

Building Bridges for Success: Rethinking Peace Operations Training for Complex Environments

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Summary

Witnessing the changes in armed conflict since the 1990s, several global political-level agendas have emerged, recognizing the growing human suffering from armed conflict and the long-term consequences on societies. These high-level agendas, such as Protection of Civilians (POC), Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and Children in Armed Conflict (CAAC), address crucial issues that fall under a broader human security approach, and are to be addressed by peace operations. As such, they have at an increasing rate been included in strategic level doctrine and policy. The three global UN peace and security reviews published in 2015 stress the need for a shift to more people-centered, inclusive processes, establishing better context awareness, and investing in cooperation with external counterparts significantly. If peace operations are to remain relevant and effective in achieving international peace and security, this needs to be taken into account. This shift within peace operations requires that the preparation and training of peacekeepers follow suit in order to meet the challenges faced in increasingly complex environments. This policy brief therefore advocates for the adoption of an integrated approach to peace operations training, putting greater emphasis on comprehensive, people-centered approaches and contextual analysis.

Introduction

As a global upholder and enforcer of peace and security, the UN Security Council endorsed three global reviews¹ in 2015 to evaluate the state of the peace and security pillar of the UN and make recommendations as to the way forward. The reviews of UN peace operations (also known as the HIPPO report); the UN Peacebuilding Architecture; and the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, all emphasize that the changing nature of conflict necessitates a revision of UN instruments if they are to remain relevant and capable of facing modern-time challenges. The global

reviews put forward common themes that need addressing, including the shift towards people-centered, inclusive processes, better context awareness, partnerships with external counterparts and a call for stronger UN system coherence. Considering the global state of affairs, including the themes and required responses identified in the reviews, what are the implications for peace operations training?

The Changing Nature of Conflict: Increased Targeting of Civilians in a Global Protection Crisis

Since the end of the 20th century the character of armed conflict has shifted from inter-state to intra-state and transnational warfare. The consequences for civilian populations have changed accordingly.² The 2017 report of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians³ found that armed conflict has become gradually more urbanized while increasingly targeting civilians. An estimated 50 million civilians were affected by urban battles in 2016 alone.⁴ In recent years, intense battles have taken place in densely populated urban areas such as Aleppo in Syria, Falluja and Mosul in Iraq, Juba in South Sudan, Goma in DR Congo, Bangui in the Central African Republic, Sirte in Libya and Ta'izz in Yemen. Urban warfare entails greater risk of civilian death, injury and displacement, damage to civilian property and essential infrastructure, because of high population density and the close proximity between civilians and military objectives.

Parties to conflicts frequently launch indiscriminate attacks or fail to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian harm by using heavy artillery, aerial bombardment and improvised explosive devices in urban centers. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, civilians account for over 90% of reported deaths and injuries.⁵ These weapons leave explosive remnants of war, which poses a continuing lethal threat to civilians, especially children, and represents a major obstacle to reconstruction efforts and the return of displaced persons. When urban centers become battlefields, large numbers of

civilians inevitably become unintentional or intentional targets.⁶ The deliberate destruction and occupation of schools, hospitals and places of worship exposes already vulnerable groups to further risk by violating sanctuaries that play vital protection roles.

Civilians also suffer from the impact of reduced humanitarian access. This can result from violence and threatened or actual attacks against humanitarian personnel as well as the politicization of humanitarian action. A record number of people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance and protection because of the myriad hostilities perpetrated against civilians - killing, torture, sexual violence, enslavement, abduction, forced recruitment and forced displacement. Over 65 million people were displaced by conflict, violence or persecution at the end of 2016,⁷ and 97% of humanitarian assistance goes to complex emergencies, the majority of which involve armed conflict.⁸ However, the UN was only able to deliver assistance to approximately 20% of people in besieged areas and less than 10% of people in hard-to-reach areas because of constraints imposed by parties to armed conflicts.⁹ These challenges have created what the UN Secretary-General described as a “global protection crisis”.¹⁰

Peace Operations and Human Security

The changing dynamics of conflict and the threats observed today have led to an increased protection focus in peace operations. The 9 largest out of 15 peace operations established today all have specific POC mandates, with these missions accounting for 95% of all peacekeepers currently deployed.¹¹ Strengthened by the high-level agendas on POC, WPS, and CAAC, crucial issues that fall under a broader human security approach are to be addressed by peace operations. Knowing that privileging military responses to violent conflict is counterproductive, mandates today include a strong emphasis on the essential political dimension of achieving sustainable peace. Key elements of this emphasis are support for proper democratic processes, stabilization and human rights.

The forms of violence observed in armed conflict today call for a shift in thinking about how peace operations can effectively protect civilians and provide human security. Threat analysis must identify key threats to civilians to inform decision about appropriate and effective counter-measures and mitigation strategies. These analyses must take into account the capabilities of armed groups, the availability of small arms and the poor regulation of arms and ammunition transfers, all of which function as conflict enablers and pose a threat to civilian populations. Today's armed conflicts are fought using weapons such as machetes, AK-47s and suicide bombs, all of which have contributed to civilian massacres across the globe. Furthermore, a form of violence that does not necessarily require any other weapon than the human being itself is Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV). CRSV is increasingly used as a tactic of war and terror, with numerous documented cases in countries such as Syria, Iraq, DR Congo and South Sudan.

This increasingly complex protection crisis has generated unsustainable and unacceptable levels of human suffering. Crimes against civilians are often met with impunity, allowing the perpetrators to re-offend and ensuring that violence continues to flourish. Mandated to protect civilians, peace operations should adopt comprehensive, people-centered approaches to prevent violence and create safe environments.

Complex Environments: Understanding the Context

All three 2015 peace and security reviews noted that peace operations personnel need to better understand the contexts in which they operate to effectively address the challenges encountered in mission areas. This calls for a shift from government-based, exclusive approaches to inclusive, community-based approaches that draw on the experiences of women, youth and minorities. This will ensure efforts to promote peace and security take shape around existing stabilization mechanisms and cultural norms. Engaging with multiple actors will increase local ownership of the peace process.

Analyses of peace operations demonstrate the inappropriateness of a one-size-fits-all approach. Each mission area is unique and calls for dedicated and sustained analysis by mission staff to inform decisions about points of engagement. These analytical efforts should be dynamic, keeping pace with cultural and other changes and avoiding oversimplification or stereotyping – mistakes that carry a risk of doing more harm than good. Mission personnel should seek to obtain comprehensive information about all relevant actors, interests and conflict dynamics through consultation at all levels of society as well as regular situational assessments. This will give them a holistic understanding of the operating environment and enhance their ability to identify, and respond effectively to, changes in the operating environment.

This consultative approach will help to counter the perception that peace operations are not established solely for the benefit of recipient societies and, potentially, strengthen people's trust in mission personnel.¹² This will improve information gathering efforts and the mission's understanding of the drivers of conflict, enhancing violence prevention and response mechanisms and assisting in the identification of sustainable solutions.

Integrated Approaches: Human Security as an Interlinked Chain

Peace operations can be viewed as one link in a chain of protection actors responsible for providing human security in the mission area. Other actors include the host nation, which may be unable or unwilling to protect its population despite having primary responsibility for this; the UN Country Team; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); and civil society groups (see figure 1). To be successful, all of these actors need to work effectively together. A lack of cooperation will undermine the broad overarching goal to protect civilians.

In practical terms, this means the military, police and civilian components of a peace operation must adopt a comprehensive approach to protection issues. In addition to that, strong coordination and cooperation is required with external counterparts, such as the host nation, the UN Country Team and NGOs. Their different and mutually supporting roles in preventing and responding to CRSV incidents is one case in point. Effective CRSV responses for instance call for immediate action by military, law enforcement, and medical personnel, and later action by psychosocial, judicial and reconciliation actors. As such, a better understanding of the unique role and responsibility of each of these protection actors is needed in order to address protection issues in complex environments. These actors complement, support and depend on each other to achieve overarching protection goals, and a holistic and integrated approach will improve the effectiveness of each of these actors.

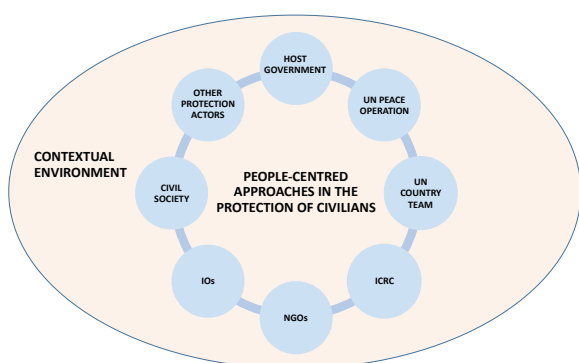


Figure 1: Interlinked chain of protection actors

Peace Operations Training: Recommendations to Prepare for Complex Environments

The 2015 UN global reviews recommended that peace operations adopt a people-centered approach with greater contextual understanding and mission-level cooperation to ensure their continued effectiveness in promoting international peace and security (see figure 2). This calls for a thorough revision of existing approaches to peace operations training and preparation.

For the most part, the human security-related agendas such as POC, WPS and CAAC, are covered in separate peace operations training initiatives, with the military, police and civilian components completing this training in isolation. Cross-cutting issues have been translated to operational and tactical levels in a vertical and piecemeal fashion, adding to the well-known challenges of silo approaches in mission areas. Such training methods encourage rather than address organizational misunderstandings, and are at odds with the emphasis on an integrated, comprehensive and people-centered approach to be taken by all components in peace operations.

Training initiatives consistent with the recommendations of the UN reviews would allow mission actors to identify commonalities across the POC, WPS and CAAC agendas, explore

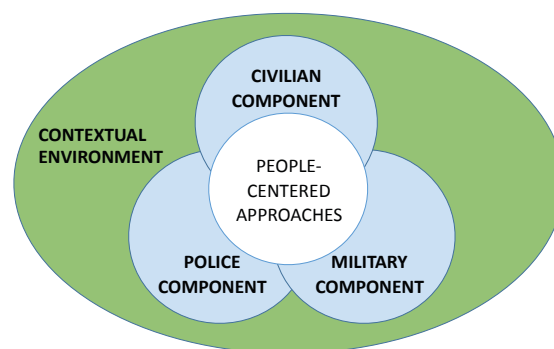


Figure 2: Comprehensive approach to complex environments in peace operations

practical and mutually agreeable implementation techniques and develop an understanding of the mission environment before arriving in the mission area. In addition to that, given the enormous task to promote peace and security in conflict areas and the limited resources available to peace operations, more needs to be done to equip peacekeepers with the tools to adopt comprehensive, integrated approaches. Training needs to shed further light on the practicalities of implementing these approaches in mission areas, both within peace operations as well as with external counterparts.

This type of training would require a multi-disciplinary approach, which draws on the knowledge and experience of a range of organizations, professions and training bodies. Applying this perspective would encourage building bridges between protection actors, assisting them in the practical implementation of human security efforts and promote the required dialogue between them. Such an approach would also help to bridge the gap between strategic guidance and implementation at the operational and tactical levels.

Furthermore, enhancing training focus on context analysis would better equip peacekeepers to collect and analyze data in more efficient and effective ways, increasing the chances to enhance human security through prevention. Cultural understanding is an essential component of this and will better enable peace operations to shift to people-centered approaches. However, moving towards people-centered approaches in peace operations requires a change of mindset and approach in which pedagogics will have to play a significant role, reassessing the way peace operations training is delivered as well as its outcome.

A number of UN, regional security and national peacekeeping training organizations have recently trialed training in this direction, and reported successful pilot phases. Developing these integrated initiatives further and strengthening their focus on comprehensive, people-centered approaches, would build bridges between protection actors and enhance mission protection efforts by establishing clear operating principles and communication channels. Preparing peacekeepers following this approach would support efforts to overcome the multiple challenges peace operations are confronted with in complex environments.

Conclusion

The changing nature of conflict and resulting threats to human security continuously force peace operations to rethink their mandates and approaches in mission areas. Impacting the preparation of peacekeepers for deployments, this has inescapable consequences for peace operations training content as well as delivery. Being mandated to address protection challenges in increasingly complex environments, requires that bridges are to be built and strengthened across the strategic, operational and tactical levels; across military, police and civilian components within peace operations; across peace operations and other protection actors in mission areas; and across protection actors and communities.

However, for the most part, peace operations training perpetuates the problems identified in the UN peace and security reviews. Mission actors continue to train separately and learn about cross-cutting issues in a disaggregated manner. This policy brief therefore advocates for the adoption of an integrated training approach for all protection actors focusing on contextual analysis, inclusivity and the centrality of people to effective human security. This would help to dismantle inter- and intra-organizational barriers and improve implementation of the POC, WPS and CAAC agendas in the mission area. This shift would contribute substantially to the effectiveness and continuing relevance of peace operations.

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