United Nations Peacekeeping and the Question of Reform

As the world's largest and most influential international organisation, the United Nations (UN) receives more public attention and scrutiny than any other. Its failures and mistakes are well known and calls for its reform are frequent. As former UN Under-Secretary-General Brian Urquhart once noted, "since 1945 scarcely a year has gone by without the subject of UN reform surfacing in one way or another" (Urquhart 2010, p. 5). Few areas of the UN system receive more calls for reform than the UN's peacekeeping operations. In part this is because peacekeeping has grown to become one of the UN's most important areas of responsibility and subsequently one of the most scrutinised. It is also because UN peacekeepers are the most visible element of the entire UN system and their mistakes and failures the most obvious. Most importantly though, it is because of the dreadful human consequences that occur when peacekeeping fails. While demand for reforming UN peacekeeping is strong, the extent of reform and shape it should take is a topic of much debate.

In this essay I will examine current UN peacekeeping practices, highlight areas in need of high-priority reform, and suggest possible reforms which could be made. The essay will begin with a discussion of the problems and politics of institutional reform in general. It will then provide a brief historical overview of UN peacekeeping, highlighting why this area of the UN is in need of reform and discussing reform efforts of the past. Finally, it will examine two areas in need of high-priority reform: Security Council mandates and Peacekeeping leadership and command structures. In doing so it will argue that the most effective high-priority institutional reform that could be made would be the establishment of a permanent, standing peacekeeping force.

Before beginning any discussion of reform, it is first important to examine and define what is meant by the term 'reform' itself. Although often touted as an objective, non-political and therefore universally acceptable ideal, the idea of reform is in reality deeply political and highly contested. Institutional reform raises endless questions about the extent of reform required, the form that any change will take, the actors and participants that will be involved, and the intended result. These questions can often delay or obscure any discussion or attempts at reform. To avoid this an 'analytically clean' definition of reform should be applied. Edward Luck's (2003, p. 4) "relatively narrow and rigorous definition" of reform as "the purposeful act of modifying… an institution in order to enhance its efficiency and/or effectiveness in advancing its core goals and principles", provides an excellent definition for this purpose. By applying this definition to the reform of UN peacekeeping, thus narrowing reform to enhancing efficiency and effectiveness, the issue can be simplified enough to overcome the ambiguity that is so often associated with institutional reform. With such a definition in mind reforming UN peacekeeping should theoretically become a relatively simple matter of reviewing means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. With this in mind, the question of whether or not UN peacekeeping 'needs' to be reformed becomes almost irrelevant, as improving efficiency and effectiveness is a task that can be seen as desirable for any institution, even if it is already seen as being efficient and effective.

That being said, there is a genuine need for the reform of UN peacekeeping. To understand why, it is first important to understand how UN peacekeeping developed. As mentioned earlier, peacekeeping has become perhaps the most visible and well-known aspect of the UN system and is arguably the UN's most important responsibility. Consequently, it is easy to assume that peacekeeping has always been an important part of the UN system.

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However, this is simply not the case. Recognising that UN peacekeeping is a progressively developing and constantly changing feature of the UN which has only recently been developed to the level with which we are now accustomed is important. In fact, when the UN was founded, the modern conception of peacekeeping did not yet even exist. This is made evident by the UN Charter itself, which as Bellamy and Williams (2010, p. 264) highlight, "neither explicitly mentions the concept, nor contains provisions for peacekeeping operations." The reason for this absence is quite simple. As Paul Kennedy (2006, p. 78) argues, when the Charter was drafted "the whole system was tilted to stop… transborder aggressions. It therefore had nothing to do with what happened within any member state".

Contemporary UN peacekeeping only emerged as the Charter was reinterpreted in later years. Specifically, it was Article 1(1) of the charter, which tasks the UN with maintaining "international peace and security, and…[taking] effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace" (United Nations 2008a, p. 5), that was progressively reinterpreted to develop peacekeeping as a primary UN responsibility. One key way in which this happened was through reinterpretations of exactly what constitutes a 'threat to the peace'. As this expanded over time to include threats such as state collapse and human rights abuse, peacekeeping operations developed, multiplied and expanded to tackle these threats (Bellamy & Williams 2010). This past experience of institutional evolution provides an important lesson for the UN by demonstrating the inevitable nature of change, growth and development in its peacekeeping operations.

The changing nature of UN peacekeeping can be made even clearer by examining the growth in number of peacekeeping operations deployed over time. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), created in February 1992, retrospectively lists its first peacekeeping operation as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) (United Nations 2011c). This operation, established in 1948, consisted of unarmed military observers responsible for supervising and monitoring the Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbours (United Nations 2011f). In the 40 years of the Cold War that followed only 12 more peacekeeping operations were established (United Nations 2011d). Perhaps the most notable of these was the First United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) deployed to Egypt in 1956 following the Suez Canal Crisis.[1] It was not until the last years of the Cold War that peacekeeping became the prominent feature of the UN that it is today. Since 1988 51 peacekeeping operations have been deployed (United Nations 2011c). There are currently 14 peacekeeping operations in progress, spread over 4 continents (United Nations 2011a). Importantly, there has also been a significant increase in the range of tasks assigned to peacekeepers "in response to shifting patterns of conflict and to best address threats to international peace and security" (United Nations 2011e).

It is clear then that peacekeeping is not only a constantly evolving and developing area of UN responsibility but also rapidly increasing in demand. This not only reflects the success of past peacekeeping operations, but also the extremely important role peacekeepers play in the world today. Unfortunately, this rapid evolution and increasing demand has led to UN peacekeeping operations developing in an extremely *ad hoc* manner. This contributed to some of the UN peacekeeping's most infamous failures as peacekeepers were sent in to unclear operations ill-prepared and under-supported. To avoid this happening in the future, the UN must guide the growth of its peacekeeping operations to ensure that its development happens in the most beneficial way possible. It is therefore vital that the UN learns from the mistakes of the past and determines the key areas which are in the most drastic need of improvement.

In 2000 Kofi Annan convened a high-level panel to do just this. The resulting*Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, more commonly known as the *Brahimi Report*, outlined high-priority areas of reform and, as an analyst from the International Peace Institute described, has since become "conventional wisdom, if not outright gospel." (Smith, A 2009) That being said, several areas of reform recommended by the report have not yet been enacted. In 2009*,* the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Operations released a 'non-paper' entitled *A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping* . Released a decade after the landmark *Brahimi Report,* this 'non-paper' aimed to "further stimulate concrete and constructive discussions" on peacekeeping reform (United Nations 2009, p. ii). Due to their depth, insight and influence, these reports provide an excellent place to start any discussion concerning the reform of UN peacekeeping operations.

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One of the most common areas of reform targeted by critics of UN peacekeeping and discussed in depth in both the *Brahimi Report* and the *New Horizon* document is the Security Council mandates used to authorize peacekeeping operations. Mandates provide the legal basis of UN peacekeeping operations, drawing their authority from Chapters XI, XII, and XIII of the UN Charter and various Security Council Resolutions (notably 1325, 1612 and 1674) (United Nations 2011e). They are crafted by the Security Council to reflect "the nature of the conflict and the specific challenges it presents" (United Nations 2011e). Peacekeepers on the ground can only act according to what is explicitly written in their operation's mandate, thus well crafted mandates are essential to any successful operation. There is little doubt that poorly crafted mandates have played a large part in some of the UN's most infamous peacekeeping failures. For example, Brian Urquhart argues that "muddled mandates" were responsible for the catastrophic failures of the operations in Bosnia and Somalia (Urquhart 1998, p. 7).

The *Brahimi Report* condemned the ambiguity that had come to characterize Security Council mandates and called on the Security Council to ensure "clear, credible and achievable mandates" in the future (United Nations 2000, p. 10). The report noted that ambiguity, a result of political compromise, "can have serious consequences in the field" and urged the Security Council to refrain from mandating ambiguous operations, "[r]ather than send an operation into danger with unclear instructions" (United Nations 2000, p. 10). Furthermore, the report found that mandates too often applied "best-case planning assumptions" and were therefore too ambiguous regarding the use of force. In response to this, the report argued that "mandates should specify an operation's authority to use force" (United Nations 2000, p. x). Generally, the report argued that "Security Council mandates…should reflect the clarity that peacekeeping operations require for unity of effort when they deploy into potentially dangerous situations." (United Nations 2000, p. x)

A decade later Security Council peacekeeping mandates still remain an area in need of reform. The *New Horizon* document reaffirms the points outlined in the *Brahimi Report* by declaring that "clear and achievable mandates are the foundation of an effective mission strategy" (United Nations 2009, p. 10). It also acknowledges that the Security Council has "worked to provide clearer and more precise direction" (United Nations 2009, p. 10). However, a decade later ambiguity is no longer the problem. Rather, perhaps due to a genuine desire to redress the problems outlined in the *Brahimi Report*, Security Council mandates have become too specific and unrealistically demanding. The *New Horizon* document cites the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where UN peacekeepers are mandated with over 45 specific tasks, as being a prime example of this. This over specificity "can obscure the overall objectives that the Council expects peacekeepers to achieve" (United Nations 2009, p. 10).

That the Security Council has been unable to craft 'perfect' mandates is clear. That these imperfect mandates have been a source of much trouble for UN peacekeeping is also clear. However, in terms of institutional reform aimed at increasing the effectiveness of peacekeeping, the Security Council may not be the best place to start. It is important to acknowledge the political nature of the Security Council. As David Bosco (2009, p. 3) notes, "the Council is a creature of great-power politics, not international bureaucracy." This fundamental aspect of the Security Council not only makes reform a slow, tedious and ultimately unlikely process (see Kugel 2009), but also ensures that any mandate crafted by the Council will also be political in nature. Mandates "are political compromises made by member states, not technical calculations performed by experts" (Smith, A 2009). This is not to suggest that advice from experts is not incorporated at all, merely that the process is more political than technical. Simply put, the Security Council is not capable of creating ideal mandates and it is unlikely that it ever will be. However, as argued by a representative from Brazil in relation to this issue, "the absence of an ideal Security Council should not paralyse peacekeeping activities" (Gray 2001, p. 271). Recognising the systemic imperfections of the Security Council is essential and may be the first step towards increasing the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping. Mandates are political statements and as such provide international legitimacy and support. This is their core role. Although as the *Brahimi Report* highlighted they should not be too ambiguous and vague, they should also not be expected to provide detailed on the ground instruction and leadership.

No matter how much they can be reformed, the political nature of mandates means they will never be as capable of providing effective guidance as those on the ground. The leadership and command structures of UN peacekeeping operations should therefore become the main target of peacekeeping reform. After all, "absent the right leadership in the field, a good or bad mandate is irrelevant" (Smith 2009). Unfortunately, UN peacekeeping operations do not have

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a good track record of strong leadership in the field. The need for institutional reform in this area has been made clear time and time again. Bellamy and Williams (2010, p. 273) site UN operations in Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, the Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia as all being adversely affected by "[t]he lack of strong institutional command and control capabilities" (Bellamy & Williams 2010, p. 273). Even the most infamous cases of misconduct, such as the sexual assault of civilians by peacekeepers in the Congo, have been identified as being the result of poor command structures and the absence of "clear lines of responsibility" on the ground (Broinowski & Wilkinson 2005, p. 47). A recent report by the International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations found that "highly effective leadership… is arguably the single most important factor for the success of all peacekeeping operations" (IFCPO 2010, p. 15). Since strong leadership and clear command structures are so obviously vital to a successful peacekeeping mission, it is important that the current command structures of UN peacekeeping operations are assessed to determine where reform could best be implemented. To do this we must examine the process through which UN peacekeeping operations are established.

Providing a systematic explanation of the establishment of a peacekeeping operation is challenging. Operations vary greatly in the way they are set-up depending on a variety of factors, the most important of which is political will. Thus, as UN peacekeeping's guiding *Capstone Doctrine* states, "[i]n reality, there is no set sequence of events for establishing a United Nations peacekeeping operation" (United Nations 2008b, p. 63). This lack of consistency and structure is in itself arguably problematic. Generally, however, the following steps are taken in the establishment of an operation. Once the Security Council has provided a mandate for an operation the Secretary-General is responsible for choosing the Head of Mission to oversee the operation. The Head of Mission is usually a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (United Nations 2011b). The Secretary-General must also select a Force Commander and request Member States to contribute peacekeeping troops. Civilian support staff are also required and provided by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support. Additional civilian staff may also be recruited and deployed by the Secretariat (United Nations 2011b). Often other agencies, such as the UNHCR, UNICEF and the WFP, are also involved. These agencies provide their own personnel (Bellamy & Williams 2010, p. 271). On top of this, there may also be non-UN actors involved. These may include non-UN military formations from national or regional delegations, diplomatic and/or political actors, and NGOs such as the ICRC (United Nations 2008b).

The sheer number of independent actors involved in the establishment of a mission provides some indication of the difficulties of leadership and command in UN peacekeeping operations. As noted by Bellamy and Williams (2010, p. 271), the relationship between each of these actors "is often ambiguous…[and] can create practical problems with regard to command and control". The Head of Mission (HoM) is the highest official of any operation and, through the Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, reports to the Secretary-General and Security Council. The HoM exercises "operational authority" over all of the missions activities. The Force Commander (FC), has "operational control" over the military aspect of the mission (United Nations 2008b, pp. 67-8). The FC is usually the head of a major troop contributing country. The HoM, FC and their deputies and staff form the 'Mission Leadership Team' (MLT). Military, Civilian, and Police units each report to their respective leaders who report to the MLT. Liaising between the UN operation and external actors is also the responsibility of the MLT. While this command structure may seem relatively straight forward in theory, on the ground it is not so clear.

Although the FC theoretically has operational control, any troops contributed to the operation by Member States at all times remain under the authority of their national Governments and operate under terms negotiated between their Government and the UN. They therefore generally act at the discretion of their highest ranking national officer (Bellamy & Williams 2010). Each national military contingent may regularly "communicate directly with their home state, adhere to their own rules of engagement and choose whether or not they will obey the FC" (Bellamy & Williams 2010, p. 273). The civilian aspect of the mission is faced by similar problems in that each agency involved is "led by its own personnel, is tasked seperately, and has different standard operating procedures" (Bellamy & Williams 2010, p. 271). Each military contingent and each civilian contingent, although theoretically under the command of the MLT, operate under their own system of leadership and command and follow their own procedures. The problem is further exacerbated by the huge operational differences between military and civilian components. As one report found, military and civilian units "represent significant cultural differences, not least from a professional perspective" (IFCPO 2010, p. 26). It is little wonder then that UN peacekeeping operations have been plagued with leadership issues in

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the past.

Overcoming these leadership issues must become a high priority area of reform for the UN. Although the writing of the *Capstone Doctrine* was in some ways an attempt to do this, it simply did not go far enough in order to be effective in the field. It may have cleared up any ambiguity in the theoretical command structure of peacekeeping operations, however as long as UN peacekeeping operations remain as splintered and segregated as they currently are, this kind of theoretical guidance is unlikely to ever be enough. To overcome the current leadership and command problems faced by UN peacekeeping operations, it is essential that there is both a reduction in the number of independent actors involved and a reduction in the autonomy of those that remain. In short, the UN must seek to overcome some of the negative consequences of its multilateral nature.

Despite being sometimes portrayed as an independent actor, the UN is and always will be a multifaceted, multilateral organisation. Indeed, the multilateral nature of UN peacekeeping is in may ways one of its strengths, especially in regards to the legitimacy and accountability of its operations (see Bellamy & Williams 2010). However, this does not mean that there are not reforms which could be implemented to overcome some of the negative consequences of UN's multilateral nature. One such reform would be the creation of a standing UN peacekeeping force. The creation of such a force, although by no means a simple or clear-cut solution, would reduce the number of actors and agendas involved in peacekeeping operations, thus providing the UN secretariat with more authority and control. In doing so, many if the leadership and command issues highlighted above could be overcome. Consequently, the creation of a standing UN peacekeeping force would likely result in an increase in both the efficiency and effectiveness of UN peacekeeping.

The creation of a standing UN peacekeeping force is certainly not a new idea. It has been debated in some form since the very beginning of the UN and was an idea favoured by the UN's first Secretary-General Trygve Lie (Bellamy & Williams 2010, p. 428). The Cold War stifled debate on the topic until the 1990s when several high-profile arguments for a standing force, notably from then Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992) and former Under-Secretary-General Brian Urquhart (1993), where put forward. It has since become a topic of much debate. Unfortunately, except for a few developments such as the establishment of SHIRBRIG in 1996 and the creation of the UN Standing Police Capacity in 2007, this debate has borne little fruit. It must be noted that proponents for the establishment of a standing force generally focus on the benefits it would have to peacekeeping issues such as the speed of deployment and the levels of professionalism and training of soldiers. These issues have not been discussed in this essay, however they are undoubtedly important areas of reform for UN peacekeeping. The benefits the creation of a standing army would have on the leadership, command and control structures of UN peacekeeping has often been overlooked. This is an area that deserves to be researched further.

The creation of a UN standing peacekeeping force, even with a limited capacity, could arguably be the most effective reform that the UN could make to its peacekeeping operations. Unfortunately, it remains unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future. UN member states have cited various reasons for their unwillingness to support reform of this kind. For example, a common argument from the US has been that it would be unconstitutional, and therefore illegal, to provide troops to such a force. There are however doubts about the authenticity of such claims (Longsworth 1995, p. 27). Whatever the reason cited, while member states remain unwilling to allow such a reform it will not occur. As Alison Giffen (2010) argues, "UN institutions and operations are a reflection of individual member states' political will to turn the rhetoric of human rights into reality." Thus, as General Sir Michael Rose (cited in Smith, MG 2008, p. 322) expressed, "the UN can only become effective in its principal role of peacekeeping if there is a will in the international community to make it so." Although political will may currently be lacking, the creation of a standing peacekeeping force remains a high-priority reform that should be seriously considered by the UN and its member states.

Since the first peacekeeping operation was deployed some sixty years ago, peacekeeping has developed to become one of the most important areas of UN responsibility. The rapid growth of UN peacekeeping has meant that this development has often happened in an *ad hoc* and relatively unguided manner. As a result mistakes and failures have occurred. It is therefore clear that the UN needs to implement some manner of reform, however the precise nature of this reform remains highly contested. This essay has examined two areas in need of reform, Security Council mandates and peacekeeping leadership and command structures. Whether because of a lack of clarity or

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too much specificity, Security Council mandates have been a cause of many of the problems that have plagued UN peacekeeping. However, the leadership and command structures of UN peacekeeping operations would be a more beneficial target of high-priority reforms. This could perhaps best be achieved by the creation of a standing UN peacekeeping force. Unfortunately, reform of this kind remains unlikely due to a lack of political will from the UN's member states. After all, it is the member states of the UN which determine its actions and ultimately any reform, no matter how important, is up to them.

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[1]   Due to the limited mandates and unarmed nature of the very first missions, many scholars argue that the UNEF I deployment was actually the true beginning of contemporary UN peacekeeping (Bellamy & Williams 2010, p. 271)

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Written by: Evan Ritli
Written at: The University of Melbourne
Written for: Prof. John Langmore
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About the author:

Evan Ritli is a Juris Doctor student at Monash Law School. He holds a Master of International Relations from the University of Melbourne, and a BA (Hons) in International Studies from RMIT University. His research interests include IR theory, International Law, Human Rights, Colonialism/Postcolonialism, and Religion.