



Thematic Series

Building More Effective UN Peace Operations



CENTER ON
INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION

Peacekeeping Overstretch: Symptoms, Causes and Consequences **Summary of 26 May 2009 Launch Event**

On 26 May 2009, the Canadian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, in cooperation with the Center on International Cooperation (CIC), hosted the first of a series of thematic roundtable discussions aimed at building more effective UN Peacekeeping operations. The launch event gathered a comprehensive grouping of Permanent Representatives and peacekeeping practitioners for briefings on the current causes and symptoms of peacekeeping overstretch and the various ongoing initiatives aimed at overcoming these challenges. The roundtable panel consisted of: Canada's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador John McNee; UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Alain Le Roy; UN Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, Ms. Susanna Malcorra; and CIC's Director, Dr. Bruce Jones. The meeting's proceedings were governed by Chatham House Rule.

UN peacekeeping operations have grown considerably in size and complexity over the course of the past decade, but are showing signs of increasing strain. The symptoms include shortages of troops and other essential personnel, burgeoning costs amid the global economic downturn, limits on force enablers and multipliers, and flagging mission management at UN Headquarters. The causes are both operational and political: large, but geographically dispersed deployments and inadequate strategies for sustainable exit, on one hand; the absence of a viable political settlement, limited consent, and stalled reforms on the other. There is a risk that UN peacekeeping operations will contract unless these challenges are addressed. To do so, the panelists agreed that what is necessary is not only a shared understanding of the causes and symptoms of the current crisis of confidence affecting peacekeeping, but also a harmonization of the efforts aimed at surmounting them.

The panelists outlined the joint Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support's "New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping" initiative, which aims to provide a foundation for discussions among the UN Secretariat and Member States on reforms necessary to better meet the complexities of contemporary peacekeeping operations. While still preliminary, the initiative is considering: *(i)* establishing broader political consensus on priorities for UN peacekeeping operations, their sequencing, and limits; *(ii)* improving strategic guidance and planning for peacekeeping operations and their transition to peacebuilding; *(iii)* assessing the balance between headquarters- and regionally-based support systems capable of servicing multiple missions; *(iv)* modernizing procurement procedures, information management, and recruitment rules and procedures to reflect current operational needs; and *(v)* exploring mechanisms that would allow the UN to deploy more quickly and efficiently during the mission start up, as well as to more flexibly transfer assets and personnel between missions.

During the question and answer period, Member State representatives stressed the need for UN peacekeeping structures to be updated to reflect contemporary operational demands and recommended the following additional lines of inquiry: *(i)* the budgeting procedures of UN peacekeeping, including the potential for a singular UN budgetary process; *(ii)* better planning to safely draw-down peacekeeping operations and transition to peacebuilding once stability has been achieved; and *(iii)* the need to revisit principles put forward in the "Brahimi Report," especially the implications of deploying peacekeeping operations into contexts where there is no peace agreement. Overall, Member State representatives emphasized that any potential reform of UN peacekeeping must be guided by clearly articulated goals based on solid political consensus from key constituencies, including the Security Council, Troop/Police Contributing Countries, and major financial contributors.