

III. A year of reviews

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In 2015 United Nations peace operations were put under the microscope by several high-level reviews. In June, 15 years after the Brahimi Report, the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), which was established in October 2014 by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, produced its report: *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People*.¹ Over the summer the UN Secretariat worked on the Secretary-General's response and in September published the report entitled 'The future of United Nations Peace Operations: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations'.² These efforts to make UN peace operations fit for purpose culminated in the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping held during the General Assembly high-level week at the end of September, at which unprecedented pledges were made to support UN peace operations.

The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations

In over 100 pages and more than 100 recommendations, the HIPPO report called for change. Although it recognized the many improvements in the field of peace operations made over the past decade, HIPPO flagged a wide range of 'significant chronic challenges', most notably increasing demands on operations in the absence of sufficient resources, insufficient unity of effort among the different parts of the UN system, too much use of template answers and too little attention on tailoring solutions to support political processes and strategies, and too much focus on technical and military approaches over prevention and mediation.³

A call for change

To achieve the required change, HIPPO called for four 'essential shifts' to prepare peace operations for the challenges ahead. First, 'politics must drive

¹ United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, 'Identical letters dated 21 August 2000 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council', A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 Aug. 2000; United Nations, Secretary-General, 'Secretary-General appoints High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations', Press release, SG/SM/16301-SG/A/1521-PKO/451, 31 Oct. 2014; and United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, 'Identical letters dated 17 June 2015 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council', A/70/95-S/2015/446, 17 June 2015.

² United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, 'The future of United Nations peace operations: Implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations', Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/357-S/2015/682, 2 Sep. 2015.

³ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1), pp. 17–23.

the design and implementation of peace operations'. Current operations, such as the African Union (AU)/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) or the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), often seem to have been deployed without being embedded in a political strategy. HIPPO argued that politics should be at the centre of any peace operation. Second, 'the full spectrum of United Nations peace operations must be used more flexibly to respond to changing needs on the ground'. This is why HIPPO uses a broad definition of what constitutes a peace operation, beyond peacekeeping operations and special political missions:

a broad suite of tools managed by the United Nations Secretariat. Those instruments range from special envoys and mediators; political missions, including peacebuilding missions; regional preventive diplomacy offices; observation missions, including both ceasefire and electoral missions; to small, technical-specialist missions such as electoral support missions; multidisciplinary operations both large and small drawing on civilian, military and police personnel to support peace process implementation, and that have included even transitional authorities with governance functions; as well as advance missions for planning.⁴

Third, it called for a 'stronger, more inclusive peace and security partnership'. As the UN is not able and may not be the best positioned organization to take care of all peace operations, HIPPO emphasized the importance of partnerships with regional organizations. Finally, because peace operations have for too long been directed by the UN Secretariat and determined by international politics in the Security Council—which takes too little account of the needs of the local population, the 'recipients' of the peace—HIPPO stressed that UN peace operations must become 'more field-focused' and 'more people-centred'.⁵

In addition to these four essential shifts, HIPPO emphasized 'decisive and far-reaching change' in four core fields of UN peace operations. First, conflict prevention and mediation should return to centre stage. Second, because there are high expectations on the UN to protect civilians, the capabilities to do so should be brought in line with these expectations. However, the tensions that can arise between the protection of civilians and supporting political solutions, and potential short-term and long-term trade-offs, were not dealt with.⁶ Third, many of the more recently established operations are active in hostile environments, and more clarity should be provided

⁴ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1), p. 20. The HIPPO definition of UN peace operations is broader than the SIPRI definition of multilateral peace operations, which includes peacekeeping operations and most special political missions but excludes e.g. envoys and election monitoring missions. This makes the HIPPO definition less clear about what does not constitute a peace operation, and many of these tools are also implemented by e.g. individual countries.

⁵ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1), pp. 24, 26–30.

⁶ Gorur, A. and Sharland, L., *Prioritizing the Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations: Analyzing the Recommendations of the HIPPO Report* (Stimson Center: Washington, DC, 2016).

on when, how and under what conditions they can use force. Finally, more attention should be given to sustaining peace through, among other things, strengthening inclusive economic growth, wider community involvement and women's participation.⁷ HIPPO also made more detailed recommendations on partnerships, the use of force and a number of technical or institutional improvements.

Partnerships

HIPPO put major emphasis on the need for the UN to strengthen its cooperation and coordination with regional organizations. The UN is unable to act as a global police force in every conflict—a role that would anyway be seen by some as external interference. Therefore, HIPPO calls for a 'global-regional partnership for peace and security' in which the UN Security Council can 'call upon a more resilient and capable network of actors in response to future threats'.⁸

The idea of peace operation partnerships is not new. Chapter VIII of the UN Charter has a similar vision for the relationship between the UN and regional organizations. The Prodi Report echoed the Charter with its call to strengthen global and regional partnerships.⁹ Governments in general like to work through regional organizations as they feel they have more influence and control over operations in a regional context. This feeling is particularly strong in Africa, where African ownership has been embraced not only by African leaders who hope to be in the driving seat, but also by non-African governments which hope, among other things, in the absence of interests, that they do not have to deal with problems on the continent. Consequently, cooperation between the UN, the European Union (EU) and the AU has greatly improved in recent years. It should also come as no surprise that the AU in particular embraced HIPPO's call to strengthen the UN–AU strategic partnership and 'on a case-by-case basis provide enabling support, including through more predictable financing, to African Union peace support operations when authorized by the Security Council, even as the African Union builds its own capacity and resources for that purpose'.¹⁰

Although partnerships in Africa are likely to be the way forward, obstacles remain. Two further UN reports were published in 2015: on 'transitions from the AU to the UN' and on 'partnership peacekeeping'.¹¹ AU–UN cooperation

⁷ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1), pp. 24–26.

⁸ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1), pp. 14, 28–29.

⁹ United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, 'Identical letters dated 24 December 2008 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council', A/63/666-S/2008/813, 31 Dec. 2008.

¹⁰ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1), p. 14; and Peace and Security Council, 532nd meeting, Press Statement PSC/PR/BR.(DXXXII), 10 Aug. 2015.

¹¹ United Nations, Secretary-General, 'Letter dated 2 January 2015 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council', S/2015/3, 5 Jan. 2015; and United Nations,

has led to frequent operational problems and financial challenges due to the different organizational cultures and bureaucratic constraints.¹² According to one analyst, cooperation in the hybrid AU/UN UNAMID set-up is ‘producing more “lessons learned” than “best practices”’.¹³ The transition from the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) also showed that the bridging operation approach will face many challenges.¹⁴

The use of force

One of the reasons why HIPPO was established was to find solutions to the challenges many UN peace operations face when: (a) there is ‘no peace to keep’ or political process to support; (b) it is unclear who the parties to the conflict are; and (c) peacekeepers face asymmetric and unconventional threats.¹⁵ This was a challenging assignment and it is therefore not surprising that HIPPO was unable to provide complete solutions.

HIPPO was very clear in its recommendation that ‘United Nations troops should not undertake military counter-terrorism operations’.¹⁶ However, this did not take into account that UN peace operations can be the victims of terrorist acts, for example, the bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad; may well face more asymmetric attacks in potential future deployments to Libya, Syria and Yemen; and are sometimes pulled into supporting military counterterrorism operations, for example, when MINUSMA provided security backup and medical support at the site of the Radisson Blue Hotel siege in Mali in November 2015.¹⁷

HIPPO was less clear about the use of force in other cases. It was reluctant to support operations such as the Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which is mandated to ‘degrade, neutral-

Secretary-General, ‘Partnering for Peace: Moving towards partnership peacekeeping’, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2015/229, 1 Apr. 2015.

¹² Williams, P. D. and Boutellis, A., ‘Partnership peacekeeping: Challenges and opportunities in the United Nations-African Union relationship’, *African Affairs*, vol. 113, no. 451 (Apr. 2014), pp. 254–78.

¹³ Fleshman, M., ‘Darfur: An experiment in African peacekeeping, is African Union–UN hybrid a model for the future?’, *Africa Renewal* (Dec. 2010), p. 219.

¹⁴ ‘Extract from MINUSMA report: Review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali by the Office for the Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership’, [n.d.]; and Avezov, X., ‘The new geopolitics of peace operations II: A dialogue with Sahel-Saharan Africa’, Bamako, 16–18 Nov. 2015, SIPRI Workshop Report, 2015.

¹⁵ United Nations, Security Council, 7196th meeting, S/PV.7196, 11 June 2014; and United Nations, Secretary-General, ‘Secretary-General appoints High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations’, Press release, SG/SM/16301-SG/A/1521-PKO/451, 31 Oct. 2014.

¹⁶ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1), pp. 24–26.

¹⁷ Della-Giacoma, J., ‘The UN panel on peace operations: Getting the politics right’, *Global Peace Operations Review*, 19 June 2015; and United Nations, ‘Mali: UN condemns “horrific” terrorist attack on hotel in Bamako’, UN News Centre, 20 Nov. 2015.

ize or defeat a designated enemy'. It cautioned that such mandates should be given only in exceptional cases, for a limited period and 'with full awareness of the risks and responsibilities for the United Nations mission as a whole'. UN peacekeeping operations deployed in parallel with a force engaged in offensive combat operations were also advised to maintain a clear division of labour and distinct roles.¹⁸

These recommendations are meant to placate those troop contributing countries that fear for the safety of their peacekeepers and those which hold on to the principles of peacekeeping—consent of the parties, impartiality and the non-use of force. However, the operations established over the past decade have generally been deployed to ongoing conflicts—particularly the Force Intervention Brigade, MINUSMA and MINUSCA—and indicate that for the UN Security Council, stabilization is more the rule than an exception. Hence, there is a need not only to caution against, but also anticipate how to undertake stabilization missions.¹⁹

Unfortunately, the formulations in HIPPO are similar to the formula used by the Security Council to overcome its internal disagreements over the mandates of the Force Intervention Brigade and MINUSCA: 'on an exceptional basis and without creating a precedent and without prejudice to the agreed principles of peacekeeping operations'.²⁰ The principles remain the rule, but there are exceptions in a growing number of cases, and increasingly the exceptions become the rule. Consequently, the need to further develop strategies for dealing with the 'exceptions to the rule' has only become more urgent.

Technical solutions

Perhaps the largest contribution of the HIPPO report is that the panel members, who are all insiders in the UN system, were able to highlight a set of technical and institutional recommendations that need to and can be implemented within the UN system.

Among the recommendations, HIPPO suggested ways to improve planning, establish a strategic analysis and planning capacity, and apply a two-stage mandating process in which the UN Secretary-General must prioritize tasks and stimulate better access to expert analysis and research. It endorsed the new strategic force generation approach, which it hoped would be better resourced and supported by stronger political efforts. It also focused attention on the fact that many policies already exist and simply need to be put into practice, such as improving the selection, preparation

¹⁸ United Nations, 17 June 2105 (note 1), pp. 24–26.

¹⁹ Muggah, R., 'The United Nations turns to stabilization', Global Observatory, 5 Dec. 2014.

²⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2149, 10 Apr. 2014; and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2098, 28 Mar. 2013.

and accountability of senior mission leaders, and appointing more women to senior leadership positions. Similarly, it underlined that because so many operations are deployed in insecure environments, ensuring that safety, security and crisis management systems as well as medical standards are at agreed levels is vital.²¹

HIPPO favoured more results-oriented budget preparation and oversight, and innovations in delivering mandates, through programmatic funding. As special political missions struggle due to insufficient funding and backstopping arrangements, HIPPO proposed a single ‘peace operations account’ to finance all peace operations and their related activities in future—as suggested by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in 2011.²²

It also highlighted a number of frustrations commonly heard from staff in the field, such as the need to enhance communication with both international audiences and host nations; to provide all the available technologies in the field to support missions; and to modernize and make UN administrative procedures more field-focused, particularly within human resources.²³

Reviewing the review

The HIPPO’s call for ‘essential shifts’ and ‘decisive and far-reaching changes’ sounds more revolutionary than it is in practice. Some analysts criticized it for being ‘technocratic’, others for missing ‘a compelling narrative that would persuade Member States to re-commit to peace operations with a passion’.²⁴ The Brahimi Report was frequently referred to as a landmark document that was much more revolutionary.²⁵ However, some analysts have called the HIPPO report ‘incisive and pragmatic’, believing that:

The report combines sound analysis of the current problems of peacekeeping with a comprehensive package of specific recommendations . . . In contrast to most prior UN reports, however, the panelists acknowledge that the main problems of peace operations lie with the political and budgetary jockeying of member states. . . . The panelists don’t shy from recognizing the ‘root causes’ of the issues at hand, and governments from Washington to Khartoum to New Delhi are bound to find something to dislike. . . . But it remains a good starting point—if UN member states adopt even half of its recommendations.²⁶

²¹ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1).

²² United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1).

²³ United Nations, 17 June 2015 (note 1).

²⁴ Della-Giacoma (note 17); and Einsiedel, J. von and Chandran, R., *The High-level Panel and the Prospects for Reform of UN Peace Operations* (United Nations University, Centre for Policy Research: Tokyo, 2015).

²⁵ Della-Giacoma (note 17); and Nadin, P., ‘From Brahimi to Ramos-Horta: A 15-year peacekeeping quest’, *Pass Blue*, 23 June 2015.

²⁶ Nadin (note 25); and Call, C. T., ‘The good, the bad, and the sad of the High-Level Report on UN peace operations’, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 28 July 2015.

In fact, just as a number of the more ambitious recommendations in the Brahimi Report are still awaiting implementation, some of the HIPPO recommendations are also likely to prove too utopian. For example, the call to move beyond reactive peacekeeping missions and marshal all of the UN's tools in the struggle for peace is not new, and has been made since the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Nonetheless, politics, interests and sovereignty have persistently blocked any progress on the issue of prevention.²⁷ In addition, the need to have a standing peace operation capacity can be traced back to Article 43 of the UN Charter, but it has never been implemented as the cost and issues of control have deterred member states. Even HIPPO's suggested rapid reaction 'vanguard' capability and rapidly deployable integrated headquarters for new missions—an 'intriguing concept', according to the UN Secretary-General—will probably be regarded as too ambitious.²⁸

The HIPPO's call to shift from consulting with local people to actively including and engaging them in the work of operations is crucial for many reasons. Awareness of the need for a more field-focused and people-centred approach also goes back to earlier reports, but has so far been impossible to implement in practice. Multilateral actors seem to need recognizable counterparts and generally find these in government officials and the military. They lack the organizational ability to work with civil society, women's groups and other non-state actors, which is a more complex constellation.²⁹ Indeed, although the report advocates a people-centred approach, its focus is yet again on bureaucratic institutional fixes.³⁰

Would a more revolutionary report lead to more effective change? The lessons from the failure to implement many of the recommendations of the Brahimi Report suggest not. It might have satisfied more critical commentators on peace operations, but it would probably also have led to more resistance among member states and within the UN bureaucracy. For this reason, HIPPO appears to have adopted a more incrementalist approach—a strategy that seemed to have worked when the AU Peace and Security Council expressed its appreciation of the report.³¹ In the General Assembly too, many of the countries that participated in the debate on the report endorsed it either in part or in its entirety.³² Whether this turns out to be lip-service or leads to genuine progress remains to be seen. Perhaps the best that can be

²⁷ Einsiedel and Chandran (note 24).

²⁸ United Nations (note 2), p. 90; and Einsiedel and Chandran (note 24).

²⁹ Van der Lijn, J., 'Imagi-nation building in Illusionstan: Afghanistan, where dilemmas become dogmas, and models are perceived to be reality', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 20, no. 2 (June 2013), pp. 173–88.

³⁰ Call (note 26).

³¹ Peace and Security Council, 532nd meeting, Press statement PSC/PR/BR.(DXXXII), 10 Aug. 2015.

³² United Nations, General Assembly, 29th plenary meeting, A/70/PV.29, New York, 12 Oct. 2015; and United Nations, General Assembly, 30th plenary meeting, A/70/PV.30, New York, 12 Oct. 2015.

hoped for is that the HIPPO report leads to a change in mindset at the UN and among the international community.³³

The UN Secretary-General's report

In his report on the implementation of the HIPPO recommendations, the UN Secretary-General focused on measures aimed at strengthening the capacities for prevention and mediation; reinforcing global-regional partnerships; tailoring peace operations; increasing the agility of field support; increasing the speed, capabilities and performance of the uniformed components of missions; addressing the safety and security of deployed personnel; and strengthening leadership and accountability.³⁴

In so doing the Secretary-General adopted the broad HIPPO definition of peace operations: the 'full spectrum' of all 'field-based peace and security operations mandated or endorsed by the Security Council and/or the General Assembly', ranging from special envoys, to special political missions to peacekeeping operations. Like HIPPO, he embraced the need for a holistic approach combined with an understanding that the different instruments used in operations need to be tailored and appropriate to specific contexts. The Secretary-General also placed the political process at the centre of peace operations, and hopes to refocus on prevention and mediation, and to further strengthen regional partnerships. In addition, he accepted most of the recommendations related to planning and analysis.³⁵

The Secretary-General touched on all the proposed shifts and changes, but the call to pay more attention to sustaining peace and changing the mindset that a peace process does not end with a ceasefire or elections was largely ignored. This important HIPPO insight has been subsumed into strengthening the capacities for prevention, and in particular strengthening the capacities of the UN country teams. Thus, the increased role for civil society and women advocated by HIPPO largely disappears from the Secretary-General's report, and he only flags a 'people-focused' approach in his conclusions.³⁶ Furthermore, he pays little attention to the use of force. Beyond protecting civilians, like HIPPO, the Secretary-General makes little progress on how operations that are active in more hostile environments might receive more clarity on when, how and under what conditions they should use force. He only states that:

³³ Boutellis, A., 'From HIPPO to SG legacy: What prospects for UN peace operations reform?', Global Observatory, 24 Sep. 2015.

³⁴ United Nations (note 2).

³⁵ United Nations (note 2).

³⁶ United Nations (note 2), p. 27.

a United Nations peace operation is not designed or equipped to impose political solutions through sustained use of force. It does not pursue military victory. As the Panel rightly recognizes, United Nations peace operations are not the appropriate tool for military counter-terrorism operations. They do deploy in violent and asymmetric threat environments, however, and must be capable of operating effectively and as safely as possible therein.³⁷

Finally, the Secretary-General ignored a number of the more technical HIPPO recommendations, such as the creation of a Deputy Secretary-General position responsible for peace and security, or the creation of a single 'peace operations account' to finance all peace operations and their related back-stopping activities in the future.

The Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping

Following the HIPPO report and the Secretary-General's report, the Leader's Summit on Peacekeeping was held on 28 September at the UN Headquarters in New York. In 2014 a similar event was convened by US Vice-President Joe Biden, leading to pledges to support UN peace operations from 31 member states. However, 2015's summit, convened by US President Barack Obama, saw much higher-level participants and pledges from 49 member states and 3 regional organizations. These pledges were more than expected, totalling more than 40 000 troops and police, almost 40 utility and attack helicopters and 12 field hospitals.³⁸

Nonetheless, pledges are not contributions—and countries need to follow through on them and not hide behind caveats.³⁹ The UN also needs to be able to absorb all the pledges, with some capability gaps being easier to fill than others. Thus, only time will tell how successful the summit really was in terms of force generation.

However, the summit was also important for a second reason: to potentially strengthen and further endorse the findings of the HIPPO report. The summit's declaration made reference to a range of the more technical HIPPO recommendations, including improving human resource management and procurement practices, and enabling missions to deploy 'more quickly, effectively and flexibly'. The importance of intelligence capabilities was stressed as a way to ensure the safety of UN personnel. It also endorsed more merit-based selection of capable and accountable leadership and further increasing the effectiveness of the UN bureaucracy.⁴⁰

³⁷ United Nations (note 2), pp. 4–5.

³⁸ For an overview of the pledges see United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Leaders' summit, 2015', [n.d.].

³⁹ Kromah, L. M., 'Hopes high for new capacities after Obama's peacekeeping summit', Global Observatory, 5 Oct. 2015.

⁴⁰ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'Declaration of Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping', Press release, 28 Sep. 2015.

While the Secretary-General had given less attention to incorporating a gender perspective into UN operations, the summit's declaration reinforced the need for this. It stressed proper conduct by UN peace operation personnel and the UN's 'zero tolerance' of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as the protection of civilians, including through the use of force consistent with an operation's mandate and rules of engagement. The safety and security of UN peace operation personnel remained high on the agenda.⁴¹ The fact that the protection of civilians and the safety of UN personnel were combined almost in a single breath is particularly notable, because when the former fails it is often due to the prioritization of the latter.

With regard to the HIPPO report, the summit's declaration particularly stressed the critical role of partnerships and cooperation between the UN and regional organizations; the notion that peace operations are essentially a means for supporting sustainable political solutions to armed conflicts; and the importance of conflict prevention and mediation, including through the use of good offices and special political missions.⁴²

Conclusions

That neither the UN member states nor the Secretary-General took the opportunity to combine the processes of the HIPPO, the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review and the Global Study on Resolution 1325 to create a joint process for the implementation of the recommendations of these processes was a missed opportunity. In the absence of a formal process, it remains to be seen how much will really happen. The Secretary-General is approaching the end of his term, so a lot will depend on the willingness of his successor to implement many of the reforms, and on the interested member states to keep the implementation process and the spirit of HIPPO alive.

There is likely to be resistance from within the UN bureaucracy and, on some issues, from a number of member states. Moreover, the reforms will need to be financed or will require the restructuring of current financing and resources. If the relationship between the troop contributing countries and the police contributing countries, on the one hand, and the finance contributing countries, on the other, does not improve, and the former are not given more influence while at the same time being held more accountable, reform is unlikely to succeed.⁴³ While there are many reasons not to be overly optimistic, some analysts are hopeful that the review might increase

⁴¹ The White House (note 40).

⁴² The White House (note 40).

⁴³ Abilova, O., *The Future of Peace Operations: Maintaining Momentum* (International Peace Institute: Vienna, Nov. 2015), p. 2.

the effectiveness of peace operations.⁴⁴ If it does, it will be as part of a larger process in which it delivers the next step forward in a long process.

⁴⁴ Ilitchev, A., 'Implementing the HIPPO report: Sustaining peace as a new imperative?', Challenges Forum Policy Brief no. 5 (2015), <http://www.challengesforum.org/PageFiles/8243/Policy%20Brief%202015_5_WEBB.pdf>.