

3. Peace operations and conflict management

Overview

On the surface, little changed in 2018. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Mission in Iraq (NMI) was the only new multilateral peace operation established and only two closed—the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Preventive Mission in the Kingdom of Lesotho (SAPMIL). At 60, the number of multilateral peace operations active in 2018 was the lowest since 2013. UNMIL's closure deserves particular attention as it is an example of a relatively successful large-scale UN peace operation. The number of personnel serving in multilateral peace operations did not change much either in 2018, decreasing by just 0.8 per cent to 144 791 by the end of the year. This was the third year in a row in which personnel deployments fell. Although there has been a slow downward trend, particularly in the numbers of personnel deployed in recent years, this trend appeared to stabilize in 2018.

The bigger changes are beneath the surface. The number of personnel serving in UN peace operations peaked at almost 115 000 in April 2015, but has decreased significantly in the past three years. The reduction in 2018 is relatively small with 2.9 per cent in 2018. The number of personnel in UN peace operations declined to 95 488—the lowest level in the period 2009–18. At the same time, however, the number of personnel serving in non-UN multilateral peace operations—led by regional organizations and alliances or by ad hoc coalitions of states—increased by 3.7 per cent to 49 303. NATO accounted for most of this increase by reinforcing the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan. In addition, in 2018 the total number of peace operation's personnel deployments in Africa fell for the third consecutive year, this time by 1.9 per cent, to the lowest level in five years, of 104 238 personnel. Although still around 66 per cent of all personnel in peace operations are deployed in UN peace operations and some 72 per cent of all personnel in peace operations are in Africa, a trend appears to be developing away from the UN and away from Africa.

The explanation lies primarily in the continuing negative atmosphere surrounding UN peace operations, their budgets and their fatalities, as well as in the increasing belief in militarized solutions. However, as the reduction in the UN peacekeeping budget came to a near halt, it appears that many of the cuts sought by the administration of US President Donald J. Trump have not yet materialized. The budget decreased from \$7.9 billion in 2016–17 to \$6.7 billion in 2018–19, mainly as a result of the closure of missions that were already scheduled to drawdown, rather than new approaches or increased

efficiency. However, further reductions can still be foreseen following the closure of the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID and the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), if no new missions are established.

In 2018, fatalities in UN peace operations linked to malicious acts decreased sharply in comparison to 2017. The figure of 27 hostile deaths was less than half the number in 2017 and the lowest since 2012. However, 2017 was an extreme year and the number of personnel deployed has also declined. The annual ratio of hostile deaths in 2018 was back to 2013–16 levels. Moreover, it is worrying that, while conditions in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) clearly improved, the number of deaths remained relatively high in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and MONUSCO.

The Trump administration is only partly responsible for the increasing belief in militarized solutions. The trend for there to be an increased emphasis on European Union and NATO training and mentoring missions—such as the NMI and the RSM—aimed at enabling local forces, and on regional coalition-based multilateral non-peace operations—such as the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (JF-G5S) and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram—began before 2018. While UN peace operations clearly have their challenges, whether training national forces and setting up multilateral non-peace operations to fight insurgents and ‘terrorists’ will be productive remains to be seen. Currently, the situation in the Sahel region is only destabilizing further, the JF-G5S and the MNJTF have come under sustained attack and national forces have been implicated in serious human rights abuses.

In the meantime, the UN is continuing its ‘peacekeeping reform’. The UN secretariat in addition to working on the implementation of the recommendations of the Cruz Report on reducing hostile deaths, has started strategic reviews of operations focused on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, and also implemented reforms of the UN’s peace and security architecture on 1 January 2019. In the context of the Secretary-General’s Action for Peace (A4P), UN member states and other partners and stakeholders have joined in, culminating in the ‘Declaration of Shared Commitments’ on topics such as the protection of civilians, safety and security, and performance and accountability.

While the UN secretariat is fighting back with reforms to keep UN peace operations relevant, the challenges associated with training and mentoring missions and multilateral non-peace operations remain significant. For now, it is still too early to tell what will become of UN peace operations and whether other types of missions will become a serious alternative tool in the hands of the international community for enhancing international peace and security.