AFRICA POLICY BRIEF

Improving Peacekeeping Performance – Dilemmas and Goals

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The recent adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2436 on UN peacekeeping is the latest development in an ongoing debate on how to improve peacekeeping performance. Africa's status as both the largest provider of troops and the continent hosting most current peace operations, positions it at the heart of this discussion. This policy brief critically examines two of the options identified to improve peacekeeping: more troop contributions from states with advanced military capability and better training for peacekeepers. Specifically, it highlights challenges with training troops from (semi-) authoritarian and post-conflict states and points to the importance of improving civil-military relations in order to enhance peacekeeping performance.

INTRODUCTION

On the 21 September 2018, the UN Security Council adopted a new resolution on how to improve peacekeeping. Resolution 2436 continues the past few years' focus on how to improve peacekeepers' behaviour, leadership and accountability. It is part of what Paul D Williams has called the UN's 'Peacekeeping Trilemma'[i] – the imperative to pursue three largely incompatible goals: 1) fulfill broad mandates in high-risk environments, 2) avoid peacekeeper casualties and 3) keep financial costs down. This debate is relevant for Africa since eight of the UN's 15 peace missions are currently in Africa, and African states contribute almost 50% of all UN uniformed peacekeepers.[ii] Africa is thus both the largest provider and client of current UN peace operations and is, therefore, at the heart of discussions of peacekeepers' performance.

The following brief critically analyses the two options identified as ways in which peacekeepers' performance could be ameliorated: more troop contributions from states with advanced military capability and better training for peacekeepers. It looks specifically at the challenges involved in

training troops from authoritarian and post-conflict states and suggests that careful considerations are needed on a case-by-case basis with an emphasis on improving civil-military relations to ensure that military training for troop-contributing countries (TCCs) does more good than harm.

Country data
Number of troops:
Data from UN Peacekeeping
August 2018

FH index:
Freedom House Index
1 = most free to 7 = least free

HICR index:
Heidelberg Institute for Conflict Research:
conflict Barometer from 2017
5 = war
4 = limited war
3 = violent crisis
2 = non-violent crisis
1 = disputes
0 = no conflict

Ethiopia
Number of troops: 8,056
FH index: 6.5
HICR index: 5 (war)

Rwanda
Number of troops: 5,744
FH index: 6
HICR index: 2 (non-violent crisis)

Tanzania
Number of troops: 2,544
FH index: 4
HICR index: 3 (violent crisis)

Ghana
Number of troops: 2,328
FH index: 1.5
HICR index: 0 (no conflict)

Egypt
Number of troops: 2,290
FH index: 6
HICR index: 4 (limited war)

Burkina Faso
Number of troops: 1,684
FH index: 3.5
HICR index: 2 (non-violent crisis)

Chad
Number of troops: 1,422
FH index: 6.5
HICR index: 3 (violent crisis)

Morocco
Number of troops: 1,267
FH index: 5
HICR index: 3 (violent crisis)

Senegal
Number of troops: 1,214
FH index: 2
HICR index: 2 (non-violent crisis)

South Africa
Number of troops: 1,155
FH index: 2
HICR index: 2 (non-violent crisis)

HOW TO IMPROVE PEACEKEEPING PERFORMANCE

UNSC resolution 2436 highlights underperformances in both Protection of Civilians (POC) and peacekeepers' track record of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), areas which are in need of improvement and accountability measures. It implicitly suggests better civil–military interaction in the field and explicitly asks for better awareness of what constitutes SEA. The new resolution also reiterates previous calls for more women in military and police contingents and greater efforts by member states to vet and train their personnel before deployment.

It is easy to understand *why* there is a need to improve peacekeepers' performance; the problem is *how* to achieve it. The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations recently proposed two ways in which peacekeepers' performance could be ameliorated: 1) more troop and non-military contributions and equipment from states with advanced military capabilities, and 2) better pre-deployment training.

Ninety percent of existing TCCs are from the African and Asian continents. Many of them have provided a significant number of troops over long periods and have, as such, filled the gap after the Western TCCs left in the mid 1990s following failures in Rwanda and Somalia. However, many of the TCCs from Africa also experience some type of domestic turbulence of their own (see map), while others are heavily leaning towards authoritarian governance, which makes both training and vetting sensitive topics. The example of the Democratic Republic of

Congo (DRC) contributing troops to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in 2014 while hosting the largest UN mission to date at home comes to mind, while Rwanda and Ethiopia are examples of states which can hardly be called democratic but which have been among the UN's top TCCs during the past decade.

While Western states have been reluctant to provide troops themselves, they have, to a large extent, financed and organised many of the pre-deployment trainings for African TCCs in the frame of capacity-building programmes like the USA's ACOTA and France's RECAMP (Renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix). Part of the answer to the UN's drive for improved peacekeeper performance through better training needs, therefore, to be addressed by Western partners to African TCCs. This raises difficult questions for policy-makers and external partners alike about what type of security assistance is needed to improve troop contributor's performances, but also which TCCs should be supported.

More troops from states with advanced military capability

The past two decades have seen a shift in TCCs from mainly Western to mostly states from the Global South. The top-ten TCCs are now divided between two continents: Africa and Asia. This shift can be traced back to the dip in UN peacekeeping missions overall following failures in Somalia and Rwanda in the mid-1990s and, related to this, the decreasing domestic support in

Western states for deploying troops to riskier operations. [iii] The shift has implied fewer troop contributions and equipment from states with advanced military capability, which arguably affects peacekeepers' performance negatively.

In the last few years, talk about a 'European return' to UN peacekeeping has resurfaced, in particular regarding the comparatively high number of European troop contributions to MINUSMA in Mali [iv] and the British armed forces involvement in UNMISS in South Sudan and the UN Support Office to Somalia (UNSOS). The United States under President Obama also appeared willing to increase its support to UN peacekeeping in different ways. Obama organised two international summits intended to boost contributions to the UN, released a new presidential policy calling for stronger US assistance for UN peacekeeping efforts and pledged to double the number of US staff officers in UN missions. [v] These efforts to increase the number of troop contributions from Western states appear nevertheless to have stalled in the wake of Brexit and the election of President Trump. Indeed, even though Trump's initial announcements of large cuts to the UN peacekeeping budget were eventually modified, [vi] it seems unlikely that the USA will live up to the peacekeeping commitments announced under the Obama administration, in particular as it has already failed to implement its pledge to double the number of staff officers. Similarly, as the EU is faced by a new identity challenge in the shape of Brexit, it appears more likely that it will concentrate its efforts on EU operations rather than the UN. The so-called European

Intervention Initiative is the latest evidence of this.[vii] This leads us to the second option for better peacekeeping performance: improving the pre-deployment training of the TCCs.

Better pre-deployment training for troop-contributing countries

The newer TCCs from Africa and Asia, which have filled the void left by the West, are on average less developed and less secure countries.[viii] Indeed, several of these newer peacekeepers from the Global South have relatively recently been involved in a conflict or war of their own.[ix] Even if far from all the African TCCs are conflict-affected or authoritarian states, many of their militaries require training, assistance and equipment to meet UN standards for deployment. The USA remains the largest bilateral donor for peace operations in Africa, with various train-and-equip and assistance programmes such as the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program, which entails different aspects of tactical and operational-level peacekeeping tasks.

European states like France, the United Kingdom (UK) and Belgium are also involved in training and assisting African armies to put weight behind the slogan 'African Solutions to African Problems'. However, all of the partners involved in military assistance to African states also have internal motives, including exercising strategic influence and promoting their own military industry as well as legitimising the military's role more generally. France, as one of the main external actors in Africa, has focused on training African peacekeepers through, for example, the RECAMP

programme, but has gradually evolved toward bilateral agreements, counting 24 military cooperation programmes and eight military partnership programmes in 2016.[x] The UK is providing extensive funding and expertise to Regional Peacekeeping Training Centres [xi] while the British Peace Support Team-Africa do tactical and operational peace support training in Nairobi. Belgium has trained African armies more generally through bilateral military partner programmes with, among others, the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi. However, like France and the USA, Belgium ended their military assistance to Burundi in the wake of the political crisis in 2015. This evokes difficult questions about under which circumstances and with which partners external actors should engage in capacity-building and military assistance to TCCs.

THE DILEMMAS OF TRAINING TROOP CONTRIBUTORS

Military capacity-building in troop-contributing African states which are experiencing domestic conflict and/or are (semi)authoritarian evokes several dilemmas: 1) By building stronger and more functional armies, external partners are assisting authoritarian governments by providing them with the best tool of oppression: a functional army. Given that the UN attempts to improve civilian–military relations in peace operations to avoid human rights abuses and SEA scandals, as well as improving POC, it seems counterproductive to deploy troops which are accused of precisely these offences domestically. 2) Several African states which are either experiencing a domestic conflict or are in the immediate post-conflict phase have decided

to deploy troops abroad while simultaneously hosting a peace operation at home. In some cases, there have even been explicit links between the externally supported Security Sector Reform (SSR) process and the pre-deployment training, which highlights new risks of foregoing political objectives in the quest to get new troops ready for deployment.[xii] In addition, it raises questions concerning the troops' preparedness and actual military capacity.

Training Politicised Armies?

Examining the first dilemma, it is worth reiterating that far from all African TCCs fall into the categories of domestic turbulence and/or (semi-)authoritarian regimes. It is also important to remember that peacekeepers from stable, democratic and militarily advanced states are not guaranteed to present a good peacekeeping performance. However, Western militaries have, in general, access to better and more advanced military equipment and more specialised training than their counterparts in the Global South, which is the basis underpinning military capacity-building programmes.

By training troops for peace operations, external partners can introduce human rights courses and gender education in a non-politicised way. [1] The training also often entails a technical modernisation of the army and exposure to new cultures and new people, which can improve the army's overall functioning and provide avenues for personal development for the soldiers. In theory, external partners can thereby contribute to forming better and more efficient peacekeepers, even though it remains difficult to evaluate the performance of individual peacekeepers in the field. Similarly, it is difficult to establish a connection between the training external actors provide and the behaviour of troops in a domestic political crisis. This issue goes both ways: on the one hand, it means that external actors cannot be held accountable for trained armies' 'unprofessional' behaviour at home; on the other hand, they cannot take credit for their 'professional' behaviour either.

External partners need thus to choose wisely when it comes to military capacity-building, even if the objective of the training is for a 'good cause', such as peacekeeping. Investing more resources in training and equipping peacekeeping states with clean human rights records both at home and abroad is one option to counter this dilemma. However, given the fact that the UN deploys roughly 100,000 uniformed peacekeepers annually, Western states cannot be too picky about whom they support – especially when they do not themselves contribute troops. Another alternative is, therefore, to strongly condition the collaboration with politicised armies and to actively take part in the vetting process of deployed personnel, ensuring that the chosen troops live up to the UN standards and that there is genuine political support from the host state for the process.

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[1] It should be noted, however, that although efforts are under way in many states, most Western militaries are not living up to the ideals in terms of gender balancing and gender mainstreaming.

Training post-conflict peacekeepers?

The second dilemma equally requires external partners to be careful in their choices of partners. SSR programmes have comprehensive and long-term objectives of reforming not just the security forces, but the security sector's governance, in democratic and accountable ways. In practice, SSR efforts often fail to address the political part of the agenda and focus on the 'train and equip' part to avoid uncomfortable confrontations with the host state. In some cases, this 'train and equip' is linked to pre-deployment training for peace operations.

There are surely cases where post-conflict armies can be ready to deploy troops to peace operations relatively soon after the formal end of a conflict, and some research has also shown how deploying troops abroad can ease tensions at home while increasing the army's cohesion. [xiii] Yet, deploying troops abroad while there is a peace operation at home is a risky undertaking for several reasons. Firstly, because it is unclear if soldiers who have recently been part of a domestic conflict are actually ready to help create peace abroad. This concerns both the individual soldier's capacity and the army's overall capacity. New research has shown that high-quality militaries are better at protecting civilians in peace operations, clearly proving the need for better trained and equipped peacekeepers in order to improve performance. [xiv] Secondly, even if the troops deployed come from a formally *post-conflict* environment, the presence of a military peace operation indicates that considerable security concerns remain. Training and equipping military actors in such an environment may be risky, as a return to conflict can happen quickly.

It is clearly tricky to dissuade states who are willing to contribute troops from doing so when the demand is high and the supply is low. Still, if the result risks eroding existing peace processes in post-conflict states and if the added value of the new TCCs is dependent on several external factors which are difficult to control, it might be better to refrain from deploying troops too early. Although it is tempting for external partners (who want to deploy troops without providing any), and for post-conflict states (who need to reform and re-equip their armies) to include pre-deployment training in SSR processes, this needs to be done in a context-specific and careful manner where the political development has to come before, or at least simultaneously with, the military capacity.

CONCLUSION

This policy brief has examined ways to improve peacekeeping performance. More specifically, it has focused on the training of troop-contributing states' armies and identified dilemmas with training politicised and post-conflict militaries. It has highlighted the risks of reinforcing an authoritarian government's main tool of oppression by training a politicised army, and evoked concerns regarding training and deploying post-conflict militaries in peace operations too soon after a conflict has ended.

Ways to mitigate the dilemmas have been identified as:

- Careful selection of partner countries on a case-by-case basis

- Closer collaboration in the vetting process
- Promoting political objectives before military objectives during SSR processes

The training of peacekeepers only goes so far in increasing the performance of peacekeeping, however. The increasingly hostile environments for peacekeeping, the robust mandates and the new security threats which fundamentally alter the rules of engagement [xv] clearly show that peacekeepers' capacity is only one part of the puzzle. Yet, peacekeepers remain key players in the peacekeeping game and as such it is essential to deploy capable, well-trained individuals who represent military professionalism. Research has shown that adding more women improves peacekeeping operations, as women increase access to local communities and intelligence and are better at de-escalating tensions.[xvi] The latest UN resolution also shows that this understanding has been integrated. Yet women should not carry the burden for improving peacekeeping. This is a process which requires equal efforts from all actors involved in a peace operation.

Finally, lessons from previous missions have shown that the civil–military dimension cannot be underestimated. Engaging with the local population in ways which go beyond the military mandate increases trust and security, both for the population and the peacekeepers themselves, thereby improving the record of POC and increasing the safety of peacekeepers. If Western states and other external partners are to continue to train politicised and post-conflict armies which are often lacking in precisely the civil–military relations aspect, more efforts should be made to ensure that the military personnel can not only perform military skills, but also show empathy and care – qualities which are not required in the traditional soldier, but which are necessary for a good peacekeeper.

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