

Beyond Heavy Peacekeeping: Alternative Mission Models for Building the Rule of Law

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Meeting Note

In the last decade, there have been two trends in mission mandates. The first and most obvious is the United Nations Security Council authorization of peacekeeping missions with significant military components and complex, multidimensional mandates. Yet, due to global strains on personnel, equipment, financial resources, and to competing international priorities, these missions – typically in the most challenging environments – have suffered from under-deployment and insufficient political attention. The second more obscure trend is that of the proliferation of a range of missions supporting peace processes with a much lighter footprint. With the limitations on resourcing peacekeeping deployments, particularly budgetary pressure, unlikely to subside in the coming years, there is a need to assess whether bigger is necessarily always better or if there are opportunities for providing support through alternative mission models.

It was in this context that the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) and the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF) hosted an expert seminar to discuss the political and operational feasibility of alternative models to peacekeeping. The meeting was held on 2 June 2010 with participants from the German Ministry of Defense, German Foreign Office, European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations (UN), and think tanks. The seminar was divided into three sessions: (i) Context and Concepts – The State of Global Peace Operations and the Centrality of the Rule of Law; (ii) Practical Insights – Operational Experiences with Alternative Mission Models; (iii) Looking Ahead – Opportunities and Obstacles to Alternative Mission Models. The event was conducted under Chatham House rule.

Alternative Models

The principle function of a peacekeeping mission is to provide an interim security guarantee pending a sustainable political settlement among the parties to conflict. There will be circumstances that warrant a peacekeeping model, but it should not be used as a default option. Where peacekeeping is either unnecessary or not feasible, there may be more appropriate, alternative models of deployment that can be tailored to specific political and operational contexts. CIC identified three general profiles of predominantly civilian or un-armed military missions that have been previously utilized by the UN and other multilateral organizations. First, missions with an explicit mediation function, including those which additionally provide a coordination function for development and humanitarian actors alongside good offices. The second category is civilian or military monitoring, inspection, or verification missions – possibly with an over-the-horizon protection element. Third, there are missions that focus on training and support functions, incorporating civilian, police and/or military components. Preventive deployments, used just once in Macedonia by the UN, represent an exceptional fourth category.

The varied composition of these models is indicative of the varying phases of peace settlements. CIC highlighted three major trends in alternative missions: 1) primarily civilian missions tend to appear in regional networks or clusters; 2) smaller rule of law or governance-focused missions (especially EU and OSCE deployments) are increasingly mandated in contexts where there are already larger (typically UN) peacekeeping operations; and 3) there is a growing number of small, transitional missions taking over from larger, precedent peacekeeping missions.

Matching Ends and Means

Understanding of the nature of conflicts is fundamental to assessing the kind of assistance that is required. The models themselves are subject to a number of external variables most notably the political will of host countries and of the organization mandating the mission. It is important to assess the expectations and intention of these actors before the appropriate model can be identified. Subsequent reassessment of these priorities throughout the process is important to ensure that both adequate buy in and optimal diplomatic leverage is maintained.

State legitimacy and regional dynamics are also crucial elements when identifying which implementing actor will provide the most beneficial impact and be able to maintain the momentum of a peace process. With regard to rule of law support participants acknowledged the danger in having too many actors. It is important to have a lead organization channeling the direction of international activities but it must also be recognized that not all organizations are equal in what tools they can contribute. Lack of civilian capacity for highly technical justice and security sector positions was identified as legitimate concern especially amongst the increasing demand for more focused rule of law missions.

However, lighter alternatives still require sophisticated resources such as sufficient air mobility and well-trained staff capable of handling local political challenges – two areas currently under-resourced in multilateral organizations. Also, financing of alternative models, particularly special political missions is restricted without access to an upfront funding mechanism such as the peacekeeping support account provided for peacekeeping missions. Without more flexible funding and budgetary rules for alternative missions they are limited in their ability to adapt to the rapidly changing political environments they are mandated to support. Moreover, peacekeeping missions, due to their size, the resources they bring to bear, and the political attention they garner, have political leverage that smaller missions may lack.

Supporting of Rule of Law

Today, strengthening the rule of law is viewed as a core function of multidimensional peace operations and a prerequisite for sustainable peace. Most UN, EU, and OSCE deployments emphasize support to rule of law institutions, particularly national justice and security sectors. Participants stressed the importance of appropriately aligning provision of technical expertise with political processes. Indeed, it was acknowledged that institutional reform is an inherently political undertaking and that, despite their prevalence, technical support missions (e.g., for justice and police training) cannot be successful without being embedded in the wider political settlement.

One participant argued that the necessary institutional and social reform was beyond the ability of international peacekeepers. Instead, international attention should be centered on supporting political settlement. According to this view, “robust” peacekeeping missions and broad statebuilding mandates have detracted from this core mediation function over the past decade, while shifting perception of the UN among conflicting parties away from impartiality. Even in cases where peace agreements have been reached, the conflation of peacebuilding and statebuilding has militated against success.

While the discussion noted the need for separation between peacekeeping and statebuilding processes in terms of securing a peace agreement, there was a call for better sequencing of rule of law support that could transition from the finite area of peacekeeping to the long- term realm of development. With rule of law encompassing so many elements, it is unrealistic to assume all areas can be adequately supported by a peace operation. Participants cited the need for “smarter” missions that are well staffed and can prioritize activities according to both what is politically feasible and sufficiently resourced as well as being able to identify and work flexibly with partners. This is especially relevant for smaller missions that by nature have limited staff, but which still need to produce maximum impact.

Conclusion

The frank discussion of the limitations of actors to effectively deliver on mandated security and support functions to peace processes culminated in participant consensus on the need for better so-called plug and play architecture for peace operations, both for individual providers internally as well as collectively amongst the broader regional and international community. Without a framework for helping organizations identify comparative strengths in different contexts, participants acknowledged the need for better sharing of lessons learned within and among organizations as a practical first step towards achieving this goal.