

## **Understanding the Political Dimensions of Robust Peacekeeping**

*Presentation at the Seminar on Robust Peacekeeping: Principles and Practical Guidelines Convened by the French Ministry of Defence (Policy and Strategic Affairs) in Collaboration with the Research Network on Peacekeeping Operations (ROP) of the University of Montreal*

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I would like to start by thanking the French Ministry of Defence and the Research Network on Peacekeeping Operations of the University of Montreal for organizing this important and timely seminar and for inviting me. A special thanks to Jocelyn Coulon for his continued partnership with us at the Center on International Cooperation.

My presentation will focus on six key issues that in my view are crucial to understanding the complexities surrounding the political dimensions of the use of force in contemporary peace operations.

Frist, I would start by stating the obvious, that is, robust peace operations of various degrees will be around for as long as there is a continued need to protect civilians and restore public order, especially in situations where national law enforcement agencies have collapsed or are discredited as in DRC, Haiti, Timor, Afghanistan, Somalia and Darfur. In all these cases, UN and non-UN peace operations have had to use force either to protect civilians or restore law and order with varying degrees of success. But despite the different outcomes, experience over the past decade has demonstrated that when peacekeepers have had to act robustly against spoilers with no political agendas, the level of success has been remarkably high. This was demonstrated in Haiti when the UN mission in that country, MINUSTAH, took on armed criminal gangs in the country's notorious slums. However, when they have been faced with politically motivated and well resourced spoilers, success has been limited. DRC and Afghanistan are classic examples of where armed groups have used resources from minerals and drugs to fund their rebellions. Thus, lack of progress in stabilizing both countries raises questions about the efficacy and sustainability of the use of

force in engaging groups with a political agenda and access to resources to sustain their insurgencies.

The second political challenge has to do with the legitimacy of host governments. In my view, the legitimacy of host governments is critical to the success of robust peace operations. This is important in at least two respects. First, partnering with legitimate host governments would help peacekeepers win the 'hearts and minds' of the civilian population thereby further legitimizing their robust actions against spoilers. Second, it would go a long way in determining domestic support in troop contributing countries. For instance, the legitimacy crisis that has dogged the government of President Hamid Karzai, especially after last year's widely discredited elections has contributed to weakening domestic support in some ISAF troop contributors for their country's continued engagement in Afghanistan. On the other hand, despite the presence of a democratically elected government in the DRC, MONUC's support of the country's discredited armed forces, the FARDC, has been the subject of intense debate. These dynamics raise several important questions. First, to what extent does domestic opinion shape the calculations of troops contributors especially when it involves deploying and maintaining troops in theatres where they are likely to use force and take casualties? Second, what are the long-term implications of MONUC's continued support of the FARDC for future UN support to national security forces against spoilers? Finally, what are the best ways of tackling the dilemmas associated with the legitimacy question?

Third and closely related to the above is how to deal with the fact that situations that require a robust response from the outset and that are of

little strategic value to key international powers tend to attract few contributors. Somalia is a classic case, where the UN has developed cold feet, and even major African troop contributors have failed to commit troops to the AU mission in that country. Instead, what we currently have is a disjointed response by various members of the international community. For instance, the Obama administration has continued with what I describe as the Bush administration's "containment strategy" which is aimed at denying al-Qaeda a foothold in Somalia. However, unlike the Bush administration which tried unsuccessfully to get a UN peace operation in Somalia, the Obama administration is reported to have pumped tons of weapons into Somalia in support of the TFG, further militarizing an already militarized society. This does not bode well for current and future peacekeeping engagements in that country as the challenge of disarming the armed groups would fall to the peacekeepers; a difficult proposition in a society where the power of the gun reigns supreme.

For its part, the EU is training TFG soldiers in Uganda, while an international but incoherent response has been mounted to deal with the menace posed by Somali pirates, as the UN continues to dither while the AU is essentially bogged down in Mogadishu in the face of ferocious attacks by al-Shabaab. The international community's confused and timid response to Somalia raises several important questions such as: what is the appropriate response to situations like Somalia where the TFG lacks legitimacy and international support is weak at best? Given that the deployment of a small and lightly armed force is far from appropriate, what are the alternatives? A multi-national force consisting of coalitions of the

willing? If so, which state(s) or institutions are most appropriate to lead such a force?

The fourth political challenge that confronts robust peace operations is what I describe as the consensus dilemma. For peacekeepers to successfully take on spoilers, it is critical to generate a reasonable degree of national, regional and international consensus over the strategy and means of engaging spoilers. Robust responses that lack such a consensus would falter and undermine the credibility of peacekeepers. For instance, the robust engagement in eastern DRC required a balanced consideration of the national, regional and international motivations and interests in the conflict. At the national level, Kinshasa was keen to restore its authority across this vast, lawless but mineral rich territory, while some of its neighbors, most notably Rwanda, was focused on dealing with what it views as continued security threats posed by armed groups that were responsible for the genocide in 1994. At the international level, the UN was keen to maintain its credibility by among other things, implementing its protection mandate. Needless to say, developing a consensus that addressed these divergent interests was a complex, messy and sometimes elusive process.

Elsewhere, we are witnessing similar dilemmas in Afghanistan and Somalia, where national, regional and international actors are divided on the best strategy to engage the Taliban and al-Shabab. However, despite the disagreements, it is almost certain that until a reasonable degree of consensus is achieved, robust engagements in these theatres will not

translate to strategic victory. In other words, the engagements will be long and tortuous with civilians bearing the brunt of the suffering.

The fifth political challenge is what I describe as the impact of the disengagement by the permanent members of the Security Council and other Western countries from UN-led peace operations. Despite the growing trend of authorizing robust peace operations by the Security Council, the P5 in particular have demonstrated little or no commitment to place their troops in harm's way, especially under UN command. Consequently, this has led to a two-tiered peacekeeping system, with some missions being better resourced than others. The disparity in resources is perhaps best illustrated by the well resourced UN Mission in Lebanon, UNIFIL, and the under-resourced hybrid UN-AU Mission in Darfur, UNAMID. You will agree with me that these dynamics raise serious political questions that needs to be addressed. Addressing the dilemmas associated with the disengagement by the P5 would in my view accomplish two things. First, it would demonstrate greater political commitment by the P5 to the peace operations that they are authorizing. Second, military contributions by the P5 would give UN missions the much needed but scarce military resources to execute their mandates.

However, the likelihood of a meaningful P5 re-engagement is remote as they continue to sub-contract difficult peacekeeping tasks in areas of little strategic value to them to partners with obvious operational limitations such as the current African Union Mission in Somalia. Given this situation, one way of dealing with the vacuum created by their disengagement is to improve consultations between the Security Council and major contributors

from Africa and Asia; the two regions that account for over 80 percent of all UN uniformed personnel in the field. Closer consultation between the Security Council and these contributors would help to ensure support and resources for missions with robust mandates, and could potentially minimize conflicts over the interpretations of mandates and rules of engagement. India and Jordan for example, withdrew from the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) partly due to disagreements over mandate interpretation relating to the use of force. While the issue of closer consultation between major TCCs and the UNSC is discussed in the recent New Horizons report, more needs to be done to ensure that this coordination takes place especially during the mandate-making phase.

Finally, it is critical to ensure that robust peace operations are backed by a multi-pronged strategy, including a robust public relations campaign. A strong and focused public relations campaign would have two effects. First, it would help to win over less ideological members of armed groups. Second, it would help to build confidence with the civilian population who are often caught up in the cross-fire. I am convinced that a robust response that is not matched by an equally robust public relations strategy would undermine the credibility of peace operations and potentially strengthen spoilers of peace processes.

I would conclude on where I started, by stating that, while the use of force is necessary to protect civilians and restore law order, its use should be considered tactical and not strategic. In other words, the use of force should not be the major preoccupation of a peace operation, it should instead be considered as a tool in tool kit, and most importantly, a tool of last resort!

Merci de Votre attention!