

What Needs to Change in UN Peace Operations?

An expert briefing book prepared for the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations

November 2014

Foreword

At the beginning of November, immediately after the announcement of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) and International Peace Institute (IPI) asked a broad group of independent experts, think-tanks and civil society organizations to submit short notes on potential priorities for the panel. In less than a fortnight, we received sixty contributions from 20 different countries.

We have gathered these submissions in the pages that follow, roughly divided into fifteen thematic sections. The contributions vary considerably in approach: some focus on a single priority in depth, while others address a series of issues more briefly. Almost all contributors have made recommendations for the Panel, but these range from broad strategic points to specific technical ideas.

We have edited the contributions only minimally. The authors write in *a personal capacity* except in a few cases where organizations chose to make institutional submissions. We hope that by bringing these submissions together we can offer the Panel members a rapid introduction to some of the major concerns and debates among experts on peace operations, and that the Panel will want to follow up on many of the ideas presented here. However, because this briefing book came together quickly, we make no pretense that the selection of topics, ideas and recommendations it contains is either scientific or definitive.

That said, this collection does give a sense of certain key issues in current expert debates on peace operations, ranging from strategic questions over the role of the UN in peace enforcement, stabilization and peacebuilding to operational priorities such as the protection of civilians and institutional concerns such as the quality of mission leadership. We imagine that individual panel members will turn to the thematic sections of greatest relevance to their own experience and priorities – a full index of the topics raised in the briefing book can be found at the end of the publication – but we hope that they will also recognize that the variety and range of submissions indicates that there is both (1) real demand for change in the peace operations system, and (2) the basic answer to the question in our title (“What needs to change?”) is “a lot.” We hope that this collection of pieces will help the Panel form its own views on what needs to change the most. We would like to thank Lamii Kromah and Michael R. Snyder for a huge amount of work in bringing this briefing book together over a very short period of time.



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Peacebuilding and Inclusivity

Local knowledge and peacebuilding

Reform 1: Increase UN Support to Local Conflict Resolution

For details and evidence, see my book *The Trouble with the Congo*.

Local conflicts over land, resources, and political power sustain violence in many war and post-war environments. In the rare cases where there have been comprehensive bottom-up peacebuilding efforts, these initiatives have been successful in helping make peace sustainable.

However, the dominant peacekeeping culture usually precludes action on local conflicts. Most international actors interpret violence as the consequence of national and regional causes alone, and UN staff view intervention at the macro levels as their only legitimate responsibility. The resulting neglect of local peacebuilding regularly dooms the international efforts.

In addition to any top-down intervention, conflicts must be resolved from the bottom up. Whenever possible, local actors (subnational authorities, grassroots non-governmental organizations) should be in control of the bottom-up peacebuilding process. UN peacekeepers should increase financial, logistical, and technical support to these local actors.

Reform 2: Value More Local and Country-Specific Knowledge

For details and evidence, see my book *Peaceland*, part I.

Peacekeeping missions value thematic and technical knowledge over local and country-specific expertise. This has many unintended consequences that decrease the effectiveness of international efforts.

Although the UN should continue to hire individuals with thematic expertise, they should also recruit foreign staff with an in-depth understanding of local contexts and knowledge of local languages. They would do well to include these latter criteria in the periodic evaluations of their employees for retention and promotion.

Peacekeeping missions should also invert the prevailing practice of foreigners making decisions while local people merely assist or execute orders. Local staff and counterparts should do things themselves and act as the primary decision makers. Expatriates should remain in the shadows to help and advise.

Another important measure would be to progressively replace most of the expatriates with local staff. Peacekeeping missions could retain foreigners only in posts that no local candidates can fill.

Peacebuilding and Inclusivity

Reform 3: Change Everyday Peacebuilding Practices on the Ground

For details and evidence, see my book *Peaceland*, part II.

Everyday routines of most international peacekeepers on the ground involve socializing primarily with other expatriates, advertising their actions, and living in fortified compounds. These practices are not just ineffective. They are often counterproductive to building peace.

International peacekeepers should socialize more with local counterparts. They should use more the acceptance approach to security, whereby protection depends on developing good relationships with local communities, armed groups, and power brokers. And they should keep a low profile and avoid advertising their actions.

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