Protectionism within the Organization of United Nations Peacekeeping: Assessing the Disconnection between Headquarters and Mission Perspectives

by Joel Gwyn Winckler, Freie Universität Berlin

The aim of this article is to assess the disconnection between the United Nations (UN) headquarters and its peacekeeping missions by exploring the perspectives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York and the United Nations Mission in Liberia. It argues that even though there is a need for decentralization in the highly complex organizational setting of UN peacekeeping, it is aggravated by communication processes and behavior that protect the autonomy and interests of both headquarters and mission from internal interferences. The findings of this study indicate that internal protectionism leads to a diffusion of responsibilities and undermines the development and acceptance of common organizational goals. It concludes by proposing approaches on how to improve communication management in the organization of UN peacekeeping.

Introduction

There is a huge difference in the dynamic in New York and in the field. It is a difference in perspective and in the awareness on how processes and things work.[1]

The above description of an experienced official in the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) clearly points out a disconnection between UN headquarters in New York and the UN peacekeeping missions in the field. This observation is neither surprising nor a new revelation. Rather, it is a well-known issue debated by both academics and practitioners. Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 121–55), for example, analyze this gap reflecting on one of the biggest failures in the history of UN peacekeeping in 1994 in Rwanda. Their assessment of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) highlights how reports from the UN mission in Rwanda were received, interpreted, and turned into knowledge in New York, which in no circumstance reflected the reality lived by the UN personnel on the ground. As the statement above indicates, one does not have to look into the depths of the Rwandan genocide to observe this gap. Rather, it suggests that in such a highly complex organizational and political endeavor as UN peacekeeping, it is an organizational normality that staff and members of both UN headquarters and missions cope with on a daily basis (Winckler 2011).

The disconnection between UN headquarters (which in the case of peacekeeping is represented by DPKO and the Department of Field Support/DFS) and peacekeeping missions also seems obvious because of geographical facts. The realities on the ground and working environments (i.e., in an office in a skyscraper in New York or a post-war situation such as Liberia) could not differ more. However, the physical factors are not the only things creating the gap. UN peacekeeping is designed as a decentralized organization. DPKO is a

---

1. Interview with UNMIL official, Monrovia, 8 March 2011.

comparatively small head of an extremely large body of around sixteen peacekeeping missions, with a total of approximately twenty-two thousand civilian staff and ninety-eight thousand military and police (Trettin and Winckler 2012). DPKO does not and cannot conduct the day-to-day management of all peacekeeping missions.[2] This is formally expressed, for example, in the fact that the head of mission (HoM), who in most cases is a special representative of the secretary general (SRSG), is situated on the same hierarchical level as the head of DPKO (an under-secretary general). But it also points to the fact that DPKO and UN missions serve in different environments and require different means to achieve their goals. On the one hand, the mandated task of the mission is to support the host government and exist in the political environment of the post-war country. On the other hand, DPKO deals with the interests and political dynamics of the Security Council. These diverse challenges inevitably lead to different organizational perspectives.

Schlichte and Veit (2007) have pointed out that these perspectives (re)produce their own discourses on peacekeeping, which do not necessarily depend on each other or create joint solutions to problems. This article goes a step further, arguing that different perspectives also change the way organizational processes are managed locally through communication behavior. The organization of UN peacekeeping heavily depends on processing information and knowledge. Being a political organization with neither donor nor executive functions, information and knowledge are the central resources of power of UN peacekeeping, both at the headquarter and the mission level, enabling it to engage and shape politics either at the international level or in the national context of the post-war country (Benner et al. 2011, Barnett and Finnemore 2004). On all levels of the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy, authority over information also enables a certain autonomy and leverage to interact with local counterparts. The central argument of this article is that organizational actors in peacekeeping missions and headquarters protect this autonomy and influence it through their communicative behavior. These practices exist next to confidentiality regulations toward other organizations. They are located within the UN bureaucracy, aiming to control internal interferences in local decision-making processes by other organizational perspectives. This makes the interaction between headquarters and mission especially difficult, leads to confrontation, conflicts, misunderstandings, and dysfunctions. The communicative behavior of organizational actors on both sides significantly aggravates this disconnection between DPKO and the missions.

This article will explore the use of communication processes as internal protective behavior by conducting a qualitative empirical analysis of the different organizational perspectives of DPKO in New York and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).[3] The selection of UNMIL as a case study provides the advantage that it is generally observed as a successful, "well managed," peacekeeping mission.[4] This allows an analysis of the different organizational perspectives within the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy, which are not biased by a general perception of dysfunctional and flawed management. On this basis, the study generates a better understanding of day-to-day political life within the peacekeeping bureaucracy, providing insights on how different interests and programmatic outlines of international organizations, such as the UN, translate into micro dynamics on different levels of bureaucracy, and vice versa. Finally, it also produces important inputs for the further development of communication and information management of UN peacekeeping.

The analysis below is structured in two parts: The first will briefly recall the gap between DPKO and peacekeeping missions, describing the formal and informal communication channels between the two perspectives; the second step will analyze two perspectives of peacekeeping, namely the headquarter perspective of DPKO and the mission perspective of UNMIL.

---

2. Interview with UN official in DPKO, New York, 19 October 2012 and background discussion with former senior official in DPKO, Germany, 8 November 2012.

3. As this study focusses on the political and substantive dynamics of peacekeeping, it explicitly excludes an analysis of the support and administrative components of the peacekeeping bureaucracy.

4. Interview with UN official in DPKO, New York, 18 October 2010.

Disconnection between DPKO and Missions through Communication Channels

The observation that there is a disconnection between DPKO and the peacekeeping missions does not mean no information exchange exists. On the contrary, communication processes are essential, especially in terms of support from DPKO to the missions as well as a reference of the missions toward DPKO. However, according to staff members in DPKO and UNMIL, there are not a lot of regular, working-level contacts between mission and DPKO. Desk officers in New York who have been previously deployed in relevant field locations sometimes use informal contacts in the field to verify information. However, as informal interaction between the mission and DPKO is rare, desk officers and even directors in New York often only refer to their officially assigned contact persons, which are apportioned due to the hierarchical level of employment.[5] In Liberia, there are very few UNMIL officers who seek regular contact to New York for professional and substantial reasons, except if it comes to joint events, such as a visit of a DPKO senior manager to Liberia.[6]

There are, however, formal communication channels that cover the gap between headquarters and the mission. The three most important will be introduced hereafter.[7] First, there are the daily and weekly situation reports (SITREPS), which represent the organizational routine of the reporting line between the mission and DPKO. SITREPS are the first line of reference of the mission to DPKO and, therefore, progress through a rigorous vetting process within the mission. The second—and from the headquarter perspective perhaps the most important internal communication tool between the missions and headquarters—is the so-called "Code Cable." It is essential to note that a Code Cable is not a normal bureaucratic communication instrument. Rather, it is a means of diplomacy to issue politically motivated notices and is used in a very similar way between DPKO and the missions. Code Cables always have to be signed at the highest level by the USG (DPKO) or the HoM and thus are also addressed to the highest level. Finally, the reference document of the mission that is open to the public is the biannual *Report of the Secretary General* to the Security Council. These reports are highly elaborate diplomatic documents. They include aspects and passages of all mission components, whereas the coordination and finalization of the document is assigned to the Office of Operations (OO) in DPKO.

The most important observation here is formal communication lines are predominantly diplomatic in the sense that they usually have a political purpose. Thus, Code Cables, for example, are often a result of negotiations between both sides before being issued.[8] The reason for this might be that they bridge not only a gap in the formal organizational setting, but they also protect daily work activities on both sides. This will be analyzed, turning to the assessment of the two broad perspectives identified in the organization of UN peacekeeping, referring to the work in DPKO as the "headquarter perspective" and in UNMIL as the "mission perspective."

The empirical analysis is based on a field study conducted in New York and Liberia in September/October 2010 and February/March 2011, which produced a crosscutting insight into both DPKO and UNMIL through conducting interviews with UN professionals and directors as well as participant observation. The following analysis is explorative and basically follows two steps for both the headquarters and the mission perspective. The first is a general description of the organizational perspective and its actors, including a brief introduction of the organizational structure. The second step explores the communication processes within each organizational setting, generating an understanding of the communicative behavior within the separate organizational perspectives, as well as toward each other.

---

5. Interviews with UN officials in DPKO, New York, 15, 18 (see fn. 4), 19 (see fn. 2) and 22 October 2010.

6. Interviews with UNMIL officials in Monrovia, 3 (two interviews), 10 and 11 March 2011.

7. For more details see Winckler (2011: 94-96).

8. Background discussion with former senior UN official in a peacekeeping mission, Germany, 14 December 2011.

The Headquarters Perspective of DPKO

As illustrated in Figure 1, DPKO is structured in four pillars: the Office of Operations (OO), the Office of Rule and Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI), the Office of the Military Advisor (OMA), and the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division (PET). OO acts as the connection between the missions and the intergovernmental organs of the UN, such as the Security Council. It is structured in four divisions in which the world of peacekeeping is geographically divided. Every division incorporates so-called integrated operational teams (IOTs), which include not only civilian personnel but also a representative of the military, police, and support side. The second substantive pillar is OROLSI, which includes the police division, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform, and mine action. Third, OMA provides services to the mission and member states (such as generation of peacekeeping troops), as well as military advice to DPKO leadership. The fourth pillar is PET, which has a somewhat exceptional position in the structure of DPKO. Crosscutting all aspects of peacekeeping, especially its most important section, the Peacekeeping Best-Practice Section (PBPS) has the task to enhance the long-term professionalization of peacekeeping. At the top of the hierarchy of DPKO is the under-secretary general (USG), who is supported by his front office and the chief of staff (CoS).[9]

Figure 1: Organization Chart DPKO (own design 2011)
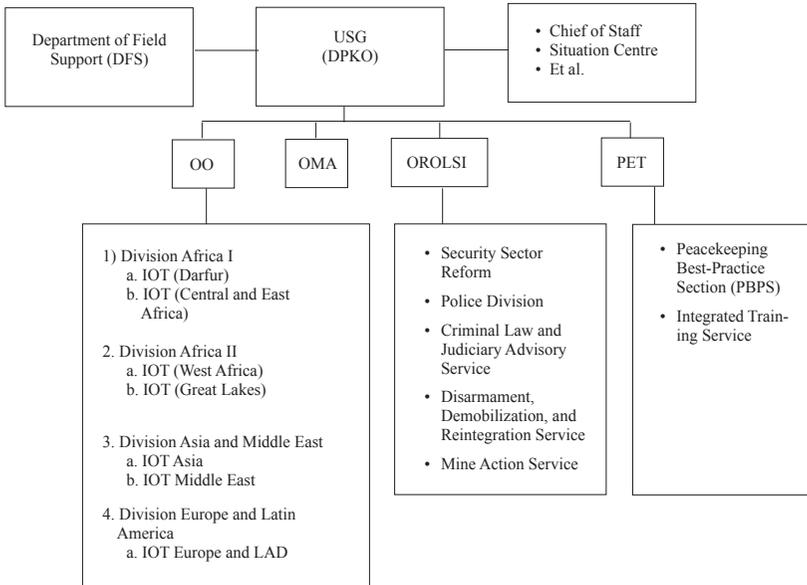
Organizational charts and terms of reference describe functions and areas of responsibility. However, in daily organizational life, functions are often blurred and areas of responsibility are frequently not clearly defined. What stands out is a web of delegated, received, and defended authorities.[10] Every decision or activity has to be cleared within this web of authority, as it especially states jurisdictions and powers of interpretation and the usage of information. One of the basic principles of decision making in DPKO, for example, is the primacy of politics, especially over the military, which gives OO an accentuated position within the (informal) hierarchy between the four pillars of DPKO.

---

9. The CoS is also responsible for the concerns of Department of Field Support (DFS), which provides logistical and technical support to the missions.

10. Interview (see fn. 4).

This emphasized position of OO can be observed in its interactions with other sections. If, for example, OMA is tasked to provide advice or a position paper to UN leadership or member states, it has to coordinate with the civilian side, as DPKO cannot produce more than one position on one subject. Views between the civilian and the military side often differ significantly, a conflict normally solved through negotiation. Here, the civilian side always has the advantage to refer to the primacy of the political, much to the frustration of the military.[11]

A further example is the preparation of background and strategy papers by specialized substantial units or persons in other pillars of DPKO. In order to prevent a departmental conflict over competencies as well as to ensure the relevance of the paper and the information it incorporates, this can only be done in agreement with the IOT, allowing UN officials in the IOT to prevail at the center of the political process. The problem of the specialized substantial employees is to present their work in a fashion that does not offend any authorities and positions of power. Including an analysis of the information may, for example, challenge senior management (especially at the director level) in their authority over the interpretation of information, as "analysis is the task of the directors."[12]

In these internal interaction processes, everyone tries to find and claim their own field of action and responsibility. This does not necessarily have to match with the respective formal terms of reference and functions. The aim is to make oneself (and the capacity of the unit) visible without offending the authority of someone else—or in the words of a UN official (not in OO), it would involve distributing as many business cards as possible without "promoting" oneself too much.[13] A former member of OMA in DPKO described his arrival in New York as a very difficult process. He noticed very quickly the terms of reference describing his functions were irrelevant, as he personally was not included in the relevant processes he should have been participating in. After two very frustrating months, his own initiative, and the circumstances through which he made various contacts to high ranking officials in the smoker's room made him slowly become an integrated part of the team.[14] Visibility, thus, is essentially a problem of getting access to relevant processes of decision making. However, it is important to avoid claiming one's formally fixed scope of action as such attempts are prone to fail.

Daily interaction, working, and decision-making processes within the headquarter perspective of DPKO interplay with both function and personality. Here, not only is information the key, but the key is also the way it is handled within the web of authority. At the same time, the framework of action is often very limited for members of middle management, depending heavily on the preferences of the (leading) persons involved. Interestingly, Code Cables turn out to be a very important instrument for members of middle management in DPKO in reference to their own work. Code Cables here are *the* visible result of an individual activity, which is signed and thus recognized at the highest level of the organization.[15] On the other hand, it is also a way of protecting authority and dividing responsibility along the lines of hierarchy. A Code Cable has to pass all relevant hierarchical levels before it can be signed by the person at the top of the organization (which is in most cases the USG DPKO). The signature process not only ensures the semantic correctness of the document, but it also divides the responsibility for this activity along the web of authority and the levels of decision making within the organization. This is practiced vertically through the hierarchical revision process of the document, as well as horizontally through its distribution to inform other offices and departments.[16]

---

11. Interviews with two UN officials in DPKO, New York, 7 and 11 October 2010.

12. Interview with two UN officials in DPKO, New York, 19 October 2010.

13. Interview 11 October 2010 (see fn. 11).

14. Background discussion with former UN official, Germany, 9 September 2010.

15. Interviews with several UN officials in DPKO, New York, October 2010.

16. Interviews with three UN officials in DPKO 15, 19, and 22 October 2010 (see fn.5).

The integrated operational teams (IOTs) in OO stand at the center of these processes, acting as mediators and advisors without any specific substantive appointments. Here, the various threads of peacekeeping as a political process come together on different levels of interaction. Next to the routine work (such as drafting talking points for presentations of the senior management in intergovernmental organs of the UN), IOT desk officers described a second aspect: political involvement in what seems to be a stalemate in the work of the peacekeeping mission. IOT can help, for example, in lobbying for extension of mandates or increased donor involvement. It has a mediatory position: on the one hand, as support and oversight of the mission, and on the other hand, in representing the peacekeeping mission toward the member states.[17]

A good example for the work of the IOT and OO is the preparation of the biannual report of the secretary general to the Security Council on the progress of the peacekeeping mission. Formally, it is the report of the mission, and actually the SRSG presents this report to the Security Council on behalf of the secretary general. However, it is compiled under the lead of the IOT. The reason is that the information for this report is selected on the basis of political interests within the Security Council rather than on the needs of the mission, which—according to the perspective of DPKO—may be judged more accurately by the UN officials in New York. This may lead to a highly difficult and conflictive negotiation process between headquarters in New York and the mission, especially because (according to the mission perspective, see below) DPKO barely considers the internal negotiation processes within the mission.[18]

A second example is the case of the 2010 extension of the UNMIL mandate. In the eyes of the member states, UNMIL seemed to have succeeded in enabling a fairly secure and stable situation, making the massive peacekeeping mission in Liberia increasingly obsolete. In comparison to other missions, the situation in Liberia seemed very calm. What the mission could report on was not in any way near as explosive as the reports from other countries such as Sudan. This development brought the mission under strong pressure to justify its own existence. Nevertheless, UNMIL viewed its strong presence as the crucial condition in order to sustain the peace process in Liberia. In preparation of the extension of UNMIL's mandate in 2010 there was a substantial debate about the withdrawal of the UN troops from Liberia. In this process, OO became one of the mediators between the Security Council and UNMIL, managing to effectively slow down the momentum of UNMIL withdrawal by persuading the Security Council members to postpone it at least until after the elections in Liberia in October 2011. On the other hand, OO also conducts its role in reminding and clarifying the concerns and interests of the Security Council to the mission by pushing for results. As, for example, the lack of capacities of the Liberian government to take over the responsibilities on security from UNMIL is one of the core arguments for the extension of UNMIL's mandate, OO felt a need for an "initial push" from headquarters to get the security handover process started. Even though such interference from headquarters in the responsibilities of the mission does not create "positive reactions [. . .] someone has to play this role, as the masters [in the Security Council] will not carry on forever with this mission."[19]

Here, the influence of the member states within DPKO becomes visible. They are often described as "masters," whose interests and decision making have considerable influence on the work within DPKO and the missions. Even though DPKO does not control the missions, several DPKO officials have mentioned in interviews that the physical closeness of DPKO to the Security Council and the representatives of its member states give the word of officials in New York a comparatively high weight toward the missions. The influence of the member states in the Security Council on the daily work of DPKO is also reflected in its constant struggle to ensure a certain amount of political autonomy. Hence, assessment and analysis of information

---

17. Two interviews 15 (see fn. 5) and 19 October 2010 (see fn. 2).

18. Next to interviews with UN officials in New York, October 2010, and Monrovia, March 2011, also background discussion with former SRSG in a peacekeeping mission, Germany, 17 May 2010.

19. Interview, 15 October 2010 (see fn.5).

is often limited to the mere description of facts and incidents in order to ensure the political correctness of the report. Evaluation and policy planning often are used by senior management as a political tool to push specific issues or processes regarding the development of peacekeeping in international politics. Guidance and policy development often get stuck in the netting of political interests between the Security Council, DPKO, and the peacekeeping missions. With such tasks one very easily reaches boundaries set by political interests. However, it also protects the political work of DPKO from failure in the missions, as it diffuses responsibilities and decision-making processes throughout the web of authority in the UN peacekeeping bureaucracy.

The Mission Perspective of UNMIL

As shown in Figure 2, UNMIL is organizationally divided into four pillars, which are headed by the special representative of the secretary general (SRSG) and her office at the top of the hierarchical pyramid. The military, headed by the force commander of UNMIL, covers both the military peacekeeping contingents, which are geographically located and divided in two sectors (A and B), and the military observers (MILOBS). Next to the military, UNMIL headquarters in Monrovia consists of two substantive pillars that are both led by a deputy special representative of the secretary gneral (DSRSG). The first substantive pillar is called recovery and governance (R&G), which includes civil affairs, recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration, and political affairs. Appointed as resident coordinator (RC) and humanitarian coordinator (HC), the DSRSG R&G also chairs the UN Country Team that comprises all UN organizations and agencies in the country. The second substantive pillar is Rule of Law (RoL), which subsumes four sections: Human Rights, Justice, Corrections, and UN Police (UNPOL). Next to mission headquarters in Monrovia, UNMIL maintains civilian field offices in all fifteen Liberian counties, which are headed by a head of field office (HoFO) that is appointed by the SRSG but formally reports to the DSRSG R&G.[20]

Figure 2: Organization Chart UNMIL (own design 2011)

---
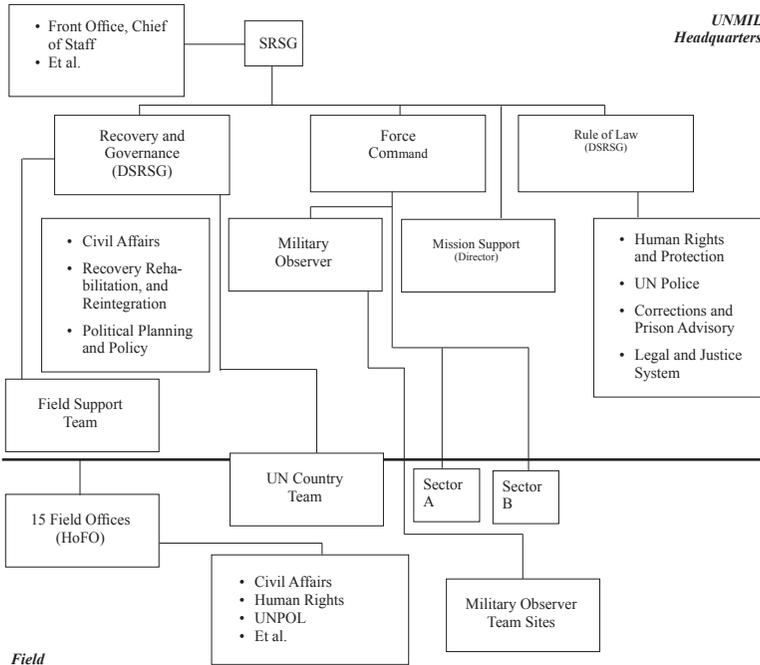
20. Mission Support is a fifth pillar of the mission, which is headed by the Director of Mission Support (DMS).

The big difference to the headquarters perspective of DPKO is UNMIL's technical and political alignment towards shaping national politics in Liberia. Here, the attribute "political" predominantly points to UNMIL's support to the government of Liberia. UNMIL itself is structured as a "shadow bureaucracy" in which most units and persons have their counterparts in the national Liberian bureaucracy. In some areas, UNMIL directly bridges technical gaps of the government's communications system, for example, through sending letters, faxes, and e-mails, as well as facilitating transport. In all areas, UNMIL has its own reporting system parallel to the Liberian government. Information from the field may be processed in the mission headquarters and used as a resource while shaping political processes at the national level. In recent years, UNMIL tried to pull itself out of all informally assumed leadership roles aiming to solely fulfill a consultancy role and push government officials into the lead. However, even in the position of the "back seat," UNMIL seems to remain the access point to three crucial resources for national development: security (practically ensured through the presence of peacekeeping troops), knowledge (the competencies which are brought into the country "from the outside" on different levels and thematic areas of state building and peace consolidation), and money (coordination with donors). These three resources are the practical basis of UNMIL's existence in the national context of Liberia, but they also have day-to-day implications on the position, function, and work of individual members of UNMIL.

Security has the topmost priority in the work of the peacekeeping mission.[21] The mission also clearly possesses the power of interpretation on what is relevant for security not only in the national context of Liberia but also for everything that might endanger the mission and its mandate. Thus, a high amount of information generated by UNMIL refers to security-related events. The interpretation of this data is usually carried out in a small circle at the top of the mission's hierarchy. In special reports, staff at various organizational levels is encouraged to assess and analyze the data. However, in the hierarchical context of the UN, the transfer of facts and event-related data seems far easier than the circulation of opinion and interpretation. Here one seems to walking a fine line between the hierarchical requirements and overstretching one's individual competencies, and not everyone has the professional experience to know how to handle this productively. Reporting that goes beyond mere description seems to depend heavily on personality, experience, and individual abilities. However, such reporting also strengthens specific involvements and might lead to increased profile and visibility within the organizational context of UNMIL.

Security has the topmost priority in the work of the peacekeeping mission.[22] The mission also clearly possesses the power of interpretation on what is relevant for security not only in the national context of Liberia but also for everything that might endanger the mission and its mandate. Thus, a high amount of information generated by UNMIL refers to security-related events. The interpretation of this data is usually carried out in a small circle at the top of the mission's hierarchy. In special reports, staff at various organizational levels is encouraged to assess and analyze the data. However, in the hierarchical context of the UN, the transfer of facts and event-related data seems far easier than the circulation of opinion and interpretation. Here one seems to walking a fine line between the hierarchical requirements and overstretching one's individual competencies, and not everyone has the professional experience to know how to handle this productively. Reporting that goes beyond mere description seems to depend heavily on personality, experience, and individual abilities. However, such reporting also strengthens specific involvements and might lead to increased profile and visibility within the organizational context of UNMIL.

---

21. The following aspects are drawn from several interviews with UNMIL officials and observations in Monrovia and Field Offices, Liberia, September 2010 and March 2011.

22. The following aspects are drawn from several interviews with UNMIL officials and observations in Monrovia and Field Offices, Liberia, September 2010 and March 2011.

The importance of profile and visibility may be illustrated by examining the process of compiling a new strategic peacebuilding priority plan for Liberia in March 2011.[23] The plan aims to strengthen national capacities in order to enhance the ability of the government to completely take over responsibility for security after the withdrawal of UNMIL. The initiative includes a great amount of new financial resources from the Peacebuilding Fund. The negotiation process concerning this plan included a vast amount of different stakeholders, including a delegation from New York as well as the Liberian government, UN agencies, and UNMIL. After an initial workshop with broad participation of all the different stakeholders, the plan (which formally is a document of the Liberian government) was drafted under the guidance of the New York delegation within the offices of the RoL pillar in UNMIL headquarters. A crucial aspect of this document is the formal conceptual integration of the thematic fields "justice" and "security." UNMIL is the first mission that incorporated a separate organizational pillar on the rule of law. This means a great amount of personnel and competencies is assigned to the thematic field of justice. Despite its size and capacity, this organizational field has always been operating slightly isolated, and there were very few formally fixed connections with the field of security. With the new peacebuilding plan, this is fundamentally changing as the security relevance of the field of justice is formally fixed and thus made attractive and feasible for donor activity. This implies a reorientation in the priorities of the mission, as this document is the basis for the medium-term financial scope of action. Such a revision of priorities creates new opportunities for many people, who have so far been working in the background as their thematic field did not attract sufficient donor attention. However, critique of such concepts is often also based on the perceived danger for individual thematic "territories," which entails personal access to resources and power. Everybody wants to be involved, and not everybody understands why he or she has not been included sufficiently in the process of compiling this document.

In interviews, UNMIL officials often complained about territorial issues. In this context they also frequently referred to the so-called "stove piping": people tend to send information through "stove pipes" of the hierarchical chain of reporting rather than sharing it horizontally with the colleague next door working on similar issues under a different chain of command.[24] Next to the isolation of operational areas, stove piping has two major effects: First, it slows down the decision-making processes within the organization, as decisions are taken on the basis of simultaneously existing but disconnected information selection processes. One experienced UNMIL official stated that this might endanger the relevance of the mission's work. If the mission and its bureaucratic apparatus take too long compiling concepts, developing political positions, or making decisions, donors would try to bypass these procedures and cooperate directly with the government. In this case, the mission would have invested a lot of effort and resources into shaping a political process in which it is not a relevant stakeholder anymore.[25] The second effect of stove piping is the constant shifting of individual responsibility and accountability. Similar to New York, the diffusion of responsibility for political and organizational activities goes along many little, hierarchically structured working steps. At middle management level there are very few formally fixed systems of horizontal information sharing. In some offices, this might not be such a problem, as the team has worked together for several years and people know each other very well, or there is a leading personality, who proactively supports and calls for coordination, critique, and information sharing in specific meetings. Such horizontal sharing processes often seem to depend more on the ability of individual persons than on organizational structures. It seems to take a great amount of courage and trust in the colleague next door to share

---

23. Interviews with an UNMIL official 3 March 2011 (see fn. 6) and UNDP official, Monrovia, 24 March 2011. The priority plan sets the strategy for the use of the Peacebuilding Fund in Liberia, which is approved by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office and administered by UNDP, New York.

24. Especially interviews with two UNMIL officials in Monrovia, 15 September 2010 and 21 March 2011.

25. Interview, 3 March 2011 (see fn. 6 and 22). Similar statements were also made by two senior UNMIL officials, 10 and 11 March 2011 (for both interviews see fn. 6).

information in a free and critical manner. An experienced UNMIL official explained that people would be very happy to share if the project is advanced or nearly finished. Before this stage, many colleagues would find it difficult to generally inform about a project without speaking about the details. This can lead to frustration, because the other side might have worked on similar issues that could (or even should) have been linked to it in favor of the project.[26]

The political representatives of UNMIL are the senior management and especially the SRSG. Therefore, flow and selection of information within the organization is also always directed to the senior management of the mission in order to keep them informed. Information processing under SRSG Ellen Margrethe Løj (current HoM at the time of my research) has become very hierarchically structured. Within this structure, only a limited number of organizational units have the authority to oversee the quality of the information that reaches the SRSG. For example, since 2008 reports from the field have been centralized. Next to the separate reporting lines of the different sections, there is now one integrated weekly report from the field, which is written by the HoFOs, overseen and compiled by the Field Support Team, and then finds direct access to the senior management (United Nations in Liberia 2008).[27] The interpretation and strategic assessment of all information is also centrally organized in the Joint Mission Analysis Cell (JMAC), which in UNMIL is also assigned to compile the daily SITREPs to DPKO.[28]

Information gathering as part of organizational self-information is the first strand of hierarchical information selection within UNMIL. The second strand concerns UNMIL's correspondence with New York. On various levels of the mission, the connection to New York has very little relevance. Separate sections send technical reports to their respective counterparts in DPKO, but the political interaction is centrally organized in the office of the SRSG. What stands out is the very low intensity of direct working level interaction between UNMIL and DPKO. There are some formally delegated contacts. Again and again there are technical and thematic inquiries and exchange of information. This is dealt with by the respective organizational unit, but is repeatedly described more as a burden rather than a productive involvement. For many members of middle management there is just no real necessity for regular communications with New York. There are some issues that indeed would need attention by New York, but this is mostly processed through the formal communication channels of UN hierarchy.[29] From the mission's perspective, the relationship to New York often is characterized by a lot of mistrust and suspicion. As an experienced UNMIL official put it, the ideas in New York on how processes in Liberia should work are very different from how the mission actually functions.[30] Another senior UNMIL official complained about the incompetence shown at times in the respective section in New York, with Code Cables, for example, coming back just repeating what has already been sent. What would be needed are support and guidelines to work out how to do things best, for this mission, for guidance of staff, and for future missions. For the senior official, these priorities are off, even understanding that the demands of the work and leading personalities in New York are difficult.[31]

In some ways, the office of the SRSG is the clearinghouse for everything that reaches the HoM and subsequently is passed on to New York. However, it is also the office that keeps off pressure and requirements of New York from the rest of the mission. A good example of this is the pressure already mentioned above to justify UNMIL's massive resources in times where the situation is regularly reported as calm. UN officials in this office stand in middle ground

---

26. Interview, 3 March 2011 (see fn. 6 and 22).

27. See also interviews with UNMIL official in Monrovia, 07 March 2011, and interviews and observations in five UNMIL field offices, March 2011.

28. Background discussion with UNMIL official in Monrovia, 20 September 2010 and interview 21 March 2011 (see fn. 23).

29. Interview, 11 March 2011 (see fn. 6).

30. Interview (see fn. 1).

31. Interview, 11 March 2011 (see fn. 6).

between claims and arguments of specialized units of the mission and requirements of DPKO. It is this filtering and internal diplomatic effort that protects the day-to-day work of the mission from debates on UNMIL's withdrawal and the ambiguity of the threat of organizational self-destruction when the Security Council deems UNMIL's mandate to be fulfilled.[32]

A further example on a more routine basis is the biannual drafting of the progress report of the secretary general to the Security Council. Every section, division, and unit of the mission participates in this process. Organizational units all draft their respective passage of the document, which then is sent through the hierarchical lines of the substantial pillars of the mission to the office of the SRSG that compiles the mission's draft of the report. Thus, the human rights section would write a passage on human rights in Liberia. This text would be sent to the office of the DSRSG of RoL, which would compile the contributions of the other sections of the RoL pillar to be passed on to the office of the SRSG. What seems to be rather simple is in reality a constant fight about text passages, language, and syntax. It is also a conflict about competencies, the specific motivation of organizational units to highlight their work, and the diplomatic obligations of this important report. The office of the SRSG mediates in this process. But they do so not only towards the other units of the mission. After the mission's draft has been finalized, the office of the SRSG has to defend the draft and revise it according to the requirements of New York. This can become very complicated, as the final version of the report also has to account for the demands of the separate units in the mission.[33]

The line of communication to New York seems especially important in terms of UNMIL's reference towards their mandate, which is the legal basis of its existence. However, it seems to have very little relevance if it comes to the day-to-day work in the national or local context of Liberia. It often seems to be more a burden that leads to delays of decision-making processes. For many individual UNMIL officials, other factors, such as the local environment and conditions, the individual collaboration with Liberian counterparts, the organizational standing and visibility of their specific thematic field of action within the policy of the mission, as well as the attention of donors, seem to be far more important in their day-to-day work. However, regular reporting and the processing of requests from New York are important. Feeding and carefully controlling the communication line to New York prevents interferences from New York and protects UNMIL's scope of action.[34]

Conclusion

In no national or multilateral bureaucracy there is such [individual] entrepreneurship and autonomy [. . .] However, trying to impose some doctrine or hard basic rules on [. . .] information flow and sharing has therefore been very problematic in being accepted.[35]

This quote from a senior UN official in New York manages to grasp the core dilemma portrayed in this article. It describes decentralization as a gift, a strength, and an important part of the organizational design of UN peacekeeping. This especially provides flexibility in a business that has to adapt to highly dynamic and precarious environments in post-war countries. In such a complex setting, gaps and the development of different organizational perspectives, such as the disconnection between DPKO and UNMIL assessed in this article, are inevitable. It may be necessary, as both DPKO and UNMIL are facing different challenges in their political work, to develop different interests and procedures of interaction. However, this article has also shown that communication processes are often used as measures to protect autonomy within the organizational setting. Even though this protectionism might create some coherence within the own organizational perspective, it fosters the disconnection between headquarters and the mission. It also prevents the creation of common organizational standards and plausible interferences from the other side.

---

32. Interviews, 3 and 10 March 2011 (for both see fn. 6).

33. *Ibid*.

34. Interview, 10 March 2012 (see fn. 6) and background discussion (see fn. 18).

35. Interview with a senior UN official, New York, 11 October 2010.

In this article, the communication behavior in the headquarters perspective of DPKO has been assessed as protective in three interconnected ways: First, in protection of basic principles, such as the primacy of the political. Even though military advice, competency, and field experience should be needed in managing an enterprise that involves sending thousands of troops into post-war settings, political interests and arguments have priority regardless of their reflection of the realities in the mission. The second form of protectionism concerns the visibility and profile of individual staff and their work. Members of middle management have to find their role and scope of action within a complex web of authority that does not necessarily reproduce formally assigned functions. Thus, communication tools such as Code Cables are used to create visibility of actions without actually taking over full responsibility for these actions as it has to run through a hierarchical signature process. Moreover, Code Cables usually create additional work for staff members in UNMIL and are often perceived as a burden, as they rarely serve as a method of individual visibility from the mission perspective. Third, communication practices are used to defend a certain amount of autonomy of DPKO toward the member states of the Security Council. This not only means communicative action is politically framed toward the interests in the Security Council, but it also explains a structural lack of strategic interest, as this diffuses responsibility of any mission failures.

The communicative behavior within the mission perspective of UNMIL may also be summarized as protective in three ways: First, it protects the sources of power and influence of UNMIL within the political context of Liberia. Even though the mandate sets the legal framework, the ability to shape politics in Liberia is created locally, especially through effective self-information. The mission itself is the first recipient of the hierarchical information selection and interpretation process. Similar to the headquarters perspective of DPKO, the second form of protectionism focuses on the visibility and profile of the scope of action of individual UNMIL staff members. However, the methods in UNMIL differ to those in DPKO. Visibility and the protection of thematic territories are often linked with the prominence of the issue at stake. A formal connection to the subject of security, for example, promises attention and access to donor funds, as it is the top priority of the mission. The example of the development of the peacebuilding priority plan has shown how interference from New York, especially if it is connected to financial resources, can substantially disrupt the setting of individual organizational actors and lead to conflicts and defensive reactions within the organizational perspective of UNMIL. Third, UNMIL has developed mechanisms of information filtering and processing, which protects the mission from such interferences of DPKO. Especially the office of the SRSG in UNMIL serves as a buffer between the mission and DPKO, carefully controlling the information that is sent to headquarters as well as processing incoming requests. This also includes protecting day-to-day work in the mission from demands for UNMIL withdrawal or defending a mission compromise for the biannual report of the secretary general from the requirements and interests of OO in DPKO, which are assigned with the final coordination and drafting of the document.

Organizational theory suggests that different perspectives in a complex and differentiated organization provide the basis of day-to-day decision making (e.g., Orton and Weick 1990, Luhmann 2006). This study underlines the importance to include these internal dynamics of organizational life into the study of international peace operations. In the interaction processes with counterparts of UN peacekeeping bureaucracy, such as the member states in the Security Council or the government of Liberia, the overall organizational objectives or norms rarely determine the process and outcomes of negotiations (e.g., Barnett and Zürcher 2008, Zürcher et al. 2013). Rather, organizational actors at different levels have to adjust to the interests of the other side. They also have to find ways to use their organizational perspective as a powerful stance as well as how to respond to the programmatic objectives of peacekeeping.

The findings of this study suggest that these dynamics and struggles can lead to organizational internal protectionism and dysfunction. Protective communication behavior is mostly directed toward the defense of autonomy, scope of action, and recognition both at the

individual and the organizational level. However, it undermines productive interaction beyond the limits of its own organizational perspective. It creates misunderstandings, sentiments, and conflicts within the organizational setting of UN peacekeeping. Moreover, it also prevents effective learning from experiences and the creation of institutional knowledge and memory that is not solely connected to personalities and interpersonal contacts. As important as it is to protect the autonomy of different organizational actors in a decentralized organizational system, it is also necessary to bridge differences with a systematic approach of information and knowledge sharing. In recent years, the UN has tried to implement some measures to enhance this exchange, such as the web-based Communities of Practice, which allow UN staff who are working on specific subjects to share experiences from all over the world.[36] However, as this study has shown, more effort should be made.

In conclusion, two suggestions for the development of the communication management in the organization of UN peacekeeping can be made. The first approach should be based on formal arrangements, which allow for a systematic exchange or rotation of UN staff in order to experience and understand the different organizational perspectives of UN peacekeeping. The recruiting system currently does not enable such an exchange. Headquarters' staff often manages to gather some experience in the field. On the other hand, it is rather accidental that someone from UNMIL applies for a job in DPKO and manages to strive professionally in this very competitive environment.[37] However, a systematic exchange of mission staff could be helpful to decrease the sentiments in the field toward headquarters, as it enhances the understanding of the requirements within the headquarters perspective.

The second approach is to encourage increased informal exchange between the middle management staff in headquarters and missions. This type of informal interaction has often been discouraged by senior leadership in order to prevent any leaks and spreads of politically delicate information and rumors. However, professionals should be entrusted with the responsibility over certain information in order to informally exchange views and experiences with counterparts. Through such interaction, learning processes may be started and produce an added value in the work within the organization of UN peacekeeping.

REFERENCES

Barnett, Michael and Martha Finnemore (2004) *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Barnett, Michael and Christoph Zürcher (2008) "The Peacebuilder's Contract: How External Statebuilding Reinforces Weak Statehood." In Paris, Roland and Timothy D. Sisk (eds.) *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, Abington and New York: Routledge.

Benner, Thorsten, Stephan Mergenthaler and Philipp Rotmann (2011) *The New World of UN Peace Operation: Learning to Build Peace?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Luhmann, Niklas (2006) *Organisation und Entscheidung*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Orton, J. Douglas and Karl E. Weick (1990) "Loosely Coupled Systems: A Reconceptualization," *The Academy of Management Review*, 15, 203–23.

Schlichte, Klaus and Alex Veit (2007) *Coupled Arenas: Why state-building is so difficult*, Working Papers Micropolitics No. 3, Berlin.

Trettin, Frederik and Joel Gwyn Winckler (2012) Die Friedenmissionen der Vereinten Nationen. Komplexe Organisationen mit schwierigen internen Herausforderungen. *Vereinte Nationen*, 115–200.

---

36. Interviews with two UN officials in DPKO, New York, 22 and 25 October 2010, and interview with UNMIL official, 21 March 2011 (see fn. 23).

37. Interview (see fn.1).

United Nations in Liberia (31 October 2008) *Working Group on UN Field Structure and Support. Addendum: Final Recommendations.*

Winckler, Joel Gwyn (2011) "Managing the Complexities of Intervention: United Nations Peace Operations as Organisational Action," *Peace, Conflict and Development*, 83–103.

Zürcher, Christoph, Carrie Manning, Kristie Evenson, Rachel Hayman, Sarah Riese and Nora Roehner (2013) *Costly Democracy: Peacebuilding and Democratization After War*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.