

# Improving the military effectiveness and proficiency of peacekeeping operations: A new goal for A4P?

## BACKGROUND PAPER

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The current reform tracks led by Secretary-General António Guterres have from the beginning mostly focused on prevention, development, the primacy of politics, and better overall management, which are all fundamental goals to both stabilize crises and to have a properly organized staff to achieve them. Rightly so, it has looked at the fundamental goals that peacekeeping operations need to achieve. In this context, through the A4P initiative, the UN Secretary-General has tried to promote better performance, stronger accountability, more reliable partnerships, and better burden sharing as well as stronger sense of collective responsibility. As a result, 151 member states (more than the current 124 contributing countries) have signed on 25 September 2018 a “Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations”; a declaration of good intentions that reaffirms the value of this instrument for managing crises, but that remains to be tested with the next crisis or the deployment of a new operation, to see if member states have really moved from words to deeds on peacekeeping affairs.

All the more so as, despite numerous reports since 2015 (in particular the HIPPO and the Santos Cruz reports), initiatives, resolutions and declarations, the dissonance has grown “between the Security Council’s expectations and what peacekeeping can realistically achieve,” in a context where member states have looked at reducing budgets.<sup>1</sup> Member states have also tended to focus on “technical improvements that have taken on a life of their own” rather than on tackling the more strategic, political and financial issues that peacekeeping operations have now faced for decades.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, these technical discussions have avoided more difficult ones on budget,<sup>3</sup> on doctrine, on the use of force, on a more equal burden

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinion or position of the Challenges Forum Partnership.



1 Jake Sherman, “Action for Peacekeeping: Will Political Consensus Lead to Change in Practice?” *Issue brief*, International Peace Institute, New York, September 2018. On the budget context, see also Jake Sherman, “With Peacekeeping Budget Approved, More Contentious Negotiations Lie Ahead,” *IPI Global observatory*, July 13, 2018.

2 Jake Sherman, “Action for Peacekeeping: Will Political Consensus Lead to Change in Practice?”, *loc. cit.*

3 On financial aspects, for example: “There is no single, permanent budget for UN peacekeeping because despite being the organization’s most visible activity peacekeeping is still not officially considered one of the UN’s core functions for budgetary purposes,” Paul D. Williams, “In US Failure to Pay Peacekeeping Bills, Larger UN Financing Questions Raised,” *IPI Global Observatory*, October 23, 2018.

sharing, and on how to adapt these operations not only to the increasingly challenging environment but also to the means (in terms of budget and capacities) member states actually want to put at the disposal of the Organization.

There is also a long-standing issue that the UN has looked at only through very technical lenses, namely the space given to military affairs at the UN. Notwithstanding the primacy of politics, there is a military element in peacekeeping, which requires military proficiency in its execution. The focus on prevention and on the primacy of politics has obliterated the fundamental issue of the “military space” in peacekeeping and the hard-wired military expertise these operations need to ensure proper commitment, planning and conduct. Political authorities have to understand what the military can and cannot do. In fact, looking at this issue may even have not crossed the mind of the Secretary-General and his colleagues when conceiving the A4P initiative, and it was certainly not part of the work of the HIPPO panel. It is a missing voice that the Santos Cruz helped restore in a way but not entirely.<sup>4</sup> Why? To understand that situation, we have to go a few decades back, before looking at what could be improved or further reformed today.

### **The United Nations: A security organization that has grown into a civilian one**

At the outset, the United Nations that was conceived more than 73 years ago by mainly the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union had two innovations compared to its predecessor the League of Nations: the creation of a Security Council with limited membership and extensive powers, and of a Military Staff Committee (MSC), an organ that would embody the cooperation of the great military powers during World War II. The MSC was designed to be the necessary military servant or adjutant to the Security Council, as well as a major tool to deal with threats to peace and security. It was intended to both “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,” (Article 47) and to “be responsible for the strategic direction of any armed forces” placed at the disposal of the council according to special agreements to be negotiated with member states (Article 43) – a function that NATO’s Military Committee and the EU’s equivalent have been performing since their inception.

The problem with the MSC is that it was the first organ to bear the consequences of the increasing division and suspicion of its five member states (the permanent members of the Security Council), as it was dealing with the most strategic aspects of the UN apparatus: security and military affairs. Therefore in 1947, the ambitions of the drafters of the Charter failed on the realities of the balance of powers, and the structures of the

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Gowan, “Fighting Words: The Cruz Report Restores a Military Voice to Peacekeeping Debates,” *IPI Global Observatory*, February 19, 2018.

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MSC<sup>5</sup> were never able to be developed, moreover, member states were never able to sign the special agreements provided for by Article 43. Deprived of a grand strategic military tool, the Security Council, and the United Nations as a whole, has developed into a civilian organization where politics dominate, the civilians are in charge, and the military considerations are kept at a technical level, even on the use of force and strategic military issues.<sup>6</sup>

Since then, the Security Council has kept ignoring the MSC and, with some exceptions, has not formally requested its help or its military advice. This, despite the need for military advice becoming increasingly pressing as the Security Council has deployed the instrument of peacekeeping into more and more challenging security environments while asking the Blue Helmets to be militarily robust. This is one of the contradictions within the current construct of the UN that is preventing a greater efficiency in its operations. To date the Security Council is deploying 88,729 uniformed personnel in 14 missions without relying on its own dedicated military advisory body. This anomaly constitutes, in my view, a fundamental limit to operational efficiency, to military proficiency, and to the performance of peacekeeping within the UN.

### **The United Nations: an organization that should gain a military proficiency**

It is extremely hard to change habits that are 70 years old, but some awareness and long-term cultural adaptation can be instilled to complement the slow professionalization that has been initiated some 20 years ago with the Brahimi report.<sup>7</sup> This should be done at 3 levels: at the grand strategic level, at the strategic level, and at the operational and tactical level. It would take the form of increasingly involving the MSC in the various deliberations on the military aspects of peacekeeping, strengthening the military expertise within DPKO and improve the integration between the military and the civilians, and working also on a better integration between the various pillars of a peacekeeping operation so that the military component can really be in support of a political strategy.

#### *The greater use of the MSC*

Within other organizations, such as the European Union and NATO in particular, Member States recognize that a military committee is an indispensable tool for the conduct and control of high intensity military operations. However, many UN interlocutors, consider such a tool less necessary in a context where military operations are used more as a political expedient than as a genuine military tool. Nevertheless, as soldiers and military officers constitute 77 percent of all personnel

5 Planned to be along a series of sub-committees dealing with planning, coordination of intelligence, coordination of operations and of training, armaments, communications, and logistics.

6 On the MSC, see the recent book of the author: *The UN Military Staff Committee: Recreating a Missing Capacity* (New York: Routledge, Global Institutions Series, 2018), 164 pages.

7 Alexandra Novosseloff, "La professionnalisation du maintien de la paix ou le travail de Sisyphe," *Global Peace Operations Review*, 30 March 2016 : <http://peaceoperationsreview.org/thematic-essays/la-professionnalisation-du-maintien-de-la-paix-des-nations-unies-ou-le-travail-de-sisyphe/>

deployed in these operations, this argument falls not just on grounds of common sense but on the need to have strong military components, able to create the space in which the political/civilian officers may fully operate. As I have written a number of times, a weak military component will always have consequences on the operation as a whole even if there is a working political process in place. Spoilers of all sorts whether in Mali, South Sudan, Lebanon, Central Africa or the Democratic Republic of the Congo are constantly testing the (in)ability (not to mention the unwillingness) of peacekeepers to use force and adopt a deterrent posture. In this sense, the military component is the backbone of the presence of any UN mission on the ground.<sup>8</sup>

In such a context, as the tensions between the three stakeholders of peacekeeping have never been so high, a forum dedicated to discussions between military experts would be needed. And the MSC has the potential to play that role, given that since 2010 it has slowly revamped its advisory function. In New York, at the grand strategic level, there is a long-standing need for having a specific body that could translate in military terms the political resolutions of the Security Council, and that would provide expertise and guidance on mandates, and on what to expect from the uniformed peacekeepers. It should not be put in a position to argue against the Council's decisions but should explain them in purely military terms. It could look at how peacekeeping doctrine and rules of engagement are applied and guide the Security Council accordingly. Where there is misunderstanding between the Council and DPKO, the MSC could be used to provide technical guidance, and help resolve military concerns related to the implementation of mandates. Indeed, downstream, "the Council decision-making could benefit from the exchanges of ideas between Council members and the Secretariat's military professionals."<sup>9</sup> This could improve the trust between the Council, the Secretariat, and troop-contributing countries and would in the long run help elaborate more realistic mandates as more attention would be given to the practical implication of mandated tasks. This would be informed by the regular visit of the MSC on the ground to listen to force commanders' concerns and military components in general.

The MSC would ensure that all Security Council members receive a common perspective from their respective military advisors. Its stronger presence would also help regain trust from some of the member states that left peacekeeping in the early 1990s after the failures in Bosnia and Somalia. In fact, the small P5 contribution in troops could be an asset and a way for the MSC to become an organ that studies peacekeeping challenges above individual interests. Certainly, a stronger MSC could help other non P5 Western States be more involved in peacekeeping operations as they could see such a Committee as a strengthening of the command and control structures of the UN and as an extra tool that

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<sup>8</sup> Alexandra Novosseloff, "UN Peacekeeping: Back to Basics Is Not Backwards," *IPI Global Observatory*, 19 April 2018: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2018/04/peacekeeping-basics-is-not-backwards/>; Alexandra Novosseloff, "Blue Helmets: UN's Unloved Stepchild Needs Leadership," *IPI Global Observatory*; "Blue Helmets: UN's Unloved Stepchild Needs Leadership," 16 February 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Security Council Report, "In Hindsight: Military Staff Committee," January 2015 Monthly Forecast, posted 23 December 2014.

understands military needs on the ground. This military advice would be independent from that of the Secretariat, and it would be up to the ambassadors to follow or not this military advice in regard to the political opportunities and constraints demanded by their respective capital.

The MSC could help set up a mechanism by which military concerns of TCCs could be expressed. The aim would be to have a military discussion behind closed doors involving the Military Adviser and his staff, the military advisors of the permanent missions of the members of the Security Council, and the military advisors of the main TCCs involved. Having such a discussion in New York could mitigate the tendency to refer back to capitals, even if it will never replace the needed political discussion on how to implement mandates.

### *The improvement of military expertise within the Secretariat*

This stronger role of the MSC would also inject in the Secretariat a stronger military expertise that is currently missing. Over the years, the positioning of the Military Adviser has been somehow downgraded, from being the military adviser of the Secretary-General to the military adviser to the head of DPKO.<sup>10</sup> The Office of Military Affairs (OMA) of the Department of Peacekeeping operations (DPKO) of the Secretariat has had varying influence, depending on the personality and the experience of the Military Adviser. OMA was strengthened in 2007 after the military surge given to UNIFIL and the request by some member states to strengthen military oversight over peacekeeping operations.<sup>11</sup> In this strengthened capacity, OMA has become, since 2010-11, a regular briefer to the MSC on current operations or cross-cutting issues, but it still has only a staff of 127 to oversee around 78,125 soldiers and military experts deployed on the ground.

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But within DPKO, OMA lacks authority and its expertise is often overlooked by the Office of Operations in drafting reports and providing advice to its leadership. Furthermore, little attention has been put on the quality of the officers put at the disposal of OMA by member states. Surprisingly, no military expertise is present in the Department of Field Support to deploy and support military operations (to the exception of a few former military officers in the aviation, medical and supply sections), which is undermining the quality of support provided to the various missions, in particular those evolving in counter-terrorism environments. The recent organizational reform of the Secretary-General seems to be driving OMA even further apart from the rest of the new DPO (and the single political-operational structure in charge of the daily management of peace and security activities), as well as from the new Department of Operational Support (DOS).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.operationspaix.net/140-lexique-conseiller-militaire-du-secretaire-general.html>

<sup>11</sup> France in particular had in 2007 asked the Secretariat to establish a dedicated "Strategic Military Cell" for UNIFIL; its merging with OMA in 2010 resulted in the increase of this office and the creation of an "assessment team" within it. See Alexandra Novosseloff, Chapter on Expanded UNIFIL, in *Oxford Handbook on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, eds. Joachim A. Koops, Norrie MacQueen, Thierry Tardy and Paul D. Williams, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Susan Manuel "UN Budget Committee O.K.'s Major Reform of the UN, as Peacekeeping Is Squeezed," *PassBlue*, July 1, 2018: <https://www.passblue.com/2018/07/01/un-budget-committee-o-k-s-major-reform-of-the-un-as-peacekeeping-is-squeezed/>

Moreover, on purely military matters such as caveats, it is obvious that OMA had little say and weight on the policy the UN has adopted in that regard (which is no caveats allowed in any of its operations). It would have otherwise told its civilian leadership that caveats are a part of any international military deployment abroad. Parallel chains of command always exist in all multinational operations, as full command over their troops will always be kept by member states. On multiple occasions, the UN Secretariat has considered that UN operations have no caveats, although the A4P declaration of commitments only stress the need “to redouble all efforts to identify and clearly communicate any caveats or change in status of caveats, and to work with the Secretariat to develop a clear, comprehensive and transparent procedure on caveats.” As what is done in the framework of NATO or EU operations, caveats (that are set political safety limits for any TCC) should be declared in the concept of operations. All the operational documents (such as the concept of operations, the rules of engagement and the operations plan) should be officially communicated to the main troop-contributing countries so that their capital is fully aware of the potential risks it is engaging in. Reducing national caveats and cases of disobedience comes with improving the processes by which operations are better planned and operational documents regularly updated. It also comes with better transparency and information sharing, improved leadership and strengthened command and control arrangements for operations, better information sharing between all contributors, and military to military triangular dialogue between all stakeholders (Security Council, Secretariat and member states).<sup>13</sup>

Another example of the current lack of military expertise and proficiency is the way air assets are used: often in a purely logistical way, although mobility and reactivity would require a more strategic use of them, where by the number of aircrafts does not always equal the number of troops on the ground. The fact is that, “to meet the ends desired by the UN – the cessation of violence between, states, groups or organizations – it is often necessary to utilize air power’s various capabilities to moderate and influence the behavior of the parties involved.”<sup>14</sup> To achieve that goal, air assets and capabilities should be managed more in terms of potential for strategic impact than in purely logistical terms. For example, training flights could also be used in a deterrence way by overflying areas where tensions can arise. Then numbers would matter less that capabilities.<sup>15</sup> The way to achieve such goal would be to give a greater voice to the military in the planning at headquarters and in missions.

Where military expertise is missing the most is in the support to peacekeeping operations, although that would be crucial in all medical support and in the protection of the camps. As a result, some (Western) contributing countries have built their own camps (with higher military

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<sup>13</sup> Alexandra Novosseloff, “No Caveats, Please?: Breaking a Myth in UN Peace Operations,” *Global Peace Operations Review*, 12 September 2016 : <http://peaceoperationsreview.org/thematic-essays/no-caveats-please-breaking-a-myth-in-un-peace-operations>

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Ross Mahoney, “Book Review – Air Power in UN Operations: Wings for Peace,” *Thoughts on Military History*, 12 July 2015: <https://thoughtsonmilitaryhistory.wordpress.com/2015/07/12/book-review-air-power-in-un-operations-wings-for-peace>

<sup>15</sup> Alexandra Novosseloff, “Keeping Peace From Above: Air Assets in UN Peace Operations” (New York: International Peace Institute, October 2017): <https://www.ipinst.org/2017/10/air-assets-un-peace-ops>

standards) beside the UN camp, such as in Gao. Such situations create two-tier missions that are not conducive to morale and cohesion of peacekeepers. That lack of general military expertise has an impact on the field where there is often a lack of coordination between the political and military components of a mission.

*The stronger integration between the pillars of a peacekeeping mission*

*Little consideration is given to operational limitations, and military officers are almost completely excluded from logistical planning. These are fundamental weaknesses of these operations*

As we have just seen, the military is poorly regarded at the UN, both in the Secretariat where the Office of Military Affairs has little influence (even if that has varied according to the personality of the Milad), and in the Security Council where it is practically absent and the Military Staff Committee has no substantive role. Little consideration is given to operational limitations, and military officers are almost completely excluded from logistical planning. These are fundamental weaknesses of these operations. Because of the political nature of peacekeeping operations, the UN has had a tendency to neglect the importance of a military component that needs to be both strong—equipped with a clear chain of command, strong integrated intelligence, and adapted for quick reaction and protection capabilities—and robust, i.e., able to command respect, which would allow for better support to political activities. As a consequence, both the Secretariat and the Security Council often believe that the number of troops can compensate for the mediocrity of certain contingents.

Recent investigations on attacks of peacekeepers and failure of performance (in South Sudan and DRC in particular) as well as the Santos Cruz report have pointed to the lack the basic military requirements by some TCCs, lack of adequate equipment, and lack of training. This was allowed by a general “laissez-faire” over the contributions of TCCs and by the lack of military expertise. In the name of political or financial interests, and in order not to offend certain countries, no one speaks out against the elementary failures of certain contingents. For a long time there has been a reticence to dismiss contingents and to reject others. This has resulted in turning a blind eye to certain practices, for example, the sending out of civilians in uniform and operating without basic means of protection, not to mention cases of sexual misconduct (that are also the result of poor leadership and of lack of regular rotation of troops).

Those failures have triggered the A4P initiative and the ensuing emphasis put on performance and accountability, as they have had an impact on the safety and security of peacekeepers on the ground. The Secretariat has now progressively put in place a system of indicators of performance that should counter member states’ practice of sending poorly trained and under-equipped uniformed personnel. DPKO has in the past few years started to repatriate contingents that were not up to UN standards, but this practice is still politically sensitive and far from systematic. The Security Council has, through its Resolution 2436 (21 September 2018) reaffirmed “its support for the development of a comprehensive and

integrated performance policy framework that identifies clear standards of performance for evaluating all United Nations civilian and uniformed personnel.” As always, the effective implementation of such framework will depend on both the UN leadership to report on the failures of TCCs to respect it, and on the willingness of member states to abide by it.

On the ground, civilian and military components personnel also need to work closer and better together. A recent trend in multidimensional peacekeeping has been an over-reliance on militarized approaches in the absence of a political strategy. This has driven components even further apart, with military components conducting operations without full consultation with the civilian component on their political consequences. Each component has its own logic and little is done to understand the other, despite all the existing coordination meetings at the level of the Mission’s leadership.

It is therefore crucial to give greater attention to the selection of Mission leadership: an SRSG or a Force Commander should not be selected without prior experience working in a political-military context. It is up to the Mission’s leadership to achieve coherence in the implementation of a mandate through integration but also by respecting the specificities of each component.<sup>16</sup> This is how trust can be built within a mission which is crucial to internal cohesion.

## **Conclusion – Investing in UN military components, a path to better peacekeeping efficiency**

There are practices that the UN should not be tolerating anymore. Countries tolerate actions in the UN that they would never allow in other circumstances or frameworks where their strategic interests are at stake. Many of the issues that peacekeeping operations have faced for decades come from a lack of funding and a lack of interest in those operations deployed in the forgotten corners of our world. What has also plagued those operations is the lack of integration between the civilians and the uniformed personnel on the ground and at headquarters and the lack of doctrine to guide the actions, activities, training, support of peacekeepers. These are the fundamental weaknesses of peacekeeping operations. Being aware of them and acknowledging them would be a first step. Doing something about them would be a second.

The UN will not be able to conduct robust operations or any proper operations where terrorism exists if it does not change the way it considers military affairs. If there is not stronger integration between the civilian, the police and the military, there will be no serious intelligence produced for those missions for the security of its personnel; there will be no proper

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<sup>16</sup> See International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations, *Designing Mandates and Capabilities for Future Peace Operations*, chapter 4 on Authority, Command and Control, 2014, available at [www.challengesforum.org/en/Reports-Publications/Designing-Mandates-and-Capabilities-for-Future-Peace-Operations/Designing-Mandates-and-Capabilities-for-Future-Peace-Operations](http://www.challengesforum.org/en/Reports-Publications/Designing-Mandates-and-Capabilities-for-Future-Peace-Operations/Designing-Mandates-and-Capabilities-for-Future-Peace-Operations).

and secure support given to peacekeepers in dangerous and remote areas; and there will be no adequate and reactive medical support for all personnel. Member states have to select more carefully the personnel they second to the United Nations as a whole and can no longer send under-equipped and untrained soldiers. The A4P is meant to be a watchdog over those drifts and to raise awareness on them: that is worth the fight. This is the price for stronger and more efficient peacekeeping operations, mandated to protect populations in need.