a decrease in the mid-1990s. It is therefore no surprise that the organization is increasingly operating at the limits of its capacity. In order to be able to meet future challenges, existing shortfalls will have to be addressed rapidly.



French peacekeepers in Southern Lebanon, September 2006.

Ali Hashisho/Reuters

The new UN secretary general, Ban Ki Moon, used his first appearance at the UN Security Council to declare the problems of Africa a priority of his work program for the next years. In addition to implementing the Millennium Development Goals, Ban is particularly determined to tackle the many violent conflicts on the continent. The UN's peacekeeping operations will have a special role in this effort. Their importance has been increasing steadily in recent years, and reached a new high in August 2006, when the Security Council approved no less than three new missions within only 20 days (Lebanon, East Timor, and Darfur).

In view of this surge, observers increasingly warn of overtaxing the institutional, financial, and military-operative resources of the UN and its member states. This is particularly relevant in view of the fact that the security and observer missions of "classic"

peacekeeping are increasingly being replaced by complex, multidimensional missions furnished with robust mandates.

## 1990s Learning Curve

The UN's peacekeeping operations have undergone fundamental change since 1948. Cold War peacekeeping operations were based on three core principles illustrating their intergovernmental nature and the importance attributed to national sovereignty: Missions were impartial and required the consent of all parties to the conflict, and use of force was only permitted in self-defense. They were intended to monitor and secure ceasefires and peace treaties by deploying military observers or lightly armed border troops between the conflict parties.

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought about a fundamental change in the international

threat picture. The new paradigm was no longer determined by inter-state conflicts, but by intra-state disputes. With their bewildering mix of state security forces, rebels, and warlords, these "new wars" were marked by assaults on the civilian population and widespread human rights violations. This strategic environment, coupled with a newfound freedom of action after the end of the Cold War confrontation, prompted the UN to adapt the goals – though not the instruments – of peacekeeping. The doctrine stating that a peace agreement was a precondition for a UN mission was no longer regarded as an absolute; instead, active intervention in conflicts was to pave the way for peace.

The euphoria of the early 1990s was soon followed by disenchantment. The humanitarian disasters in Somalia, ex-Yugoslavia, and Rwanda showed that the modified objectives could not be reached in a changed environment using the traditional means. Accordingly, the UN then markedly reduced its peace operations.

## Growing Demand

It was not until after 1999 that the number of troops and police at the UN's disposal began to increase almost exponentially. The reasons for this trend, which continues until today, are numerous. First of all, many member states had realized that the UN had neither the operative capabilities nor the political support in crisis situations to carry out *peace enforcement* measures. This insight gave rise to more realistic targets and expectations.

Secondly, the alternatives, which involved intervention by regional organizations instead of the UN, did not meet the expectations. Many such organizations, especially in Africa, did not have the necessary resources, while others were impeded by the colliding political interests or lack of goodwill on the part of those of their member states that would have been capable of action.

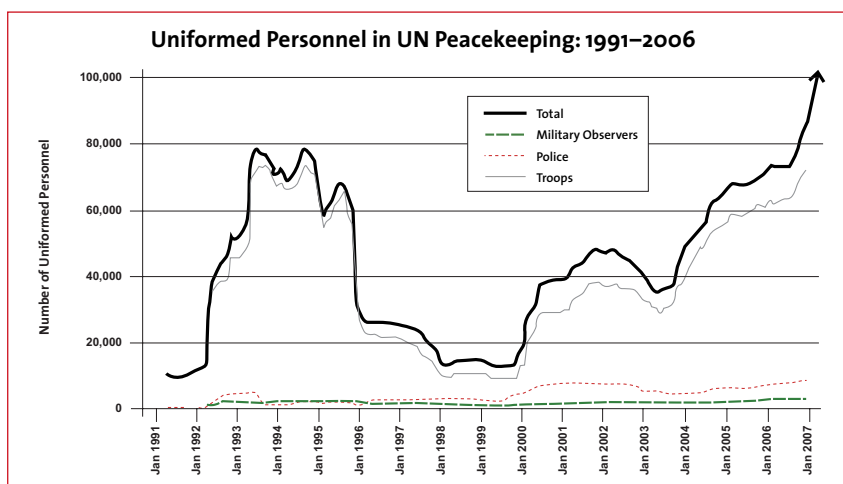
Thirdly, the UN, as a worldwide organization of states on equal footing, wields a unique legitimacy. The unilateral actions of the great powers in their campaign against terrorism, which has been superimposed on many regional conflicts in recent years, highlight the necessity of the UN's global, multilateral approach. Despite its weaknesses, the UN continues to embody principles and ideals that are shared by the global international community, and which form the basis for the kind of peace operations that no other organization, let alone a single state, can carry out.

### Expanded mission spectrum

The quantitative increase of UN peacekeeping forces is intertwined with the transformation of their qualitative profile, which can be seen in their expanded mission spectrum. In addition to observer missions, they now carry out peacebuilding operations. These include disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of soldiers into civilian life, humanitarian aid, repatriation of refugees, administrative tasks, and reconstruction of state (infra-) structures or security sector reform. The combination of traditional peacekeeping with elements of peace consolidation has become an essential characteristic of multidimensional, integrated missions.

This new mission profile demands that capabilities be adapted accordingly – especially when it comes to use of force. In principle, it is still desirable for all parties to a conflict to agree to the establishment of a UN mission. However, a peace arrangement may often be fragile, and since local security forces will frequently not be able to secure it adequately, UN peacekeeping troops have to be able to act decisively against marauding rebels, for example. This is why most UN missions today are equipped with a so-called “robust mandate” under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, allowing troops to carry out their mission by force, if necessary.

Generally, the trend towards integrated missions can be expected to continue, thus



Source: [www.un.org/Depts/dpko/chart.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/chart.pdf)

enhancing the importance of peacebuilding elements. The latter are of crucial importance in creating sustainable peaceful settlements, considering the tendency of post-civil war societies to spiral back into violence after a few years of peace. The newly created “Peacebuilding Commission” is a potentially valuable instrument for better integration of the multiple tasks and optimization of the resulting interfaces.

### Capacity Limits

One central key to the success of peace operations is the political determination of the international community, which manifests itself in practical terms when it comes to allocating the necessary resources. An expert commission chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi in the year 2000 estimated that at most, one new major UN mission would be planned and executed per year. In 2002, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guéhenno warned that the UN would hardly be able to handle a massive increase of missions; it was only by employing large numbers of new staff that the organization was able to put together five major missions in the years 2003–4.

The creation of three peace operations in August 2006, followed by another one (Nepal) in January 2007, has created a huge demand for additional staff. It is estimated that the requirements amount to 43 per cent additional military troops, 50 per cent more civilian employees, and as much as 80 per cent more policy officers. It is obvious that the UN is operating at its capacity limits in several ways and must meet these shortfalls quickly.

### Staff shortages and institutional shortcomings

One key problem is recruiting qualified

personnel. The UN can easily meet its targets for light and mechanized infantry units, since many developing countries are prepared to supply part of their (often personnel-heavy) armed forces. However, these troops are often poorly trained, and require support from third countries to pay for adequate equipment. It is even more difficult to recruit military personnel for complex tasks such as reconnaissance or logistics.

Furthermore, there is an acute recruitment gap in the area of police forces. Many countries are already short of well-trained and experienced police officers, so that it is difficult to recruit personnel without lowering quality standards. For example, it will be two years before just the missions in Darfur and East Timor reach their full nominal strength. Another delaying factor is the requirement for comprehensive tests to establish the suitability of security staff for peacekeeping missions, which has become necessary in the aftermath of sexual assaults on civilians by individual UN units.

Finally, multidimensional operations require civilian experts and administrators for the area of peace consolidation. Such experts are also rare, and they demand commensurately high salaries. Furthermore, due to rigid personnel regulations, the employees that are already on the UN's payroll cannot simply be relocated to field missions, necessitating cumbersome recruitment of new staff.

This last point also indicates serious institutional shortcomings. A fundamental reform of the UN Secretariat is long overdue. Peace missions would also benefit from a more flexible approach to personnel man-

### Swiss military and police personnel in UN peace operations

Mission	Military observers (rank of captain and above)	Police officers
UNTSO (Middle East)	10	
MONUC (Democratic Republic of the Congo)	2	
UNMEE (Ethiopia/Eritrea)	2	
UNOMIG (Georgia)	5	3
UNMIK (Kosovo)		6
ONUCI (Côte d'Ivoire)		2

agement and a deregulation of the overly restricted "UN job market".

It is also essential that civilian and military tasks be coordinated between the UN headquarters and the field mission, and that they be embedded into integrated procedural guidelines. Considerable problems still remain in this area, an issue that was already addressed by the Brahimi Commission. There are still no permanent (military) command structures, which means that the UN administration has to rebuild such structures for each new mission. For the Lebanon mission, at least, there have been some initial steps towards a comprehensive optimization of command structures and mission guidelines.

#### Future Challenges

Three challenges should be noted at this point. First of all, crisis reaction capabilities must be strengthened. At the strategic level, this includes creating and expanding an early-warning system; improvements to this end have been introduced in the Department of Political Affairs. At the operative level, the UN reform summit of 2005 resolved to create a standing police force. This means that future missions will have at their disposal a basic unit that can be deployed at short notice.

Secondly, cooperation with regional organizations must be consolidated, with the goal not of building institutional alternatives, but of utilizing complementary capabilities. On the one hand, the UN intends to better integrate the high-quality services of the EU and NATO. On the other hand, in view of the critical situation in Africa, the UN has a vested interest in supporting the African Union in developing its own capabilities in the area of peace promotion.

Thirdly, we should point out the trend towards privatization of peace operations. Just as many state security forces increasingly subcontract their activities to pri-

vate partners, the UN missions also tend to procure scarce goods and services from private-sector suppliers. This allows them to cover those requirements that member states cannot or will not meet, in an economically efficient way. However, this practice jeopardizes the legitimacy of UN troops. The UN therefore has to decide which of its real-life activities it can subcontract, and how to regulate and monitor private contractors.

#### Switzerland's Engagement

Since it joined in 2002, Switzerland has pursued a very active UN policy. Besides advocacy for Switzerland's immediate interests – for example, concerning personnel issues – it has used the new room for maneuver to present ideas on the further qualitative and institutional development of the UN. Examples include the initiative for the creation of a new Human Rights Council or a draft resolution on reforming the working methods of the Security Council. Generally, Switzerland has been able to make an exceptional impact during its brief membership so far. It should continue to regard itself as a generator of ideas and not refrain from actively promoting its interests and values in all UN organizations, including the Security Council.

Switzerland's engagement in UN peace operations contrasts notably with this positive balance sheet. While Switzerland is one of the biggest financial contributors to peace missions, the country's direct engagement is rather meager. Currently, there are only 19 Swiss military observers and 11 police officers in action with six UN-led missions. Although participation in UN peace operations is only one element of Switzerland's overall peacebuilding portfolio, the full potential is far from being tapped.

Switzerland must clarify whether it wants to supply more uniformed personnel to UN missions as a way of complementing its well-established civilian peace promotion

efforts with a matching military dimension in its UN policy. The trend towards integrated mission shows that civilian and military peace promotion efforts are mutually constitutive and demand a common goal and strategy. A Swiss involvement in both aspects would therefore be a desirable contribution towards a holistic peace promotion policy.

The increasing demand of specialized services for UN missions in such areas as logistics or transportation translates into a requirement for more qualified personnel. The growing number of international requests shows that Switzerland is a welcome partner. Contrary to the tendency of many Western countries to increasingly abstain from UN peace operations due to other obligations (such as in Afghanistan or Iraq), Switzerland could supply targeted services and create a real added value.

The Federal Council's suggestion to raise the contingent for foreign military missions from 300 to 500 troops, which was suspended in early February 2007, would have been a useful contribution to this end and would have brought Switzerland closer to the levels supplied by comparable states like Sweden or Austria. A greater contingent would give Switzerland more freedom of action and allow for more flexibility in their disposition. Participation in multilateral missions abroad is one of the core tasks of modern military forces, and is of great importance both in shaping their transformation and in terms of their legitimacy.

Furthermore, Switzerland should consider ways in which it can contribute to the high demand for police officers. Generally, a targeted expansion of Switzerland's hitherto successful UN policy to include peace operations would amount to a clear Swiss commitment to the UN and would further enhance and establish its reputation as a reliable partner of the global organization.

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