

Report

The Future of UN Peacekeeping

The Report is based on the oral presentation of Dr. Abiodun Williams, President elect of ACUNS which took place in the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna

What is peace keeping? – To say it technically, peace keeping can be seen as instrument of dissolving confrontations, as an expression of the UN Charter. Further on, peace keeping is a question of how to get the spirit to respond (after the ideas of Henry IV, Part I of the dialog written by W. Shakespeare). However, Peace keeping is not written in the UN Charta. On a way of functional adoption peace keeping remains as a tool to deal with threats to human beings coming from different sorts of conflicts. This tool can be said to be a key instrument for conflict prevention and post conflict management.

There are certain prerequisites on peace keeping operations which should be mentioned. At first it must be peace in the country where the operation takes place. This condition was important in the cold war period and helped by local conflicts, but nowadays peace operators are sent into areas where there is no peace at all. An example is the operations in Former Yugoslavia. Operating people were sending to no men's land and had to work somewhere between peace keeping and peace enforcement. So you can not start peace keeping in war region, what can be done is to try to initiate peace between belligerent behaving states. Nevertheless viable political actions can not be a substitute for an absent political process, those can just be a support for peace initiatives.

These thoughts lead to question the mandates by the Security Council (SC). The capability to implement mandates by Security Council is sometimes difficult to administrate. For the purpose of an illustration the Security Council can be compared with a bad doctor. To explicate the circumstances around the peace keeping actions of the SC the following situation is imaginable: a patient is ill, turn to a doctor and there for has to take antibiotics. On average the doctor's medical advice is that the patient has to take the medicine as long as the package is not empty, not to risks his/her health from ongoing illness. This is exactly the case in a peace keeping mission. The attendance of the SC and the supporting actions should last until all belligerent behavior is varnished and there is no doubt that there is continuing peace, but in most situations after a short intervention the UN moves to another operation field. So the long term effect is viewable.

In a quantitative sense peace keeping is supplied by approximately 50.000 to 100.000 uninformed personal, and a lot of civilians as well. However, UN peace keeping missions are as not expensive then paying U.S. troops, but there is not enough money for peace keeping. For instance it happened that nine field missions were needed but only one could be paid. So some peace operations do not enjoy the required intention, because of the high costs of a mission. By setting up new missions the ongoing ones are endangered, because the money would be taken from other (ongoing) operations. Another consequence of the less financial support is the less quality of an operation. The reasons therefore are bad educated or prepared staff, and of course a lack of material support, like a missing helicopter.

This reduction off quality leads to less protection of civilians as well, namely in terms of equipment and troops. All in all the shortage of personal is also noticeable in the following source logistics, communication and engineering.

To come to the quantitative challenges of UN peace missions, it is left to say that to identify belligerents was easier in former times. Their number was more limited and they were easier to recognize. Today situations of conflicts are more complex and the people taking part in the conflict look the same like civilians.

The most UN peace keeping missions need great support from UN and from states. For example, to mention the peace operation in Darfur, this suffered from marginal support. So peace operations do not enjoy universal participation on international level any longer.

Challenges in peace keeping operations are needed. Challenges from the governance and challenges in the complexity of the mandates, to make the environment for peace keeping easier. To get to the root of the problem, most peace keeping missions are not that sufficient because of the less financial support, but those who pay, have the weighting of votes and can authorize. For the purpose of an overview the U.S. is paying 26%, the European Union 40% and Japan 20% of the peace operations. At least the rest of the world is paying 13%. So the risks are taken among others by South Asia and African countries.

As a result organizations like the United Nations need to be confronted with the needed challenges referring to the support of peace keeping operations.

Finally, the regional organizations on the one side and the UN on the other should be addressed with the question of legal authority. In the respect of peace operations it is easier to work within the UN Charta than outside of Charta. In the Security Council is playing a major role, but however the problem of authorizing peace operations is the most common one, but at least when it comes to peace keeping no organization can match UN standards, although regional organizations have a part.

With some further advancement UN peace keeping can be effective, flexible, not that costly and one of the best vehicles is to share the costs. So the UN is an indispensable instrument for peace keeping.

In addition commends from discussants where raised, as the following from Dr. Feichtinger, from the Austrian National Defence Academy

UN peace keeping has a great effect and it is worth to do it, and it is cheaper than military operations as well. Preconditions of peace operations are strongly needed, even just to protect against growing instability in countries. In 90% of the cases a civil war breaks out in those areas where the national instability was relatively high, and these are those places where peace keeping missions are going to be needed.

A question which should be raised is the importance of the protection of civilians, and therefore the question if there should be more investigation through private military or security companies. It should be noted that in peace keeping missions more western states should take part.

Prof. Dr. Etzersdorfer, from the University of Vienna, commented the oral presentation with the following

There is a huge difference between peace keeping operations from the past compared to nowadays. In these times there is a change of a learning process in the UN, which means a change of perception as well. The principle of sovereignty should be reconsidered because of the undeniable change in the conflict scenarios. As a result the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is varnished, and the disrespect of the rules of war goes with these developments hand in hand. One of the problems is the involvement of warriors, who have not the same status like combatants, but taking part in belligerent behavior as well. As a following, international law is not able to cover the conflicts. This is a link for UN reform.

At least a comment from Prof. Jönsson, from the Academic Council of the UN System

However, facts are likely to change in future. In example, budget resource where money is missing. What about the Security Council who has been resistant to peace keeping reports? Can there be optimism?

Answering and concluding remarks from Dr. Williams on peace keeping in the UN

As someone who believes in the UN and peace keeping operations fundamentally you have to be an optimist. The UN must face many challenges in the future time. There are many instruments to induce changes, namely limiting the number of countries who are paying the bills, and sovereignty should not be a shield where states can misuse to kill their own people, and more, partnerships are important, so members have to enhance the capacity for that, but for all...

... referring to peace keeping operations you have to stay optimistic.