



Taking Leadership to the Next Level: UN Peace Operations 2020

Challenges Forum Workshop

Hosted by the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute in partnership
with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Carlisle, 28 February-1 March 2017

Presentation by Lt. Gen. Chander Prakash, Deputy Director, United
Services Institution of India / Former Force Commander, MONUSCO,
India

Impact of Leadership on UN Peace Operations – The Why

Check Against Delivery

Modern day peacekeeping operations being complex, multi-national, multi-cultural with multidimensional structures pose great challenges to the Mission leadership. The challenges faced by the Mission leadership are diverse and frequent. I was the Force Commander in United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for about two and half years (10 August 2010 - 31 March 2013). In this period, the Mission witnessed a number of ups and down.

In July 2010, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) authorities were demanding that the size of the Mission be reduced as the security situation had improved. Walikale rapes had taken place about two weeks before my assuming the appointment of Force Commander. Presidential elections were conducted in DRC in November 2011. When I finished my tenure on 31 March 2013, Bosco Ntaganda nicknamed “Terminator” had surrendered at the US Embassy in Rwanda and the Force Intervention Brigade was authorized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to neutralize M23 and other Armed Groups. Those were most challenging times both for UN Headquarters and Mission leadership. I will reflect on some of the issues and lessons learnt in my tenure as Force Commander.

Contemporary peacekeeping operations have to be driven by a political process. The peacekeeping business includes a wide range of activities such as negotiating a comprehensive peace agreement between the parties to the conflict; national reconciliation; continual attention to the avoidance of a breakdown in the peace or political process; assistance to the host government in the extension of State authority; and holding of what is hoped will be peaceful and credible elections and the strengthening of democratic processes. It also includes supporting and facilitating an all-inclusive political process that can successfully and sustainably move the country from a post-conflict state towards sustainable peace.

The political process in a country which is witnessing conflict is complicated. There are contending and competing pressures and actors. The impact of spoilers also has to be taken into account. The leadership at all levels needs to constantly gauge and re-adjust every single decision on the basis of the peacekeeping principles of impartiality, the use of force (except for self-defense and defense of the mandate), and ensure legitimacy, credibility, and promotion of national and local ownership.

There are a host of issues and challenges that the leadership encounters in contemporary peacekeeping operations. A vast array of tasks have to be performed; ranging from protection of civilians, human rights and reconciliation between parties to the conflict, the establishment of the rule of law, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)/Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement (DDRRR), etc. among many others. The challenges are constantly emerging, hence, the mission leaders have to adapt to the ever-changing contexts. No two situations are alike and they have to be addressed differently. A common denominator is a fundamental commitment to seeking better solutions to the challenges. Skilled articulation with fine political judgement and a very high standard of leadership totally committed on delivering on the mandate is a necessity.

Often, the mandates reflect political concerns of Member States rather than realistic assessments of the practicality of implementing them. UN leaders have to operationalize these complex and sometimes ambiguous mandates with little guidance on how to define success and also with resources that are scarce, not in terms of numbers but in terms of capability as these tend to get constrained by national caveats. It is only the mission leadership that can optimize the use of available resources, motivate mission personnel, set proper examples for the host

nation and strengthen the credibility and reputation of the Organization.

Some stakeholders tend to perceive the mandates as impinging on the sovereignty of a State. Under such circumstances, only the most competent and skilled leaders can deliver and achieve the goals and objectives of the mission by involving the local actors and stakeholders. Competent mission leadership will not view such mandates as a limitation on action but as an opportunity for engagement and pro-active thinking to build trust, enhance teamwork, and develop consensus on the implementation of the mandate. Professional and competent leadership will clearly define strategic goals, develop coordinated work plans, and prioritize activities in order to ensure judicious resource allocation.

Functions of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding in contemporary peace operations are increasingly overlapping. Therefore, there has to be good coordination between the political, military and police components of the Mission, and also integration with the UN Country Team and other entities of the UN System. In addition, there has to be cooperation with humanitarian NGOs, political actors, bilateral donors and other military/security organizations operating in the area of responsibility. Mission Leadership needs to take the lead in promoting the best possible working relations between the various UN entities operating within the boundaries of a conflict zone. Personalities have to be such that they complement each other, and operate as a coherent team in which the members are respectful of each other's competencies and mandates.

Also, there is a need to strike a delicate balance between creating a secure and stable environment through the work of the military forces and police services while preserving the 'humanitarian space' for UN agencies and their partners on the ground. Ensuring effective civil-military cooperation and coordination among UN elements is one of the most difficult challenges that a mission faces. Leaders have to maintain a high degree of sensitivity to the interests and operating cultures of each of them, which can be a significant challenge. This requires mature and well-developed senior leadership skills.

Protection of civilians in peace operations underpins the legitimacy and credibility of the UN. In addition to providing protection from physical violence, missions need to carry out a number of other protection tasks such as the promotion and protection of human rights; protecting vulnerable women and children; capacity-building in the area of rule of law; disarmament of ex-combatants, assistance for security sector reforms (SSR); and creating conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Senior mission leaders need to encourage the national authorities to consolidate and build institutions that are accountable to the people and that enjoy their trust. They also need to identify areas where peacekeepers could provide support to the national authorities in helping them carry out their protection responsibilities. Close coordination with these actors, national authorities and local communities is therefore essential in order to ensure that efforts undertaken by various protection entities reinforce rather than undermine the effort put in to the protection of civilians.

Sometimes, it may be necessary to deal with non-state actors, including armed groups hostile to the host government. This may raise suspicions and could cause dislike by the host government. It is only leaders of very high integrity who can ensure that the mission's impartiality is not jeopardized or becomes a cause any deterioration in the peace process. It is important to establish professional and productive relationships with the host country counterparts at all levels. In addition to everyday issues of an operational nature, the Senior Mission Leadership may occasionally need to convey tough political messages to national

leaders and/or explain and apologize for inappropriate actions by UN personnel. This has to be done in a manner that ensures a positive outcome.

Effective communications and outreach is central to the mission's ability to achieve its mandate. Mission leadership needs to evolve a well thought out and effective communication strategy and ensure its implementation by all components of the Mission. To do this, they themselves need to have confidence in the peace process; build trust among parties to a conflict; assist in maintaining consent, legitimacy and credibility; manage local and international expectations; and generate support for national reconciliation as well as the mission's work on the ground. In sum, the strategy should be designed to inform the population, the host government and influence the parties to the conflict, and protect the image of the mission and its personnel.

To conclude; what is needed are leaders who accept responsibility and ensure accountability; leverage organizational and cultural diversity; have a collaborative and flexible approach; and are capable of developing shared understandings and promote integrated planning. Hence, only the most competent, committed and capable individuals with a vision can be expected to deliver.