



PKSOI Perspective

Renewing the United Nations Military Staff Committee **06 November 2009**

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) has emerged as one of the biggest projectors of military force in the world, with some 116,000 personnel currently deployed in eighteen peacekeeping operations (PKOs), spanning five continents and twelve time zones. Modern PKOs are massive, complex missions entailing division-plus sized forces deployed into hostile regions rife with political turmoil and urgent humanitarian needs. This expansion in size and scope represents a fundamental departure from earlier, “observe-and-report” operations, the consequence of which is that UN peacekeeping operations are now on the brink of crisis. Many PKOs are unable to fulfill their designated mandates, resulting in little progress on the ground, needless loss of life, and more damage to already tenuous UN credibility worldwide. The UN’s biggest and most ambitious PKOs—including Darfur (UNAMID), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), Cote d’Ivoire (UNOCI), and Chad/Central African Republic (MINURCAT)—all face severe deployment and/or operational problems. The UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Alain Le Roy, alluded to this situation in his January 23, 2009, briefing (<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/articles/leroyarticle230109.htm>) to the UN Security Council (SC). He stated: “I believe 2009 is a pivotal year for peacekeeping. A number of our missions face risks that are so significant that there is a potential for mission failure, with terrible consequences for the United Nations.” These concerns led to a July 2009 publication of *A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping* (“*New Horizons*”) (<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/newhorizon.pdf>). Jointly produced by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), this work warns that: “The scale and complexity of peacekeeping today are straining its personnel, administrative and support machinery. New political, military and financial challenges threaten to erode the unity of vision and purpose of the global peacekeeping partnership.”¹

While the size, scope and complexity of UN peacekeeping operations have evolved beyond earlier efforts, the SC’s method of creating and sustaining them remains anchored in the past. One glaring shortfall in the process is the lack of military expertise and input to peacekeeping mandate development. PKOs are still created and perpetuated in the SC exclusively by civilian diplomats acting on orders from their respective capitals. Consequently, PKO mandates are a muddle of well-intentioned but essentially politically driven tasks and missions thrown together with little regard for existing assets and capabilities available to conduct the operation. Given the evolution in the size, scope and

increasingly complex nature of the PKOs it creates, the SC must also evolve its process, including assessments by a body of military experts internal to the SC.

In fact, the SC already has its own body of military experts at its disposal in the Military Staff Committee (MSC). However, the MSC sits dormant, hostage to long-standing rifts within the Permanent Five members (P5) of the SC over its role. An active MSC, capable of providing military advice to the SC, interface with military planners in the Secretariat and assess Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) capabilities would go a long way toward improving UN peacekeeping, and should therefore be a central component in SC reform.

The Security Council and the Expansion of UN Peacekeeping

As described above, earlier PKOs were modest, observe-and-report operations. An example is the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), established in 1949. It was initiated—and remains—a relatively straightforward operation consisting of about fifty military observers stationed in Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), established in 1948, has approximately one hundred fifty military observers observing and reporting in the Middle East. As long as PKOs were of this nature and size, the need for military planning capability in the SC was not a significant issue.

By contrast, contemporary PKOs run much larger: the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) has some 19,000 troops and police, with a SC-approved surge of about 3000 additional personnel forthcoming; the UN African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) also has about 19,000 on the ground but is authorized some 27,000 personnel; the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) has 10,000; the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has 12,500; and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has over 11,500 (<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/index.shtml>). On top of these and the numerous other ongoing missions, the SC has been deliberating over the creation of yet another massive PKO that would deploy into Somalia. This “peacekeeping” mission would almost certainly encounter significant hostilities as soon as it gained entrance into that failed state.

The PKO mandates themselves have experienced a similar expansion of content and mission. The SC now tasks peacekeepers across a full spectrum of operations, to include the protection of civilians and local governments; facilitation of humanitarian access; assistance with political and security sector reform; oversight of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants, hindering the trafficking of weapons and other illegal activities; even the orchestration of local and national elections. While these mandates may read well in the corridors of the United Nations, they amount to a dramatic overreach that ultimately creates false expectation on the ground, damages UN credibility and places ill-equipped and often un-trained peacekeepers at undue risk. The Mandates do not define “success” and seldom establish measurable benchmarks, milestones or timelines otherwise necessary for

mission accomplishment. Moreover, the SC does not take into account existing capabilities or assets of potential troop contributing countries (TCCs), or whether TCCs are even available and/or willing to commit to an operation. These, and all other security-related issues, are ceded to the UN Secretariat. While the handful of military planners in the Secretariat fulfills important roles in making PKOs operational, the decision-making responsibility for PKOs abides in the SC. As PKOs continue to grow in size and military complexity, the need for clear, credible and achievable mandates is essential. One key component to accomplishing this is the presence of an internal body of military experts within the SC.

The Military Staff Committee

In sketching out the structure of the nascent United Nations, the founders correctly avoided being overly prescriptive, leaving the details to the main bodies such as the Security Council and the General Assembly. One exception to this was the decision to create the Military Staff Committee (MSC), the only committee to which the Charter of the United Nations explicitly refers. MSC membership consists of the military representatives from each of the Permanent Five members of the SC, with the primary mission being “to advise and assist the Security Council on all questions relating to the Security Council’s military requirements for the maintenance of international peace and security, the employment and command of forces placed at its disposal....”¹¹ At the time, it was anticipated that the UN would have forces at its disposal, and that the SC would therefore require a body of military experts in order to render advice regarding the employment of those forces.

The UN never developed a standing army, and the MSC as an organization succumbed quickly to early Cold War divisions within the P5. However, because it is anchored the UN Charter, the MSC still exists, although today it is little more than a ceremonial institution, consigned to bi-weekly meetings of little relevance in accordance with its own Rules of Procedure. One questions why, despite the end of the Cold War, the MSC remains dormant as opposed to fulfilling its role of providing security advice and assistance to the SC, particularly when military input for PKOs is so clearly lacking in the Council. Conflicting national interests within the P5 continue to block any MSC activity, although contemporary national fault lines have changed dramatically since the Cold War. This is unfortunate; as a truly viable entity, the MSC could go a long way toward strengthening UN peacekeeping operations across the spectrum.

Utilizing the Military Staff Committee

As the Security Council deliberates the creation of new PKOs and the extension of existing peacekeeping mandates, it needs its own internal body of military experts to assist and to interface with the Secretariat and with TCCs for security issues. For the military aspects of peacekeeping operations, this is precisely what *New Horizons* seeks with its call for a “renewed global partnership” among the Security Council, the contributing Member States

and the Secretariatⁱⁱⁱ Specifically, an operational MSC could provide critical support in three critical areas:

1. *Providing military advice to the Security Council.* The well-known Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (“Brahimi Report”) stated that: “Security Council mandates... should reflect the clarity that peacekeeping operations require for unity of effort when they deploy into potentially dangerous situations.”^{iv} To enhance the chances for success, a PKO mandate should be clear, credible and achievable. Before creating a new PKO, the SC must determine what it expects to accomplish, and determine if conditions exist for an operation to be established that would be capable of meeting those objectives. Each PKO should have clearly articulated benchmarks and timelines, ideally within a prescribed budget. Additionally, the political and humanitarian components of the operations should be coordinated with, and mutually supportive of, the security component. Concerning existing PKOs, mandate renewals must go beyond the reading of prepared statements and an automatic vote to perpetuate the operation. The SC should take advantage of the mandate renewal process to conduct a careful review of existing PKOs, modifying as necessary, prior to renewal. Mandate renewals are an ideal tool for the SC to ensure that PKO leadership and participants, including the SRSG, Force Commander, TCCs, the Secretariat, even the host nation(s), are dedicated to the success of the operation. Accomplishing this entails a clear, sober understanding of the situation on the ground as well as an assessment of what the Secretariat and TCCs are capable of regarding the concept of operations, force structure, force generation, logistics planning and deployment timelines.

2. *Interface with the Secretariat.* The Secretariat, particularly the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), are responsible for generating and deploying the force and overseeing its operation. Planning shortfalls become more acute given that the respective priorities of the Secretariat, TCCs and the SC often diverge when it comes to peacekeeping. As mandates are drafted, it is important that the SC and the Secretariat communicate closely. Key aspects such as force size and structure, mission, mandate interpretation, command and control, rules of engagement, timelines and costs should be worked out mutually and in advance. The *Brahimi Report* alluded to this, noting that: “The Secretariat must tell the Security Council what it needs to know, not what it wants to hear, when recommending force and other resource levels for a new mission, and it must set those levels according to realistic scenarios that take into account likely challenges to implementation.”^v In fact such conversations seldom if ever occur; the SC simply does not get into this level of detail because it has no capacity to do so. However, as the body responsible for PKOs, it should. *New Horizons* agrees, stating that: “Early dialogue between the Secretariat and the Security Council can also assist in better defining the objectives and the focus of a technical assessment and can enable members of the Security Council to share relevant information with planners.

Once troop and police contributors deploy, they should be included in dialogues on subsequent assessment"^{vi} What is missing, however, is any mechanism within the SC to achieve this. An MSC-facilitated dialogue between the SC and the Secretariat on security issues will add badly-needed clarity and reality to the mandate process, assisting in defining objectives and conducting viable technical assessments.

Interface with TCCs. In addition to close consultations with the Secretariat, the SC must also interact with Troop (and Police) Contributing Countries. The *Brahimi Report* noted that: “Member States that do commit formed military units to an operation should be invited to consult with the members of the Security Council during mandate formulation...Troop contributors should also be invited to attend Secretariat briefings of the Security Council pertaining to crises that affect the safety and security of mission personnel or to a change or reinterpretation of the mandate regarding the use of force.”^{vii} The SC owes TCCs a preview of what their troops will be asked to do, when, where, and for how long, as well as a realistic assessment of the risks involved. *New Horizons* states that: “Where troop or police contributing countries are expected to deploy significant force levels to operate in volatile or high-risk situations and to be ready to perform to the full extent of their capabilities, they need confidence in the command and control of the mission. And they have a legitimate interest in plans and directives that affect their personnel. Meaningful dialogue between the Secretariat and contributing countries and, as noted above, systematic and timely consultation before planning documents are issued or reviewed, is critical.”^{viii} TCCs and the PKO leadership must know what will be expected of them and on what general timeline. Conversely, the SC needs an assessment of capabilities, readiness and equipment of perspective TCCs before it finalizes a mission. The MSC could play a key role in pulling all of this together between the SC, TCCs and the Secretariat from the outset of deliberations, with the goal of ensuring that PKOs are suitably configured to make a quick, positive impact, and have the highest probabilities of success with minimal risk to UN personnel. SC-TCC interaction benefits both sides by bringing TCCs into the process and giving them a bit of early “ownership” and visibility into the mission their troops will be asked to fulfill. It also provides the SC another key component as it drafts and renews mandates. One caveat should be stressed: while bringing TCCs into the mandate process is important, it should only go so far. Specifically, TCCs have no role in the drafting of mandates. That is—and should remain—the sole responsibility of the SC.

Addressing Practical Issues

Enabling the MSC requires little more than P5 consensus. Because it already exists, it does not require the passage of additional resolutions in the Security Council or the General Assembly. MSC authority is vested in the UN Charter and the Security Council; it simply requires the will of the P5 to act, and for the MSC to update its own draft Statute and Rules of Procedure.

Additionally, provisions exist in the UN Charter that would allow the MSC to shape itself as

appropriate: “Any member of the United Nations not permanently represented on the (Military Staff) Committee shall be invited by the Committee to be associated with it when the efficient discharge of the Committee’s responsibilities requires the participation of that Member in its work.”^{ix} This could include TCCs, representatives of DPKO and DFS as appropriate. Under the provisions of the Charter, it would also be possible to expand the MSC beyond its present P5 membership to include military representation from all Security Council members. In the end, the MSC would be in a position provide military input to the SC, assess and provide feedback to the Secretariat during planning, and interface with TCCs.

As noted above, initially it was Cold War politics that precluded the MSC from becoming operational. Today, political divisions within the P5 over the MSC continue, although for entirely different reasons. Some worry that given the already substantial resentment over P5 influence and power amongst other member states, resurrecting the MSC would exacerbate this anger. This concern is misplaced. While animosity toward the SC in general and the P5 in particular, clearly exists, it remains the responsibility of the Security Council to do what is necessary to ensure that UN PKOs are safe, efficient and successful. In fact, a fundamental aspect of the anger directed at the SC and the P5 by other Member States, particularly the major TCCs (many of which are members of the influential Non-Aligned Movement), is that the SC has been thus far unwilling to reach out to them on peacekeeping matters. A number of Member States explain that they feel as if they are expected to sit quietly in their proverbial corner until the SC unilaterally determines what is to be done, after which the TCCs are supposed to unquestionably provide troops. An active MSC would mitigate, not exacerbate, these concerns by directly working with TCCs on security-related issues in ways that the SC is presently unable to do.

There are also concerns about how military input would manifest, and whether it would even be reasonable to expect coherent military input to emerge from the P5 military advisers. No doubt there would be issues surrounding this concern, particularly in the initial implementation period. However, that is hardly cause for not moving forward. Over the years, P5 Permanent Representatives and political counselors have learned to find political solutions through compromise and cooperation, and the MSC will learn to do likewise. Additionally, the potential exists for the accrual of unforeseen benefits, such as enhanced military-to-military cooperation between the U.S. and China.

The intent of the ongoing Security Council reform process is for UN Member States to look at how Security Council membership could be modified and increased so that it closer resembles the world of today rather than that of 1945, and to modify its working methods to make it a more efficient body. Given its Charter-imposed responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the SC should do everything possible to enhance and strengthen UN peacekeeping. Additionally, with over 116,000 of their own soldiers, police and civilians deployed, all UN member states should welcome any credible measure designed to improve the UN’s capacity to reduce conflict, and save lives, time and money. It

is time for the P5 to find a way forward with the MSC in the Security Council in order to assure that UN peacekeeping remains viable.

Conclusion

No P5 member state would allow its own national military operations to be planned and executed the way that PKOs are presently done. Sending peacekeepers into harm's way is the most solemn function the UN undertakes; the SC must recognize that the increasing demands of modern peacekeeping necessitates an updated, more holistic approach to peacekeeping that includes the presence of military expertise when making the decisions that will impact those deployments.

Regional instability and failed states will continue to exist despite everyone's best efforts. The best planning in New York, including an active MSC, will not solve all of the issues surrounding global peacekeeping. Underlying this reality is recognition that UN peacekeeping is not a panacea for each and every global problem; sending UN troops into all conflicts is a recipe for failure, diminished UN credibility, and gratuitous loss of life. In some cases, the UN may resolve that a PKO is not a viable solution for a given situation at a given time. The *Brahimi Report* wisely advises: "Rather than send an operation into danger with unclear instructions, the Panel urges that the Council refrain from mandating such a mission."^x *New Horizons* concurs: "Peacekeeping is not always the right answer."^{xi}

However, when a PKO is appropriate, an active MSC can improve PKO planning significantly, resulting in a closer correlation between what the SC votes into existence and what TCCs are expected to achieve on the ground. United Nations Security Council Resolution # 1, dated 25 January 1946, was prophetically entitled "Military Staff Committee" (<http://www.un.org/documents/sc/res/1946/scres46.htm>) UNSCR 1 directed the MSC to meet swiftly, determine its rules of procedure, and submit them to the SC for approval. That early Security Council directive has yet to be fulfilled. Now is the time.

NOTES

ⁱ A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping, page ii

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/newhorizon.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Charter of the United Nations, Article 47 <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

ⁱⁱⁱ A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping, page 6-7

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/newhorizon.pdf>

^{iv} Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, UN Document S/2000/809, Executive Summary, page 10. http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/

^v Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, UN Document S/2000/809, Executive Summary, page 10. http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/

^{vi} A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping, page 11

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/newhorizon.pdf>

- vii IBID, page 10. http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/
- viii A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping, page 14
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/newhorizon.pdf>
- ix Charter of the United Nations, Article 47 <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>
- x Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, UN Document S/2000/809,
Executive Summary, page 10 http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/
- xi A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping, page 9
<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/newhorizon.pdf>