

The evolution of UN peacekeeping: unfinished business

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The year 2006 began badly for UN peacekeepers. In January, eight Guatemalan forces were killed in the midst of year old, on-and-off military campaign against armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Anti-UN riots in Côte d'Ivoire forced the UN mission there to seal off its compound and appeal for immediate reinforcements from a neighboring peace operation in Liberia. Elections in Haiti were postponed for a fourth time, while gang violence – including almost daily kidnappings – continued despite UN efforts to bring it under control for more than a year. The future of the UN mission in Ethiopia/Eritrea remained in doubt in view of the severe restrictions placed upon it by the Eritrean government. And while the UN mission in Sudan was helping to keep the fragile north-south peace, enormous new challenges loomed on the horizon with the decision to take over from the African Union in Darfur later in the year. The days of traditional, consent-based peacekeeping seem to be over in most places; today, the choice is often between a more robust approach and going home. Increasingly, though with trepidation, the UN is choosing the former.

The shift to robustness is also evident in non-UN operations. In the Netherlands and Canada, politicians clashed over contributing troops to NATO's increasingly robust operations in Afghanistan.¹ In Germany, the new coalition government found itself under significant pressure to promise short-term reinforcements to the United Nations (UN) mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.² And in January 2006, President Bush called for a bigger NATO role in the peacekeeping effort in Darfur, although he did not endorse calls for this role to include providing a bridging force prior to the deployment of a UN mission.³

The public debates engendered by these proposals led to a burgeoning realization that peace operations – so often seen as humanitarian and well-intentioned – have grown increasingly complicated. Electorates have been exposed

¹ Ditchburn 2006; BBC, 03.02.2006.

² Williamson/Dombey 2006.

³ VandeHai/Lynch 2006; International Crisis Group Briefing 2006.

to the reality that “peacekeepers” are now frequently expected to use force to secure territory, protect civilians and maintain public order.

These mandates have not only strained peace operations doctrine but the resources needed to sustain the missions, especially UN missions. As our colleague Bruce Jones has argued, the eleven new operations launched in the last six years have put the UN under strategic strain:

Since 2003, the U.N. has taken on large-scale deployments to vast areas such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, southern Sudan and now [potentially] Darfur. In 2000, the U.N. deployed nearly 13,000 troops in Sierra Leone, or one soldier for about every 3 1/2 square miles. In late 2005, it was maintaining a force of more than 15,000 in Congo, but with a ratio of one soldier for more than 90 square miles. Such a force cannot secure such a vast space consistently.⁴

While such problems may occasionally and temporarily enter public debate, they are not the stuff of day-to-day domestic politics. Given the shift towards a more robust approach by both the UN and non-UN missions, it is natural to ask what forms of political reflection and discussion *do* set the parameters of peacekeeping. This is especially true in the UN’s case, where the search for consensus is inevitably more complex than within regional security organizations and temporary military coalitions.

This article sets out to chart the evolution of debate within and about the UN since the end of the Cold War, when the principles of consent, impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defense were thrown into question by a changing security environment. It does so through reviewing the substance and implications of three major reports produced by or for the UN. These are *An Agenda for Peace*, published by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992 (hereafter *Agenda*); the “Brahimi Report” (more properly *The Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations*) of 2000 (hereafter the Brahimi Report); and the 2004 *Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* (hereafter the HLP report).⁵

It is not our purpose to excavate every detail of these documents’ relevance to peace operations – they have been the subject of insightful commentary elsewhere.⁶ Rather, we focus on the operational and doctrinal aspects of the use of force as features of continuing reflection on the fundamental nature of peacekeeping. Our central argument is that, taken together, the reports chart a

⁴ Jones 2006.

⁵ See links to the documents UN, General Secretary 1992; UN, Panel on UN Peace Operations 2000; UN, High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change 2004.

⁶ See in particular Durch et. al 2003 and Berdal 2005.

politically achievable and useful path to reform, but we have a long way to go before achieving even the modest vision they contain. The development of UN doctrine for contemporary operations remains unfinished business and significant growth in capacity is needed to counter the acute strain under which they are operating. We conclude by highlighting a number of priority reforms that need to be taken now.

Before turning to the reports themselves, we will sketch out the recent context of UN peacekeeping in more detail. For while the crises of early 2006 may have come as a surprise to many, arguments over the use of force in peacekeeping are well-established.

The Contemporary Context of UN Operations

The field of peace operations is currently both crowded and confused. In the early 1990s, UN peacekeeping emerged as a tool to manage the aftermath of the Cold War, primarily in Europe, Africa and Central America, and to a lesser extent in Asia. But the crises of Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia threatened to destroy the tool's credibility. Today, UN and non-UN peacekeeping have renewed significance in the Western Balkans, Africa and the main theatres of the post-9/11 "war on terror."

Since 1999, peace missions have been conducted not only by regional organizations that have been in the business for a while – such as NATO, ECOWAS and the OSCE – but also others that are new to the enterprise, including the European Union and the African Union. There has also been a rise in peace missions by "coalitions of the willing" and individual states, ranging from a small Australian-led operation in the Solomon Islands to the larger French mission in Côte d'Ivoire – and, most obvious of all, the massive US-led presence in Iraq.

Yet however complex the peacekeeping environment, the UN has come under particular heavy pressure to evolve. It has seen its military forces worldwide grow by nearly 500% since 1999, surpassing the peacekeeping deployments of all regional organizations combined (if still trailing Operation Iraqi Freedom in numerical terms).⁷

But the expansion in UN peacekeeping has not just been a manpower issue. It has also involved taking on new tasks that raise questions over what we mean by "peacekeeping." These have included pushing civilian activities to

⁷ Unless otherwise stated, discussions and data on current peace operations are derived from Ian Johnstone (ed.), *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2006* hereafter *Annual Review*.

the point of *de facto* and *de jure* government (as in Kosovo and Timor-Leste) and giving less expansive but politically sensitive assistance to the US and its allies after the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. The most controversial aspect of the current crop of UN peace operations concerns not their civilian dimension but differences surrounding the use of force.

Although the Kosovo experience in particular caused policy-makers and scholars to concentrate on the long-term problems of “transitional administrations,” UN missions have increasingly been asked to face more immediate challenges concerning public order and civilian protection. In 2000, the risks involved were made plain in Sierra Leone when the Revolutionary United Front took over 300 UN troops hostage. And there has also been political pressure to ensure that global opinion is not offended by another Srebrenica or Rwanda. The UN Security Council has come to include generic language to this end in new mandates. Since late 1999, no fewer than ten peace operations – both UN and non-UN – have been authorized “to protect civilians under the imminent threat of physical violence,” often qualified by the words, “within capabilities and areas of deployment.”⁸ The need to delimit UN mandates is a reminder that peacekeeping forces often lack the manpower and resources to protect civilians throughout a disordered country without additional support. The Sierra Leone crisis was in considerable part resolved by the deployment of British paratroopers to reinforce the hard-pressed UN mission.

But the UN’s difficulties in Sierra Leone were not simply operational. They also revealed sharp differences of opinion – in the Security Council, in the Secretariat and in the field – as to how forcefully the peacekeepers should act. Many of the main troop contributors to the mission were wary of becoming too confrontational; and balked when the mission’s mandate was revised to allow its troops to “deter and where necessary, decisively counter the threat of the RUF by responding robustly to any hostile actions or threat of imminent and direct use of force.”⁹ A smaller scale crisis in East Timor at around the same time prompted a debate on the rules of engagement of the UN mission there, which were ultimately revised to enable it to act forcefully against mi-

⁸ For UN operations see SC resolution 1270 on Sierra Leone (1999); SC resolution 1299 on DRC (2000); SC resolution 1509 on Liberia (2003), SC resolution 1528 on Cote d’Ivoire (2004); SC resolution 1542 on Haiti (2004); SC resolution 1545 on Burundi (2004); SC resolution 1590 on Sudan (2005). For non-UN operations, see SC resolution 1464 on both the French-led Operation Licorne and ECOWAS in Côte d’Ivoire (2003); and SC resolution 1564 on the African Union in Darfur. A compilation of the precise language in these resolutions can be found in Holt 2005.

⁹ UN document S/RES/1313, 4 August 2000.

litas on the basis of an amplified concept of self-defense.¹⁰ In mid-2004, the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (known by its French acronym, MONUC) was humiliated when militias seized the eastern town of Bukavu, killing more than one hundred inhabitants. A UN study concluded that the mission's leaders appeared "to confuse impartiality with neutrality."¹¹ MONUC responded to this experience by pushing the boundaries of its mandate with robust tactics, although the associated risks resulted in considerable inconsistency in how this was carried out.¹² Similar, though less dramatic issues arose in Haiti in 2005, where political and criminal violence in the slums of Port-au-Prince led to on-again off-again robustness by UN military contingents and formed police units.

These cases thus demonstrate two challenges for peacekeepers operating in dangerous environments. The first is the *operational* need to concentrate and sustain the military and police resources to meet threats. The second is the *doctrinal* dilemma of engendering coherence within multinational forces in how to use force both to maintain order and contain crises.

Our definition of the use of force is broad, embracing the planning and resource issues necessary to *project* force even before it is used (or deemed necessary). In the analyses of the three reports that follow, we will concentrate on these challenges as interrelated aspects of the problem of force – without sufficient resources any form of doctrine is futile, and without doctrine, resources may prove to be ineffective or inert.

An Agenda for Peace

The UN Security Council held its first ever heads-of-state summit meeting in early 1992, as the collapse of Yugoslavia added urgency to the new generation of peacekeeping missions that had emerged in Africa with the end of the Cold War. The summit asked Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to present recommendations on how to strengthen the UN's capacity for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping.

His response was *Agenda for Peace*, which reflected a sense that a strategy was needed to guide UN peacekeepers in doing what they were already being asked to do on an *ad hoc* basis in the former Yugoslavia and beyond. This was an appeal to the Security Council for doctrinal clarity, and it ambitiously re-

¹⁰ S/RES/1319, 20 September 2000. Stephens 2005

¹¹ See Annual Review, p. 4.

¹² An attempt to clarify the mandate at the end of 2005 succeeded only in reaffirming the existing uncertainty. See UN document S/RES/1649, 21 December 2005, especially paras. 9 and 11.

defined peacekeeping as “the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, *hitherto* with the consent of all the parties concerned.”¹³

This was a departure from the traditional presumption that *ongoing* consent by all opposed factions was a necessary condition for peacekeeping – it implied that the UN must be ready to adapt operationally and doctrinally for operations in less permissive environments. Having thus shifted the central problem in peace operations from gaining consent to acting without it, the *Agenda* then proposed an elegant solution to both the doctrinal and operational implications for the use of force, peace enforcement units:

Cease-fires have often been agreed to but not complied with, and the United Nations has sometimes been called upon to send forces to restore and maintain the cease-fire. This task can on occasion exceed the mission of peace-keeping forces and the expectations of peace-keeping force contributors. I recommend that the Council consider the utilization of peace-enforcement units in clearly defined circumstances and with their terms of reference specified in advance.¹⁴

But the *Agenda* did not advocate an increase in the use of force by peacekeepers *per se*. Rather, it drew a distinction between both the operational and doctrinal aspects of peacekeeping and enforcement.

I recommend that the Council consider the utilization of peace-enforcement units in clearly defined circumstances and with their terms of reference specified in advance. [...] They would have to be more heavily armed than peace-keeping forces and would need to undergo extensive preparatory training within their national forces.¹⁵

The Security Council did not endorse the Secretary-General’s proposal and following the failures of commission and omission in Somalia, former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, he backtracked in a 1995 *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace*. This argued that “peacekeeping and the use of force (other than in self-defense) should be seen as alternative techniques and not just as adjacent points on a continuum, permitting easy transition from one to another.”¹⁶ The *Supplement* effectively rejected the whole idea of “peace enforcement.”

Yet it would be a mistake to dismiss the *Agenda* out of hand, for while it failed to generate new doctrines, the “enforcement units” would reappear in

¹³ *Agenda*, para. 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, para 44.

¹⁵ *Agenda.*, para 44.

¹⁶ *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary-General On the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary Of the United Nations (A/50/60 – S/1995/1)*, para. 36.

other guises in future reports. So too would its emphasis on the need for more effective mechanisms for deploying international police within UN operations and – of particular importance in operational terms – its call for a standing logistical reserve:

Not all Governments can provide their battalions with the equipment they need for service abroad. [...] a great deal has to come from the United Nations, including equipment to fill gaps in under-equipped national units. The United Nations has no standing stock of such equipment. . . . A pre-positioned stock of basic peace-keeping equipment should be established, so that at least some vehicles, communications equipment, generators, etc., would be immediately available at the start of an operation.¹⁷

Had the *Agenda's* proposals been translated into policy, the UN might have developed a greater degree of strategic flexibility through the 1990s. But real progress towards developing that flexibility would have to wait for almost a decade, until the expansion of the UN's activities from 1999 put under renewed operational pressure – and raised urgent questions about the doctrinal assumptions under which it should operate.

The “Brahimi Report”

In 1999 and early 2000, the UN Secretariat not only found itself facing a surge of new missions but also had to respond to serious critiques of its earlier performance. These included two internal reports on Srebrenica and Rwanda, and a further analysis of the latter crisis by the Organization of African Unity.¹⁸ In this context, Secretary-General Kofi Annan commissioned *The Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations*.

Drafted in just four months, with the crisis in Sierra Leone and major new missions in Kosovo and East Timor as a backdrop, the report was compiled under a ten-member panel – and became known after the panel's chair, Lakhdar Brahimi. Like Brahimi, nearly all the panelists had held senior posts in UN missions or those of other international organizations.¹⁹ Whereas Boutros Boutros-Ghali had presented *An Agenda for Peace* as his own vision, Annan made a deliberate appeal to the field knowledge of others. The resulting document duly reflected the complexities of the peacekeeping experience.

¹⁷ *Agenda*, para. 53.

¹⁸ For summaries, see BBC, 16.11.1999; *Economist*, 23.12.1999.

¹⁹ The panelists are listed at http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/docs/panel_members.htm.

This had implications for its attitude to the use of force. As we have seen, the *Agenda* distinguished between peacekeeping and enforcement – and its *Supplement* argued that they are not on a continuum. The Brahimi report argued that the challenges presented in complex peace operations did not permit any easy distinctions. It reaffirmed the bedrock principles but then qualified all three: consent is often unreliable because “local parties sign peace accords for a variety of reasons, not all of them favorable to peace”; impartiality does not mean neutrality, but rather “adherence to the principles of the Charter and to the objectives of a mandate that is rooted in those Charter principles”; and UN operations must sometimes use force to take on “spoilers”:

“Spoilers” — groups (including signatories) who renege on their commitments or otherwise seek to undermine a peace accord by violence — challenged peace implementation in Cambodia, threw Angola, Somalia and Sierra Leone back into civil war, and orchestrated the murder of no fewer than 800,000 people in Rwanda. The United Nations must be prepared to deal effectively with spoilers if it expects to achieve a consistent record of success in peacekeeping or peace-building in situations of intrastate/transnational conflict.²⁰

From this emphasis on the inherent fragility of peace operations, the Report argued that UN operations must be “able to pose a credible deterrent threat, in contrast to the symbolic and non-threatening presence that characterizes traditional peacekeeping.”²¹ The panel did not explicitly recommend a new doctrine for peace enforcement operations, but it signaled the need for a more robust approach. And it made clear recommendations for the UN to build up its capacity to represent a credible threat.

In line with its warning that peace agreements might be in question from the moment of signing, the Report prioritized initiatives aimed at permitting the deployment of complex UN peacekeeping missions in ninety days (and more traditional operations within a month). In this it differed from the *Agenda*'s more reactive approach, but reflected difficulties with in establishing complex missions at short notice. This showed the need for new logistical and planning arrangements.

In planning terms, the Report argued for an increase in the UN Secretariat's ability to prepare operations with some autonomy from member-states. It proposed the development of Integrated Mission Task Forces (IMTF), made up of seconded UN personnel, which could initiate planning at the earliest pos-

²⁰ Brahimi Report, para. 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, para. 51.

sible notice.²² And it proposed alterations to the Security Council's methods for setting force levels when mandating peace operations. The Council "should leave in draft form resolutions authorizing missions with sizeable troop levels until such time as the Secretary-General has firm commitments of troops and other critical mission support elements".²³ This would prevent UN planners and commanders from facing impossibly ambitious mandates.

To give the UN the capacity to achieve more rapid deployments, the Report developed the logistical vision previously set out in the *Agenda*. It proposed that the Secretary-General should develop a global logistics strategy. This would center on the pre-existing UN Logistics Base at Brindisi, Italy, that should have five mission "start-up kits" (a resource concept first floated in the mid-1990s) available at all times.²⁴

Overall, Brahimi and his panel set out a strategic architecture that would allow the UN to concentrate its forces early and effectively. In reality, some of that architecture was achieved. The Secretary-General backed the recommendations on provisional mandates, but these were blocked by the Security Council – which nonetheless proposed more restricted "planning mandates", used to develop strategies for the Democratic Republic of Congo and, most recently, Darfur.²⁵

Perhaps the most significant success was logistical. In late 2001, the Secretary-General followed through on the Brahimi Report, proposing the creation of a Strategic Deployment Stock (SDS) to permit more rapid operation deployment. The UN General Assembly approved a one-time expenditure of \$142 million for the 2002-2003 financial year for the initial investment into the SDS initiative. This proved its worth in 2003, permitting a rapid deployment of UN forces to the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Yet, if the Brahimi Report's operational proposals were adopted in part, its doctrinal suggestions made less progress. The Security Council requested the SG to prepare a "comprehensive operational doctrine for the military component of UN peacekeeping operations".²⁶ But the Special Committee on Peacekeeping (a General Assembly body with broader membership than the Security Council) was less enthusiastic. Although welcoming the Report, it did not encourage the Annan to launch into a new doctrinal exercise. The Secretariat finessed the issue by producing an updated version of the *Handbook*

²² Brahimi Report, paras. 198-217.

²³ *Ibid.*, para. 64(b).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 169.

²⁵ BBC, 25.03.2006. The analysis in this paragraph and the next relies on Durch et al 2003.

²⁶ UN, Security Council 2000.

on *UN Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations* in December 2003. This is not about the military peacekeeping alone, but all aspects of a multidimensional operation, and does not say much more than the Brahimi Report itself on the use of force.

If the Brahimi Report went some way to providing the operational tools need for the UN it thus failed to engender real progress on the doctrinal issues essential to translating the concentration of into the ability to threaten “spoilers” in a consistent fashion.

The High-level Panel Report on Threats, Challenges and Change

As the Brahimi Report’s recommendations were being partially implemented, the 9/11 attacks and the Iraq crisis shook the UN’s political and strategic assumptions. But whereas the Yugoslav wars of the early 2000s and the surge of 1999 onwards had put pressure on the UN’s peacekeeping role, this new crisis was of a broader and higher political nature. Even as the United States and its critics clashed in the prelude and aftermath to the Iraq war, they could agree to expand or launch UN missions from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Haiti, Afghanistan and (on a limited scale) Iraq itself.

If the crisis of the early 1990s was thus not a crisis of peacekeeping, the major report it produced gave concomitantly less attention to peace operations. In September 2003, Kofi Annan announced the formation of a High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. The new group included only one member with significant peacekeeping experience – Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar of India, a former commander of UN forces in the Balkans.²⁷

The High-level Panel Report argued that, in spite of significant failures, UN peacekeeping had been an important tool in reducing conflict since the end of the Cold War.²⁸ But it had little to say on doctrinal issues. Its most revealing passages are those that forthrightly acknowledge the blurring of the line between Chapter VI peacekeeping and Chapter VII peace enforcement, a distinction the Panel says is ‘misleading’ and should not be exaggerated. It notes that the usual practice today is to give both peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations Chapter VII mandates under the UN charter, allowing the use force, on the understanding that even the most benign environment can turn sour.²⁹

²⁷ HLP Report, Annex II.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 211.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, paras. 211-213.

But the panel's main contribution to debate on doctrine may have been to declare that there are certain situations on which peacekeeping is simply inappropriate.

In some contexts, opposition to a peace agreement is not tactical but fundamental. We must learn the lesson: peace agreements by Governments or rebels that engage in or encourage mass human rights abuses have no value and cannot be implemented. These contexts are not appropriate for consent-based peacekeeping: rather, they must be met with concerted action.³⁰

If the Brahimi Report had blurred the distinction between peacekeeping and the use of force made by the *Supplement*, the High-level Panel thus highlighted the value of force under certain circumstances. In so doing, it limited its scope to discuss aspects of peace operations doctrine under stress, but echoed increasing political pressure to adopt the idea of a "Responsibility to Protect" against genocide common to all states.³¹

On operational questions, the panel explicitly endorsed the Brahimi Report's conclusions and urged developed states to make greater logistical capacity available to the UN.³² More striking was its reinterpretation of the *Agenda's* concept of peace enforcement units. Whereas as Boutros Boutros-Ghali had apparently perceived such forces as being dedicated to and delimited by the UN, the panel assumed that "it is unlikely that the demand for rapid action will be met through United Nations mechanisms alone."

We welcome the European Union decision to establish standby high readiness, self-sufficient battalions that can reinforce United Nations missions. Others with advanced military capacities should be encouraged to develop similar capacities at up to the brigade level and to place them at the disposal of the United Nations.³³

Continuing this theme of partnership with other organizations, the Panel argued for a ten-year capacity building program for African organizations under the AU's strategic framework.³⁴ Operationally, therefore, it turned much of its attention away from the UN.

More closely echoing the *Agenda*, the panel recommended that the UN should develop its civilian policing capabilities. It proposed a capacity of fifty

³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 222.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Annex I, para. 51. Of the copious literature on the Responsibility to Protect, see Evans/Sahnoun 2002.

³² *Ibid.*, para 218.

³³ *Ibid.*, para. 219. In 2003, an EU force had reinforced the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. For the European role see. Tardy 2005.

³⁴ *Ibid.* para 272(c).

to one hundred officers to “undertake mission assessments and organize the start-up of police components.”³⁵ More widely noted was its endorsement of a Peace Building Commission and Support Office in the UN to handle the long-term stability and reconstruction of states – but these issues fall outside our rubric for concentrating on questions surrounding the use of force.

While the panel’s position on those questions was thus relatively limited, it was to be watered down further through the process of international negotiation that followed Kofi Annan’s adoption of many of its proposals in his own report, *In Larger Freedom*.³⁶ In September 2005, a World Summit at the UN in New York concluded those negotiations with an outcome document that, *inter alia*, approved the African capacity-building plan, endorsed a standing police capacity, and welcomed the EU’s rapid reaction forces. Efforts to mandate a more systematic package of standby forces to reinforce UN missions were blocked by American opposition, however, although a reference to the need for “enhanced rapidly deployable capacities” did make the final document.³⁷

The High-level Panel thus endorsed (and to a limited extent, helped realize) some of the ambitions set out in both the *Agenda* and Brahimi Report. But its focus on the Responsibility to Protect – also approved at the September Summit – and non-UN operational capabilities meant that it had relatively little new to say on how to project and use credible force in the murky world of peacekeeping described by Brahimi.

Unfinished Business

Reviewing the three reports, we must recognize that some of the problems identified by the *Agenda* have to still to be resolved in theory. In practice, as we noted at the opening of this article, UN and non-UN peacekeepers have often been required to operate without clear doctrine. Peacekeeping strategies tend to be improvised rather than developed through high-level political discussion.

This experience demonstrates that the doctrinal lessons of the Brahimi Report will only be learnt when reinforced by realities on the ground. The troubling realities are starting to sink in, suggesting the moment is right to reflect on the implications of the use of force in peace operation and to provide more systematic guidance to personnel in the field. Ignoring doctrine means

³⁵ *Ibid.*, para 223.

³⁶ UN document A/59/2005.

³⁷ UN document A/60/1. See also the summary of clauses affecting peacekeeping at Annual Review, p. 6.

either that decisions will be taken in a conceptual void, or based on doctrinal assumptions that find their way into a peace operation through the back door – for example, through the influence of a lead nation.

Specifically, doctrinal clarity and more systematic guidance will provide three principal benefits. First, shared understandings about the nature and underlying principles of a peace operation would help manage the expectations of those affected by it: the parties to the peace agreement, opposition groups, the local population, the personnel contributors, and all others with a stake in the outcome. In concrete terms, if force is used, it should be for transparent and understandable reasons; if force is not used, the reasons should be equally understandable. If the peacekeepers are likely to take casualties, that should be understood from the outset; if they are likely to inflict casualties – often more troubling for current troop contributors, especially when civilians risk getting caught in the cross-fire – that also must be well-understood.

Second, better guidance will help clarify how the bedrock principles of ‘consent’ and ‘impartiality’ play out in practice. These principles have stood the test of time, but what they mean in contemporary operations is far from self-evident. Consent is often unreliable, and it is not obvious whose consent matters. Is it only or primarily the parties to the conflict, or is the consent of the broader population as important? If ‘impartiality’ means the principled application of a mandate, then it is important that mandates be clear. But to expect perfect clarity asks too much of a political body like the Security Council. So the challenge for the peacekeepers is to interpret the mandate creatively, to act consistently in its implementation, and to communicate to all concerned – not just the belligerents – what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Finally, guidance can minimize uncertainty about how to measure appropriate force. The language of ‘spoilers’ has found its way into the peacekeeping lexicon. But what is an appropriate response to the threat they represent? Should peacekeepers ever act pre-emptively and shoot first? What does it take to deter spoilers? Military reinforcements may be helpful in some situations, but not if the security threat is of a lower order – such as criminal violence by armed gangs. In those circumstances, what may be needed is a judicious mix of military and formed police units (FPUs) with carefully calibrated rules of engagement, not ‘overwhelming force’.³⁸

Yet, as we have observed, without sufficient resources, doctrine is futile. While the Brahimi report may have led to significant improvements in the UN’s logistical system, its goal of rapidly deployable, militarily credible UN peace forces is yet to be achieved. Indeed, it may now be further away than

³⁸ A Formed Police Unit consists of approximately 110 personnel trained in riot control and related tasks.

it was in 2000.³⁹ The UN has found it increasingly difficult to muster forces for new operations such as that in southern Sudan (launched in 2005) and that being planned for Darfur at the time of writing. In the former case, the UN mission (UNMIS) took nine months to reach just 40% of proposed troop strength – and was lagging further behind in terms of police.⁴⁰

Efforts to build UN capacity should start by seizing on the opening provided by the World Summit’s endorsement of “enhanced rapidly deployable capacities”. The idea of a UN ‘strategic reserve’ in its most ambitious form is now dormant. But it may not be too much to expect major troop contributing countries like Pakistan, India or Nigeria to deploy “over-the-horizon” rapid reaction forces, which could reinforce UN missions (where many of their own troops are already deployed) when a crisis erupts. This, of course, would have to be funded out of the UN budget – an obstacle but not necessarily an insurmountable one.

Until such reserves become available, the UN is likely to turn to individual governments and organizations such as the EU and NATO for rapid reinforcements in periods of crisis. There is no room for complacency. While the High-level Panel praised the EU’s high-readiness forces, a paper adopted by the European Council in May 2004 noted that their deployment in support of the UN would “involve complicated coordination” and be “limited in its usability”.⁴¹ Discussions on greater operational compatibility between UN and non-UN forces must continue to ensure the reliability of such reinforcement mechanisms.

Expansion of international police personnel is also critically important. The standing police capacity is a good first step. In addition, FPU’s need to be further developed as a tool for dealing with lower order security threats and high end law enforcement in peace operations. Such units have been used with mixed success in Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, Cote D’Ivoire, Liberia and DRC. A large number of FPU’s may be required in Darfur as a key instrument in fulfilling any UN mandate covering protection of civilians.

Finally, building up African peacekeeping capacities would go a long way to alleviating current operational strains on the UN, which has more than 80% of its current troop deployments on that continent. Widely-reported difficulties experienced by the African Union mission in Darfur have demonstrated the need for more robust regional capacities (in particular the proposed rapidly

³⁹ The enhanced UN base at Brindisi has been put under significant pressure by the sheer number of current operations – in February 2006, its stock were reportedly at 60% of their target levels.

⁴⁰ Annual Review, p. 173.

⁴¹ Gowan 2005, p. 16.

deployable African standby forces).⁴² But they have also prompted calls for greater dialogue with African troop-contributors on doctrinal issues.

In arguing that the UN should launch a mission in Darfur to replace that of African Union – Kofi Annan has emphasized the need to be robust. He explained in the *Washington Post*:

Any new mission will need a strong and clear mandate, allowing it to protect those under threat, by force if necessary, as well as the means to do so. That means it will need to be larger, more mobile and much better equipped than the current African Union mission. Those countries that have the required military assets must be ready to deploy them.⁴³

The contrast between these ambitions and the realities of UNMIS are telling. Yet the division cannot be ascribed to mistakes in implementing the recommendations of the reports we have discussed. Rather, they imply that the broader failure to discuss peace operations doctrine reflects political doubts over the trajectory of post-Cold War peacekeeping. Fortunately, the lack of inter-governmental consensus has not stopped the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations from pushing ahead in areas where it can.

UN training modules, standard directives, generic standard operating procedures (SOPs), a ‘master list’ of rules of engagement, and publications like the 2003 Handbook on Multidimensional Peacekeeping all reflect evolving understandings of what peacekeeping is about. An important initiative is underway in DPKO to launch a “guidance and policy management system” for the conduct of operations. While this exercise can only go so far without greater consensus among governments, the experience of the last five years may well provide the impetus for achieving that consensus.⁴⁴ As a result, the prospects for completing the unfinished business of doctrinal and operational reform look better today than in many years.

⁴² See, for example, Fisher 9.03.06.

⁴³ Annan 2006. For a more detailed discussion see Johnstone 2006.

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