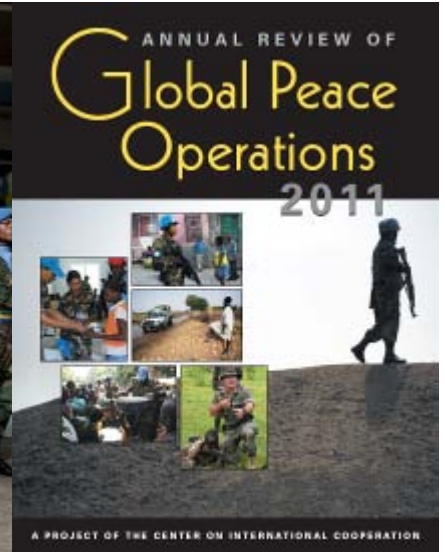


Andrew Sinclair

Strategic Trends, Dilemmas, and Developments in Global Peace Operations

An Annual Review by NYU's Center for International Cooperation



The past year has been an active one for peacekeeping, particularly in Africa. Photos: Andrew Sinclair.

WHILE the past year has been difficult for global peace operations, peacekeeping remains a sought after and integral part of the international community's response to conflict and fragile states. The *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2011*, written by New York University's Center on International Cooperation, concludes that while continued growth in overall levels of deployment in 2010 reaffirms peacekeeping's role in conflict management, the massive overstretch and cost of missions from the Horn and Central Africa to Afghanistan have led to increasing operational, political, and financial pressure to scale down the overall size of peacekeeping operations. With the increasing use by the UN of "political missions" – i.e., those focused on mediation and support to political processes – and questions about the relative merits of military-based peacekeeping versus lighter options, 2010 was characterized by paradoxical desires to, on the one hand, reduce the size of operations and transition from full-scale peacekeeping to national ownership of security and governance, and, on the other hand,

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react to changing conditions which necessitate continued action and sometimes additional troops for missions.

After a decade of continuous expansion, historic levels of demand and increasing operational complexity, peace operations, as they currently exist and at their current scale, are at risk. Setbacks in high-profile missions like Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have coincided with military overstretch and growing fiscal austerity, while missions that have achieved interim stability lack clear transition strategies. The evolving use of a range of alternative models of peace operations, including the expanded use of political missions, is both creating new options and adding complexity to policy debates. However, these debates frequently neglect the point that an adequate force with the right capacities is an indispensable tool for both safeguarding and, at times, encouraging political negotiations – a point reinforced during the past year by operations in Cote d'Ivoire. Civilian-based political missions are complements, not replacements, for military peace operations.

The *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2011*, the sixth in a series begun in 2006, focuses on

managing peacekeeping transitions: defined as the withdrawal of a peacekeeping operation and the handing over of responsibility to national authorities, another international presence, or other regional and local actors. Peacekeeping missions are transitioning amid drastically different operating environments: from – on the one hand – a phased withdrawal of the UN Mission in Liberia in a relatively stable, albeit tense, security environment (one that is still at risk from the conflict in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire); or the on-track handing over of national security functions in Timor-Leste from the UN Mission to the national police; to – on the other hand – the precipitous withdrawal of the UN Mission in Chad and the Central African Republic after the Government of Chad abruptly denied consent for the operation; or the difficulties encountered in Haiti following a devastating earthquake where a mission in transition lost 102 personnel – the highest number killed in a single event in the history of UN peacekeeping.

While all of these missions are different—with different force levels, mandates, concept of operations and aims—they all share a common thread: all of these missions have had to cope with

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how to transition from a peacekeeping presence to national ownership of security and governance, a task that is easier said than done.

Dilemmas of long-term peacekeeping

Many of the largest, most high-profile UN missions are now entering over a decade in the field well beyond the time most immediate post-Cold War peacekeeping missions stayed deployed. As former head of UN Peacekeeping, Jean-Marie Guéhenno has noted, “In practical terms, the markers that will determine when a peace operation is no longer required – when a government has enough capacity to take full ownership – are shifting.”¹ The conventional thinking in the 1990s (e.g., for missions in Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, and Namibia) was that holding national post-conflict elections in a country was the point at which a peace operation was no longer needed. Now, as is well known, these often deeply-flawed elections rarely result in a broad-based, representative and capable government. (One need not look farther than Cote d’Ivoire, Haiti, the DRC, and Afghanistan.)

So attention is now (and has been for quite some time) focused on extending governance, which necessitates that peacekeepers act as early peace-builders, state-builders, and engage in not just disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, but also security sector reform (SSR), which includes judicial, police and corrections reform. Institution-building is a long-term and expensive undertaking. The increased material, human and financial costs of these longer, more multidimensional, operations have not been fully taken into account by the international community. So, at a time when many governments are making cutbacks and tightening their budgets, troop and financial contributing countries are exerting increased pressure to drawdown the size and scale of peacekeeping operations, and asking missions to do more with less. The scope and scale of what peacekeepers are asked to accomplish remains as high as ever, even as missions are given fewer and fewer resources. But beyond the resource and financial constraints, there are also political ramifications for accompanying post-conflict governments well beyond their first election, and actively supporting the extension of their authority. The technical questions are relatively easier to solve than the political ones. In Cote

d’Ivoire this dynamic was apparent. Holding the elections called for in the Ougadougou peace agreement was the easy part. The more vexing dilemma was how to uphold the results of that election when the Gbagbo government—the very government the UN mission there had been supporting for the past five years—refused to recognize the results and had to be removed by force. Indeed, one of the most difficult dilemmas of peacekeeping is how to support a government that does not yet represent the full breadth of their peoples, may be seen in their eyes as illegitimate, and may not yet have earned their trust.

In Afghanistan, this dilemma is manifest in a NATO operation, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), but nonetheless creates a particular problem for the UN. Too close engagement on the side of a government risks the impartiality of the UN, or places the UN on the side of state-sponsored violence, (as problems with the Afghan electoral process and growing corruption within the national government demonstrate). Too distant of an engagement risks the appearance of condoning coercive – or even violent – governance and predatory security forces, and places the UN in a weak position to leverage gradual reforms. These dilemmas are not easily resolved or fixed; they require managing tensions inherent in long-term peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and statebuilding interventions, and more importantly for the UN, they require a consensus among Member States about what peacekeeping should achieve and what peacekeepers can reasonably be expected to accomplish before pulling out.

2010: the year of peacekeeping transitions

While talk of transitions, imminent contraction, and consolidation in peacekeeping dominated discussion about global peace operations in 2010, overall deployment levels continued to rise. Much of this growth is attributable to the United States’ reinforcement of NATO’s ISAF operation in Afghanistan. During the period under review, ISAF increased by almost 60,000 troops in 2010 to reach a total of some 130,000 troops.² This surge represented an 84% increase in deployments since 2009 (71,000). UN and African Union (AU) peacekeeping deployments also increased in overall size. The UN grew by 2.4% over the year, adding more than 2000 troops, and reaching

nearly 100,000 total military and police personal in the field. The AU also grew, primarily because of the boost to its Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) which increased by more than 2,000 troops to reach a fully authorized force of 8,000 troops. At year’s end, on December 21st, the UN Security Council voted to increase AMISOM’s authorized deployment by 50%, raising the force requirement to 12,000 troops.

Overall, global peacekeeping—in terms of total troops, military observers, and police—grew by 32% over the year to reach more than 256,000 peacekeepers in 2010 – compared with nearly 194,000 in 2009. However, despite continued growth, these numbers belie a considerable slowing in the rate of increase for UN peacekeeping operations – reflecting the operational, political and financial pressure to scale down in overall size. These pressures were manifest in withdrawn consent for an operation from a national government (as noted in Chad, and the DRC), and consolidated peace and stability in a mission’s area of operations (as in Timor-Leste, and Liberia). In fact, the international community’s appetite for the creation and deployment of new large-scale multidimensional peacekeeping operations is weakening. No new peacekeeping mission has been mandated since the joint AU-UN Hybrid Mission in Darfur which was created nearly four years ago. There is a very real international reluctance to continue large-scale multidimensional peacekeeping. However, there is a countervailing trend: conditions on the ground often necessitate an international response, as in Sudan, Cote d’Ivoire, Somalia, and Haiti. In all of these cases the UN Security Council sent additional troops to deal with changing conditions. This trend is likely to continue as a peace operations presence in Libya appears increasingly probable. So while on the one hand the international community is signaling a shift away from large-scale military peacekeeping, the Security Council continues to rely on peacekeeping as an instrument to bring stability to conflict-ridden states. ■

Endnotes

1. Foreword p. viii, *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2011*, Center on International Cooperation, Lynne Rienner Publishers.
2. September 2009 until September 2010 for non-UN-commanded missions, and October 2009 until October 2010 for UN-commanded missions.