

# Capacity to Protect Civilians: Rhetoric or Reality?

## Introduction: Protection of Civilians Norms and Frameworks

After the experiences of Rwanda and Srebrenica in the 1990's, and the United Nations (UN) failure to act, the protection of civilians (POC) has taken an increasingly prominent role in international peace operations. The first mission to be mandated with an explicit POC-mandate was the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNASIL) in 1999. While the emphasis on POC may initially have been met with reluctance, both from traditional Troop and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs) and from within the system, the concept has increasingly taken a central role in UN peace operations after the presentation of the milestone Brahimi Report in 2000.<sup>1</sup> More than 98 percent of military and police personnel currently deployed in peace operations have a mandate to protect civilians, as part of integrated mission-wide efforts.

Although the Security Council has recognised the progressive consideration of POC in armed conflict as a thematic issue since 1999,<sup>2</sup> for a number of years there was not much guidance on how such mandates should be implemented. In an independent report on the protection of civilians in the context of UN peacekeeping operations from 2009, it was made clear that missions largely lacked a clear definition of POC and suffered from poor planning and implementation of protection mandates.<sup>3</sup> That same year, the Security Council adopted a resolution that requested all UN missions with protection mandates to incorporate comprehensive protection strategies into overall mission implementation and contingency plans.<sup>4</sup> This, together with other developments, led to an increased focus on guidance to the field,

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 August 2000.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, S/PRST/1999/6, 12 February 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Victoria Holt and Glyn Taylor with Max Kelly, *Protecting Civilians in the Context of UN Peacekeeping Operations: Successes, Set-backs and Remaining Challenges*, Independent study jointly commissioned by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (New York, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Security Council, Resolution 1894 (2009), S/RES/1894 (2009), 11 November 2009.

## Background details

This policy brief was originally written as a background paper for the Challenges Annual Forum 2015 on 'Institution- and Capacity-building for Peace: Implications of the UN's Review Panels' Recommendations for Future Missions', hosted by the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), Ministry of Defence, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, 5-6 October 2015.

The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Challenges Forum Partnership, Secretariat or the Hosts of the Annual Forum 2015.

## About the author

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trying to improve the understanding and application of POC-mandates. In 2010 an operational concept on POC was published by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support (DPKO/DFS), and the following year a Framework for Drafting Comprehensive Protection of Civilians Strategies in UN Peacekeeping Operations.<sup>5</sup>

Following this guidance framework and additional focus on POC by the Security Council, a POC Policy has now been developed by DPKO/DFS.<sup>6</sup> The intention was to strengthen POC implementation in the field, making sure that there will be a common standard across the system and that the capacities both on the civilian and military side are fit for purpose.

In all these guidelines and policy documents, as well as in most Security Council Resolutions mandating missions with POC-mandates, it is emphasised that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with the respective governments. The presence of a UN mission or other protection actors does not diminish the obligation of host governments to make every effort to protect their own civilians. However the responsibility of the host government does not dilute the obligation of UN missions to act within their capabilities when they are not willing or able to protect its citizens.

As the UN High-Level Independent Panel (HIPPO) says in its Report, significant progress has been made in promoting norms and frameworks for the protection of civilians. Yet, on the ground, the results are mixed and the gap between what is asked for and what peace operations can deliver has widened, especially in the more difficult environments.<sup>7</sup>

Against this background, this policy brief focuses on the UN's protection capacities, asking what this implies for civilians in the countries where the organization operates. This is related to capacity- and institution-building in host nations, in particular in the security sector. The policy brief provides a short overview of the implementation of POC-mandates in UN peace operations drawing upon the author's experience from the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) between 2011-2014 first, with a particular focus on the capacity to protect through non-military means, and second, on the capacity to provide physical protection. Third, the responsibility of the host government is elaborated upon, ending with some concluding remarks on what the next steps should be in order to further enhance the UN's capacity to protect civilians.

<sup>5</sup> The full range of activities that fall within this mandated task are set out in: United Nations, Department for Peacekeeping Operations/Department for Field Support, *Framework for Drafting Comprehensive Protection of Civilians Strategies in UN Peacekeeping Operations*, 2011; and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations/Department for Field Support, *Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians*, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, Department for Peacekeeping Operations/Department for Field Support, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, DPKO/DFS Policy, 1 April 2015.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, p. ix.



## The UN's Capacity to Protect through Non-Military Means

Protection of civilians has for many years primarily been understood in military terms, and the ultimate test confronting peace operations has been to what extent they are able to physically protect civilians under imminent threat. It is important, however, to emphasise that UN framework documents and guidance focus on several aspects of POC and include prevention through political action, as well as other civilian protection work. This is also linked to institution- and capacity-building and is included in the following three tiers:

*...the mismatch between the UNMISS' mandate and its resources were glaring, making it close to impossible for the mission to deliver on its mandate to provide physical protection to civilians under threat.*

- **Tier I: Protection through dialogue and engagement.** Activities include dialogue with a perpetrator or potential perpetrator, conflict resolution and mediation between parties to the conflict, and persuading the government and other relevant actors to intervene to protect civilians.
- **Tier II: Provision of physical protection.** Activities by police and military components involving the show or use of force to prevent, deter, pre-empt and respond to situations in which civilians are under threat of physical violence.
- **Tier III: Establishment of a protective environment.** Activities to help create a protective environment for civilians, for example through the rule of law, human rights and protection cluster activities, as well as Security Sector Reforms (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) reforms. Many of these activities are undertaken alongside or in coordination with programmes by the United Nations Country Team or Humanitarian Country Team (UNCT/HCT).<sup>8</sup>

In South Sudan, UNMISS developed a POC-strategy with interventions along all three Tiers outlined above in consultation with the UN and the HCT, and every State office was obliged to do the same. This proved to be an effective tool in relation to both threat assessments and the extensive work that the mission was engaged in.<sup>9</sup>

With the new 2015 policy, a more comprehensive approach is being advised, requesting POC operations to be implemented along four operational phases: (i) prevention, (ii) pre-emption, (iii) response and (iv) consolidation.<sup>10</sup> This should be reflected in a comprehensive POC action plan, including all relevant components of the mission.

While UNMISS has engaged actively on multiple fronts in prevention, peace consolidation and at times also mediation support in relation to inter-communal conflict in the country (Tier I), it has proven difficult to build the capacity of the host nation institutions to take on such critical tasks.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Department for Peacekeeping Operations/Department for Field Support, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, DPKO/DFS Policy, 1 April 2015.

<sup>9</sup> UNMISS Protection of Civilian Strategy, approved by SRSG, 4 June 2012, since then replaced by the UNMISS Protection of Civilians Strategy, 2014/POC/1, 15 September 2014, which in turn is due for revision in 2015.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, Department for Peacekeeping Operations/Department for Field Support, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, DPKO/DFS Policy, 1 April 2015, p. 9.

UNMISS has supported the relevant institutions for Tier I, the Peace Commission of South Sudan and the National Reconciliation Committee, as well as peace advisors at different administrative levels.

Although some progress has been made, the best results have not been achieved in the formal institutions of Juba, but locally. It has been most rewarding to work with leaders at state and county level, community leaders and also with religious leaders where conflicts are brewing, emerging and in some cases also escalating. The UN's collective efforts in trying to prevent or resolve inter-communal conflict has borne fruit in several instances, for example in the Equatorial States and the Tri-State Area between Unity, Warrap and Lakes States. In one instance in the latter area a large scale attack of thousands of armed youth was prevented. Tremendous efforts have been invested in the peace process in Jonglei on multiple fronts. But despite signed peace agreements this cycle of violence has shown to be very intractable and extraordinarily challenging to resolve, resulting in for example heavy-handed disarmament campaign and military operation by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).<sup>11</sup> Only when an UNMISS-supported Church-led peace process succeeded was it possible to achieve some stability.

Creating a protective environment (Tier III) has been another major challenge in a country awash with weapons and with significant security challenges, whether inter-communal violence or ill-disciplined and at times violent and abusive security services and forces. Some training in international humanitarian law and POC has been provided to the uniformed forces, but the scale has been too limited to have any real impact.<sup>12</sup>

While UNMISS was from the outset mandated to support the police and rule of law institutions, strengthening them and their protection role is necessarily a long-term effort. The current timelines and methodologies of UN peace operations are not conducive for such capacity-building processes. Nevertheless, the mission has been innovative in finding new ways of using existing UN Police (UNPOL)-mechanisms to provide such institution-building, but only with fundamental reforms in the way that the UN Police Division and UNPOL operate can better results be delivered. Both these points are reflected in the HIPPO report recommendations (capacity-building and police reform).<sup>13</sup>

Throughout its first years, UNMISS worked on multiple fronts to strengthen a more protective environment for people and increase the respect for human rights, including through a close partnership with the Protection Cluster under the Humanitarian Country Team. Also Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like Non-Violent Peace Force carried out very important work, strengthening communities' resilience and response, in areas of Jonglei where



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<sup>11</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan*, S/2012/820, 8 November 2012; and United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan*, S/2012/877, 26 November 2012.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan*, S/2015/296, 29 April 2015.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations, Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, pp. 41-43.

civilians were at risk.<sup>14</sup> However, UN capacity-building efforts of government delivered limited results. In relation to these challenges, human rights and humanitarian institutions of the country have had few possibilities to achieve real impact, despite the best efforts of the entire UN family in building their capacity. It would primarily be through SSR and a transformation of both the SPLA and the Police Service one could see an improvement.

With the crisis that exploded on 15 December 2013, one could ask questions about the mission's efforts to prevent the crisis.<sup>15</sup> While not in the public domain, significant efforts were made by mission leadership to help resolve the tensions, starting already 18 months before the crisis and carried on throughout this period. Also the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)-leaders and regional leaders engaged to resolve the problems. However, none of these attempts succeeded. The failure of prevention was primarily caused by the high risk behaviour of the South Sudanese leaders themselves on all sides. It was this behaviour that led to the outbreak of violence and then civil war, which threatened the lives and livelihoods of thousands and later millions of civilians.

The warring parties in South Sudan have totally failed to protect and civilians have in many cases been systematically targeted. With its limited military capabilities, the protection challenges have been far beyond the capacity of UNMISS. The mission had to open its gates to civilians fleeing for their lives as a last resort. Tens of thousands were protected within the two UNMISS-bases in Juba in a couple of days during the 2013 crisis, and within four to five months 85 000 civilians had sought protection in eight UNMISS compounds around the country.<sup>16</sup> Since then, the UN has continued to report on large numbers of Internally Displaced People (IDP) who seek refuge in UNMISS POC sites during times of violent surges, citing total numbers surpassing 200 000 in June 2015; and reaching almost 180 000 in November 2015.<sup>17</sup>

Both prior to the crisis and during the civil war, the mismatch between UNMISS' mandate and its resources were glaring, making it close to impossible for the mission to deliver on that mandate and provide physical protection to civilians under threat. UNMISS is not the only peace operation to face this problem as HIPPO points out in its Report,<sup>18</sup> and it is therefore important to analyse these challenges more carefully.

<sup>14</sup> For more information see: <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/what-we-do-mobile/south-sudan> (accessed 18 November 2015).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan*, S/2014/158, 6 March 2014.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan*, S/2014/158, 6 March 2014.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan*, S/2015/296, 29 April 2015; United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan, *Flash Human Rights Report on the Escalation of Fighting in Greater Upper Nile*, April/May 2015, 29 June 2015; and United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan*, S/2015/902, 23 November 2015.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, p. 25, para. 93-94.

## Physical Protection - Rhetoric or Reality?

While a blanket protection of civilians mandate in military terms is not possible for UN-missions since the resources would never be adequate, there is still a strong expectation that military contingents act robustly and proactively when civilians are under threat. A recent evaluation conducted by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS),<sup>19</sup> has shown that these expectations are often not met, and that far too many missions are assessed as not acting to protect civilians quickly and robustly enough. In other words, many UN missions are perceived to fail in the implementation of their physical protection.

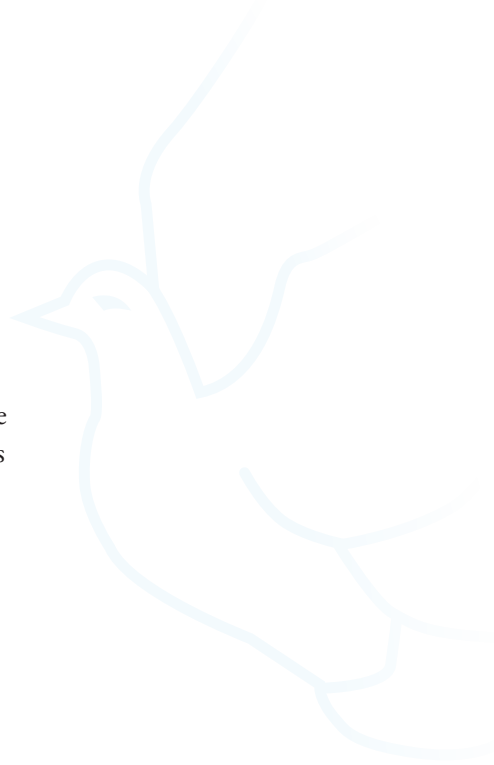
Whether this is the reason for the revised definition of the protection of civilians mandate in the new POC policy, is not known. The definition now contains the additional 'and including the use of deadly force'.<sup>20</sup> It is nevertheless important that this has now been specified.

The impact that this revised definition will have on the performance of the contingents will largely depend on capabilities and the contingents' own willingness to take risks. This is about resources: the numbers of troops compared to the challenge and capabilities, mobility in difficult terrain, and the flexibility and agility of the troops and their willingness to act more robustly.

In classic military thinking, one would need two to three times the number of forces that constitute a threat, to successfully counter that threat. One can compensate for the lack of numbers of troops with force multipliers such as attack helicopters and more advanced weaponry. With more of the latter, one does not need that many troops. In many cases, however, peace operations have neither of the two. Both troops and force multipliers are lacking. If you have high performance mobile and technologically advanced military units you may not need the numbers, but UN missions are normally not provided with these types of military units.

It is not without reason, therefore, that peace operations deployed to small countries are more likely to succeed than those deployed to large countries, where the protection needs in many cases are in remote areas. As HIPPO also pointed out, the resource constraints of many UN missions are dire, particularly in countries that are vast, with a difficult topography, poor infrastructure and climatic conditions, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali and South Sudan.<sup>21</sup>

UNMISS suffered major deficits on all of these fronts. The challenges related to the protection of civilians in South Sudan were grossly underestimated from the outset, despite the existence of a mission in this area six years prior



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<sup>19</sup> United Nations, 'Evaluation of the implementation and results of protection of civilians mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations', A/68/787, Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), 7 March 2014.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, DPKO/DFS, *Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, 1 April 2015:5, para. 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, p. 25, para. 93, p. 59, para. 210.

to its establishment.<sup>22</sup>

The number of troops in UNMISS were wholly inadequate for the task, and much less than comparable missions. The mission had one soldier per 100 km, almost three times less peacekeepers compared to the territory of the next comparable UN mission.<sup>23</sup> In addition, as no realistic amount of troops would be enough for a large country like South Sudan, force multipliers and particularly attack helicopters, would have been essential.

Furthermore, 60 percent of the country's territory is inaccessible for six to eight months per year during the rainy season. The mission would therefore need a much more diverse set of mobility assets to have a chance to deliver on its mandate. Without means of transport on the rivers, without all-terrain vehicles that can move in the mud and the swamps, the mission has been largely dependent on aviation. The lack of proper airstrips implies that the only realistic means of transport is really helicopters.<sup>24</sup> This necessarily limits the numbers of troops that can be deployed and retained in remote locations significantly. In addition, the mission often times suffers from a mobility crisis due to other aviation constraints. The resource deficits have been particularly exposed in Jonglei, but the mission continues to have major challenges all over the country.

In April 2013, during a military capability review, UNMISS had problems convincing visiting colleagues of the urgent need for strengthening the capabilities of the mission on several fronts, despite the POC-challenges threatening thousands of civilians. Only when the crisis hit in December 2013 was it possible to obtain the approval for a significant strengthening of the mission's capabilities, although the surge then took unacceptably long (an equally important issue in its own right).

HIPPO is very strong in its recommendations in relation to enabling missions to deliver on their POC-mandate, both in its proposals for changing the mandating process to better tailor mandates to the needs on the ground, and in making sure that the resources and capabilities match the mandates.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, as more resources are critical, an equal challenge is the performance of the contingents, and their willingness to engage pro-actively in confronting threats to civilians with force. Also here, UNMISS is a relevant example to draw upon. While some contingents have shown to be risk averse, with mission leadership at times having to directly instruct a more robust response, others have delivered on the mandate pro-actively and effectively.

<sup>22</sup> UNMIS, United Nations Mission in Sudan, 2005-2011.

<sup>23</sup> UNMISS' presentation for SPLA: *South Sudan and UNMISS*, 4 November 2013, based on DPKO-sources: UNMISS' ratio was 98:1 in late 2012. In 2011-2012, the figure was even lower. As the comparator for UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), the Eastern DRC was used as this is the primary area of operations for this mission, and the ratio of territory to soldier in 2012 was 17:1. For The UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), it was 29:1, and for UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire UNOCI it was 35:1. These comparators also do not account for the fact that UNMISS had less infantry and more engineering companies than most other missions. Even if all forces were moved to Jonglei state, UNMISS would have had a ratio of 1:19, which was worse than what MONUSCO already had as its presence in Eastern DRC.

<sup>24</sup> Constructing air-strips was high on the mission's agenda, but the engineering companies were delayed in their deployment to the mission, and had to concentrate on building military bases, which also were lacking. This implied that the construction of new airstrips were delayed.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, pp. 47-48, recommendations 1 and 2.

When the crisis hit in December 2013, these differences came out even more strongly. The national caveats that had been applied by some were expanded and amplified, while other contingents were undeterred and engaged in protecting civilians through impressive and courageous efforts.

As an example of the latter were the efforts in Bentiu, Unity State, when civilians were hiding in hospitals, churches and mosques. They thought they were safe, but it turned out they were not. More than 400 civilians were extracted and rescued from these locations in Bentiu under fire by a Mongolian contingent. A safe corridor was also established to bring more than 1000 people into safety. In Bentiu, this happened several times while the fighting was raging. This was in addition to the efforts that followed the protection of 40 000 civilians in the sites within the UN-base in Bentiu. This shows that results on POC can be achieved, even by an overstretched and under-resourced mission and under dire circumstances. It is also about the willingness of the troops to engage robustly and proactively within their means when they are seeing civilians under threat.

HIPPO used very strong language on the performance of peacekeepers, stating that national caveats were not acceptable and should be treated as disobedience of lawful command.<sup>26</sup> It is incumbent upon the UN-leadership in New York to make sure that T/PCCs do not get away with mediocre performance and the introduction of new caveats when contingents are deployed to UN missions.

### POC by the Host Government - Rhetoric or Reality?

As stated in the introduction, the main responsibility for the protection of civilians will nevertheless rest with the host government. When a civil war is raging in a country, the focus has to be on respect for the Geneva Conventions, distinguishing clearly between combatants and non-combatants (i.e. civilians). This was and still is the case in South Sudan, where violations of these conventions is the rule and not the exception. In more stable settings, one should expect that the uniformed forces of a host government do their utmost to engage actively in protecting civilians. This, however, is not the case in most countries, and certainly not in South Sudan. Here lies one of the greatest paradoxes in the UN's approach to POC in its peace operations.

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<sup>26</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, p. 28, recommendation 3.



Most peace operations from the 1990's onwards were deployed into an environment where a country had emerged from conflict, and a fragile peace agreement was to be implemented. The UN was dealing with armed forces coming out of war, loose in their structure, and at times including different militia. One could hardly talk about a professional army. While most peace operations are deployed into more complex situations these days, the characteristics of the armed forces the UN is dealing with remain the same.

Nevertheless, the principle is clear; any government has the primary responsibility to protect its own population. However, what is more surprising is that there is no systematic investment enabling host governments to take this responsibility seriously. In actual fact, no government army, whether professional conventional armies or those that have originated from liberation movements, militia or guerrilla warfare, has experience in operations that involve the protection of civilians. Military operations are usually focusing on gaining control over territory and dominating it and protecting territory when this control is threatened. And in doing so armed forces of all categories have often been the predators of the civilian population and not their protectors.

The more static *modus operandi* of traditional military operations is also different from protecting civilians. Most military see this typically as a job for police forces, formed police units or gendarmerie. The tactics and operations of protecting civilians usually involve highly mobile units much more similar to the more robust armed police units, such as those handling crowd control and riot control. Peacekeepers are therefore not used to such operations, either. This has not been a topic of much discussion, however.

Hardly any efforts are being made to train forces of host governments to enable them to better conduct operations to protect civilians. Very limited investment is being made in developing the numbers of formed police units that more effectively could take on such tasks. Not even UN formed police units are being properly trained in a systematic manner for such operations according to agreed standards.

That training of uniformed forces in the specifics of POC-operations, whether military or police, is not given higher priority is surprising. But more importantly, it is a great paradox that host governments are not assisted with such training programmes to enable their police and military units to develop and build the type of capacities and institutions that are needed to better protect civilians. This is a serious concern. After all, host governments are supposed to have the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians. But without such support, the principle will

remain an empty slogan.

Such POC-training programmes can only succeed, however, when they are developed as part of an overall SSR process, where fundamental issues such as professionalisation, command and control, competence and performance, and discipline and accountability are mainstreamed through the uniformed forces. Civilians will not be protected by forces and institutions that are dysfunctional and of questionable quality and where behaviour will depend on the individual commanders' whims. POC-training, which would be a natural area for the UN to invest in, will therefore never work as a standalone-measure, but will have to be imbedded in the strengthening of the institutions of the armed forces and the police.

To consolidate and sustain peace in a country, reforms of the security sector may be the most critical intervention. As HIPPO has highlighted, the security sector can be the greatest spoiler of peace.<sup>27</sup> Yet, this is maybe one of the largest gaps in international peace efforts. While bilaterals engage in Defense Sector Reform (DSR), often in accordance with their own strategic interests, and with minimal transparency and coordination, hardly anyone, including the UN, supports overall SSR effectively, making sure there is coherence between the reform efforts in the different security sectors.

HIPPO identified this as a major gap. While DSR is not an area where the UN is well positioned to engage, the Panel states that efforts should be made to support security sector reform in a more effective and coordinated way. Given its role in police development and DDR, the Panel states that the UN can and should play a convening and coordinating role in SSR, if so requested by the government.<sup>28</sup> This implies making sure coherent reform efforts take place in all security sectors. This is also affirmed in a recent Security Council Resolution on this issue.<sup>29</sup>

A lot will have to be done to change the way UN peace operations work. The Panel has highlighted that fundamental reforms are needed in how the United Nations Police work.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in order to develop advisory functions in the SSR-area there is a need to change the way in which UN peace operations support institution-building. This is about capacity-building in one of the most difficult, yet most critical sectors.



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<sup>27</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, p. 40, para. 154.

<sup>28</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, p. 40, para. 154.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations, Security Council Resolution 2151 (2014), S/RES/2151(2014), 28 April 2014.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace, Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 16 June 2015, p. 41, para. 156-157 and recommendations 1-2, 5 and 6.

In the case of South Sudan, UNMISS had changed the approach of the UN police component entirely, and was about to roll out support to a major institutional reform of the South Sudan National Police together with partners at the time of the 2013 crisis. The commitment was strong also from the Inspector General of Police. It was different with the armed forces, however. The UN Special Representative of the Secretary General and Head of UNMISS at the time was very concerned about the lack of reforms in the SPLA and raised the issue several times, both with the highest levels of government and bilaterals engaged with the Army, emphasising also the need for coherence and coordination between all actors. But the UNMISS-mandate was not strong enough in this area and there was no transparency around the support from various countries. While there were plans developed, not much happened.

The lack of reforms in the SPLA was one of the main contributing factors to the escalation of violence in December 2013. While the origin of the crisis was political, it spun out of control largely due to the tensions in the security forces, and its rapid escalation was in no doubt caused by an ethnically fragmented army. The responsibility for this rests squarely with the SPLM leadership and it illustrates how fundamental security sector reforms are.

## Conclusion: Strengthening the UN's Capacities and Role in Security Sector Reform

The security sector is too important for achieving and sustaining peace to be left to random arrangements, depending on the situation in each country. At the very least, where a UN peace operation is deployed, a significant effort must be made to make sure that there is a coordinated and coherent effort in reforming the security sector by competent authorities—whether bilateral or regional arrangements—with UN-engagement as appropriate depending on the mandate. With such an investment, the UN would kill two birds with one stone, both for the efforts to consolidate peace and in relation to the protection of civilians. After all, uniformed forces of host governments are supposed to be the primary protectors of the citizens.

If the UN continues its hands-off approach in relation to security sector reform, it may impact negatively on its overall mandate in achievement of peace and security. Furthermore, given the scale of the challenge, and the fact that there are limits to what UN peace operations can do, investment in security sector reform and training in POC operations in relation to uniformed forces of host governments can help make protection a reality rather than rhetoric for civilians in many countries. Without making this a priority, physical protection is

likely to remain an illusion for the vast majority of civilians, even where the UN is present—and even when the promise of protection is widely communicated.

Against this background, the UN and its Member States, in particular the main troop and police contributing countries, have to consider ways in which, the protection of civilians can be scaled up within the UN-system, from a military, police and civilian point of view.

UN peace operations have to be significantly reformed in order to become more effective in both institution- and capacity-building, in particular in relation to the protection of civilians, both on the military and police side. In order to deliver on protection mandates, it is key for UN peace operations both to have the necessary means and be able to answer to requests from host governments to support security sector reform. The Security Council has a special responsibility to make this reality.



### INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR THE CHALLENGES OF PEACE OPERATIONS

The Challenges Forum is a strategic and dynamic platform for constructive dialogue among leading policymakers, practitioners and academics on key issues and developments in peace operations. The Forum contributes to shaping the debate by identifying critical challenges facing military, police and civilian peace operations, by promoting awareness of emerging issues and by generating recommendations for solutions for the consideration of the broader international peace operations community. It is a global network of Partners representing 47 peace operations departments and organizations from 22 countries. [www.challengesforum.org](http://www.challengesforum.org)