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Too Quiet on the Western Front

Why failing to find political solutions to overstretch in UN peacekeeping could scupper the realisation of the Responsibility to Protect

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Over the past 15 years global bodies have increasingly been called upon to intervene in situations of armed conflict: mediating, enforcing and keeping the peace, and stabilizing and rebuilding countries after periods of war. Arguably it is the recourse to multilateral involvement that has led to a significant drop in overall civilian deaths in war situations. However, the increasing number of missions undertaken by the UN in response to armed conflict translates into a continuous and significant increase in demand on the UN as a whole.

This demand is particularly felt in the UN's peacekeeping organ, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). The joining of the peacekeeping and Responsibility to Protect (R2P) debates has further increased the pressure. Failure to prepare the UN for the resulting challenges threatens its ability to fulfil its mandate of ensuring global peace and security. It is thus necessary for all member states to renew their commitment to effective international responses to armed conflict led by the UN.

This briefing explores the demands placed on the UN as the global peacekeeper and develops recommendations to address its existing overstretch. It does not address the important but complex issue of regional peacekeeping. The paper concludes that addressing overstretch in peacekeeping is not just a question of resources; a political perspective is required to understand the critical role a sufficient, proactive and legitimate UN response capacity plays in operationalising the Responsibility to Protect and making it a meaningful contribution to global conflict prevention. In order to achieve this, the UN as an institution and all its member states need to (1) put greater emphasis on the use of preventative diplomacy, (2) increase the predictability and level of resources available to the DPKO, and (3) ensure a broader basis of contributing nations in UN peacekeeping missions, in the arena of both troop and fiscal contributions. In addition, (4) key countries that possess an enhanced capacity to engage in global conflict prevention should provide more direct support to the UN and DPKO.

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Overstretch: issues, impact and current steps for reforms

Overstretch is one of the most visible impediments to international peacekeeping. There are 'hard' issues such as shortages of personnel, low equipment standards and an overall lack of materiel and logistics to be faced. But overstretch also includes 'soft' issues such as deficits in peacekeeping training, lack of understanding and sensitivity to cultural circumstances, absence of common doctrine in command structure and rules of engagement, and an imbalance in sourcing of troops and provenience of support for missions.

Shortfalls in *materiel* have a direct impact, such as communication difficulties from field operations to headquarters, untimely and inadequate deployment of troops, and failures to provide the necessary equipment to forces. However, the overall effectiveness of peacekeeping missions is called into question due to the failure to address issues of overstretch in the 'soft' factors. This leads to problems associated with a lack of political and local acceptance and legitimacy.

Overstretch is not a new issue. After the initial growth of missions in the 1990s, the UN undertook a review and formulated steps to reform peacekeeping missions seeking to build an adequate response capacity to cope with demand. The ensuing reforms proposed in the Brahimi Report¹ were 'aimed to equip the DPKO with sufficient capability to launch *one new multidisciplinary mission per year*'. Yet over the past three years nine missions have started or expanded².

Today there are 18 ongoing missions, with 100,000 personnel in the field, and three missions in the start up phase: Lebanon, Timor-Leste and Sudan. The full staffing of these three missions will see a further 40% increase in peacekeeping personnel. There have also been calls for a support mission to Somalia, and a policing mission to Chad³. It is not surprising that UN officials have recently described the organisation as again being in a phase of overstretch. These officials refer back to the criteria set forth in the Brahimi Report which highlights the growing gulf between capacity oriented contingency planning and current expectations⁴.

DPKO: The Budget

Set up in 1948 the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) is the UN's primary unit for the implementation of peacekeeping missions. In 2007 its budget had grown to US\$4.75 billion⁵, approximately £2.44 billion⁶. Funding for the DPKO is calculated using a special equation, which takes into account how much each member state is able to contribute. The permanent five members of the Security Council are then asked to contribute extra in recognition of their special status. In absolute terms the US is the largest contributor, funding 27% of the budget. The UK contributes 7% of the budget⁷; this corresponds to approximately

¹ United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, "the Brahimi Report"*, New York: United Nations, 2000;

² UN News Centre, 'General Assembly supports Ban Ki-moon's reform proposals for stronger UN', 15 March 2007 [online], emphasis added;

³ UN, 'Security Council Press Statement on Somalia', 2 February 2007 [online] and Laura Trevelyan, 'UN Chief suggests Chad, CAR force', BBC, 21 February 2007 [Online];

⁴ Guéhenno, Jean-Marie, 'Key Challenges in Today's U.N. Peacekeeping Operations' at Council on Foreign Relations, 18 May 2006;

⁵ U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Fact Sheet," September 2006, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf ;

⁶ Using a conversion rate of £1 = US\$1.95 on 21 March 2007;

⁷ U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Fact Sheet," September 2006, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf ;

£170 million, which is a mere 0.5% of the UK national defence budget⁸. When comparing the levels of contribution, the US lags even further behind, with only 0.3% of its national defence budget being spent on UN peacekeeping⁹.

For their personnel requirements UN peacekeeping missions are entirely reliant on the goodwill of member states. These personnel are meant to be sent with two months worth of supplies, they must be correctly kitted, armed, and trained in basic peacekeeping skills. Often, however, these demands cannot be met by contributing member states. As a result, some troops volunteered to the UN show up without kit, poorly armed, and with no supplies or training.

In return for their troops, contributing member states receive from the UN a flat rate per volunteered soldier, currently US\$1,400 per month. The home government remains responsible for paying its peacekeepers, and often the reimbursement received from the UN is far in excess of the troop contributing government's actual costs. Thus, there is the potential for UN reimbursement to be used to cross-subsidise other parts of the contributing nation's defence budget.

Joining the Peacekeeping and R2P debates

The end of the cold war has refocused world attention on the need to effectively respond to a range of armed conflicts and its impact on civilians¹⁰. The significant conceptual and practical questions on how to address associated aspects of human rights accountability, humanitarian protection needs and rebuilding societies after conflict have led to the development¹¹ and increasing entrenchment of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Doctrine¹². Thus the role and capacity of the UN and DPKO to engage in peacekeeping operations is increasingly discussed in tandem with issues of operationalising the R2P doctrine in international policy and normative practice. The endorsement of the R2P doctrine by the UN General Assembly in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document represents so far the most important expression of its growing acceptance into customary international law.

Capacity

The joining of the two debates increases the demand placed upon the UN in terms of mission quantity, complexity of services offered, and a greater range of intervention types. As Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guéhenno stated "So the responsibility to protect, yes, but there has to be a strong commitment from member states, then, to back up with the right resources"¹³. Many well intentioned resolutions for international action in response to crises are not followed through with supportive action by member states. The trend for the burden of peacekeeping operations to shift from Security Council decision makers to the UN Secretariat and thus the DPKO with formal authorisation

⁸ HM Treasury, *UK budget 2007: Building Britain's long-term future: Prosperity and fairness for families*, London: HMSO, 2007 [online], using 21 March 2007 conversion rate £1=US\$1.95;

⁹ Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2007*, Washington DC: OMB, 2007 [Online];

¹⁰ Heldt, B. and P. Wallensteen, *Peacekeeping Operations: Global Patterns of Intervention and Success 1948-2004*, Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2006 and Human Security Report 2005, *War and Peace in the 21st Century*, Canada: Human Security Centre, 2005;

¹¹ Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereign, *Responsibility to Protect*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001 and United Nations General Assembly, *UN High-level Panel Report on Threats, Challenges and Change*, New York: United Nations, 2003;

¹² United Nations General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome*, New York: United Nations, 2005;

¹³ Guéhenno, Jean-Marie, 'Key Challenges in Today's U.N. Peacekeeping Operations' at the Council on Foreign Relations, 18 May 2006;

of a mission is not sustainable. In order to fulfil the DPKO's capacity needs more trained troops will need to be provided, in addition to increasing the overall level of financial contributions. An equally important component of the solution is the commitment of current key troop contributing nations to re-invest UN reimbursements into peacekeeping training for their forces, and to purchase necessary kit and supplies to properly equipment them.

Complexity

Beyond the question of resources, the joining of the two debates raises important conceptual issues about the capacity of a unit originally set up to provide primarily military and policing services¹⁴. This same unit is now being asked to expand its operating procedures to include for instance election and human rights monitoring, registration of weapons, and nation building/development activity coordination¹⁵. This expansion of duties is noted in the Brahimi Report, which not only recognises the need to strengthen the UN's capacity for an effective peacekeeping response and to invest more efforts into preventative diplomacy, but also raises awareness of the multidisciplinary nature of the new peacekeeping challenge.

Legitimacy

By joining these two discussions, questions of legitimacy are thrown into stark relief. Currently, the top 10 troop contributors are primarily developing nations¹⁶, whereas the top 10 financial contributors are primarily Western nations¹⁷. This 'division of labour' along both geographical and fiscal lines is very visible and threatens to undermine the legitimacy of the UN and its peacekeeping missions¹⁸.

Western nations who are top financial contributors could greatly serve UN peacekeeping missions by sharing their knowledge and experiences from nationally led missions. Also, by sharing the practical burden of troop commitment Western nations would further enhance the global conflict prevention agenda. In turn, current emerging economies should be drawn into a more visible, even if modest, role of financial contributor.

Reforms: Past and Present

Great emphasis has been placed on achieving key recommendations outlined in the 2000 Brahimi Report. These reform efforts have focused primarily on operational aspects, funding, accountability, and the actions of deployed forces. Particular importance was also placed on developing rapid deployment capabilities. Reform projects which have grown out of the Brahimi Report include:

- Strategic Deployment Stocks: housed in Brindisi, Italy on a UN logistics base, they are aimed at enabling the timely provision of *materiel* in support of the rapid deployment of forces;

¹⁴ This is illustrated by the approximate ratio of 4:1 uniformed personnel to civilian personnel in missions supported by the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Fact Sheet," September 2006, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf ;

¹⁵ Election monitoring in Timor-Leste, UN News Centre, 'UN welcomes preliminary results of Timor-Leste poll, looks ahead to next round', 18 April 2007 [Online], and arms registrations in Nepal, UN News Centre, 'Completing registration of Nepal Army weapons, UN ends first phase of process, 13 April 2007 [online], are just a few examples

¹⁶ Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Jordan, Nepal, Ghana, Uruguay, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa, U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Fact Sheet," September 2006, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf ;

¹⁷ USA, Japan, Germany, the UK, France, Italy, Canada, Spain, China, and the Netherlands, U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Fact Sheet," September 2006, at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf ;

¹⁸ For example, the UK has 364 uniformed personnel spread throughout 8 missions and Canada has 139 uniformed personnel over 9 missions. In contrast, Pakistan has 10,173 uniformed personnel spread throughout 13 missions, and Brazil has 1,277 uniformed personnel over 8 missions, U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "UN Mission's Summary detailed by Country", 31 March 2007;

- Rapid Deployment Teams: consisting of several brigade size units including 100 officers, these troops are massed, trained, and on-call under the United Nations Stand-by Agreement Systems¹⁹;
- Pre-Mandate Commitment Authority: as permitted by the General Assembly, the Secretary General may 'forward fund' UN peacekeeping missions to facilitate rapid response and reduce dependency on national commitments²⁰;

Other reforms undertaken by the new UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon involve the recently approved restructuring of the DPKO to include next to a Department for Peace Operations, a separate Department of Field Support. This new Department of Field Support is intended to address logistical challenges, the 'hard' issues that were discussed earlier in this paper²¹.

While the above examples show that reforms are being taken forward at the UN level to enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping responses, the majority of UN member states have not reciprocated these changes by taking on increased responsibilities themselves.

Leadership

Contributing to international peacekeeping efforts and fulfilling obligations under the R2P doctrine are of strategic national interest to all UN member states. These actions ensure that member states own and other nations' citizens can live in a safer and more secure world. In reality, the capacities of nations to support and engage proactively in such activities are set at varying levels.

Leadership is needed to develop practical support for the role of the UN in international peacekeeping and fulfilling the R2P. Without this leadership DPKO overstretch is unlikely to be addressed coherently or to a sufficient level. Leadership in countering these challenges, particularly in perceptions of legitimacy, falls not only to the permanent members of the UN Security Council, but also to countries with relevant levels of resources and concomitant political and economic bargaining power. Such countries include emerging powers as Brazil, South Africa, India, Mexico, and Pakistan.

The involvement and support provided by the UK to a range of mid-term NATO operations such as in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Iraq, and the Eastern Mediterranean demonstrates that the capacity for support to multilateral operations exists in individual countries and can be effectively deployed through multilateral agreements. Experiences from more limited coalitions should set a precedent and act as models; enhancing national support for global responses to armed conflict, by favouring multilateral channels for national investment in conflict prevention strategies.

¹⁹ While 31 nations have signed these agreements, many member states provide only 'estimated numbers' of troops to the DPKO rather than concrete numbers or lists of names. This leads to substantial amounts of lost time and opportunity when activating the RDT's. 2004 Conference on the implementation of the Brahimi Report on Peace Operations, *The Brahimi Report: Four Years On*, Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2004;

²⁰ Provided 'that the operation is likely to be established, but prior to the adoption of a Security Council resolution', *ibid*;

²¹ United Nations Department of Public Information, 'General Assembly gives support to Secretary-General's Proposals to Restructure United Nations Peacekeeping, Disarmament', 15 March 2007 at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/ga10579.doc.htm>.

Recommendations

Addressing overstretch in peacekeeping is not just a question of resources; a political perspective is required to understand the critical role a sufficient, proactive and legitimate UN response capacity plays in operationalising the Responsibility to Protect and making it a meaningful contribution to global conflict prevention. In order to achieve this, in particular

1. The UN as an institution and all its member states need to
 - 1.1. **Put greater emphasis on preventative diplomacy as a primary method of conflict prevention** – Using this approach does not only fulfil the key duty to prevent conflict as laid down in the R2P doctrine, it may also help to reduce the number of situations that worsen to the point of necessitating the deployment of United Nations peacekeeping operations.
 - 1.2. **Make more resources available to the DPKO, particularly allotting money to the Department of Field Support for logistical necessities** – An increase and stabilisation of the predicted resources would allow DPKO to maintain an independent capacity for logistics; facilitating rapid deployment and reducing response times.
 - 1.3. **Build peacekeeping missions on a broader basis, ensuring that a greater variety of nations send contingents and are involved in the funding of the interventions** – Developing a broader basis for both financing and implementing peacekeeping missions will enhance the legitimacy of UN mandated missions, especially when facing criticism or hostility from “in-country” governments.
2. **Key countries with an enhanced capacity to engage in the global conflict prevention agenda should show more leadership** – The support provided to the UN and DPKO, including sharing national knowledge and experience in relevant disciplines, should increase not only from the permanent members of the UN Security Council but also from emerging economies with relevant levels of resources and concomitant political and economic bargaining power.

Global and regional organisations are increasingly being called upon to respond to armed conflicts. However, developing appropriate policies and taking effective action at the international level in this domain continues to involve a range of global governance challenges. This set of briefing papers seeks to explore in particular options and constraints faced by multilateral institutions in their role as peacekeepers, how the Responsibility to Protect can be translated into legitimate and practical steps towards ending and preventing violence, how democratic engagement with issues of international responses to conflict can be strengthened, and how the foreign policy process intersects with issues of human rights accountability and peacebuilding. With this work the One World Trust aims in particular to support parliamentarians and others in the policy community in their task to contribute to an emerging framework for global conflict prevention.
