

UN Peacekeeping: The 21st Century Challenges

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UN peacekeeping operations have over the last fifteen years gone through a process of rationalization and professionalization. They are today better planned and run than at the time when the Brahimi report was calling for their reform following the failures of the 1990s. They help stabilize situations in countries that have gone through profound and lasting crises.

In the meantime, UN missions operate in an ever-changing and volatile environment that directly impacts their organization and overall effectiveness. From the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to Mali or South Sudan, peacekeepers face huge challenges in the implementation of their mandate.

This paper looks at two issues that characterize the environment in which UN peacekeeping takes place and that inform its role in international politics.

First, the paper argues that at a strategic level, UN peacekeeping is made possible largely as a result of a broad international consensus on its principles and objectives. Divergences among the main big powers exist on where and how best to consolidate peace in fragile states, yet peacekeeping is by and large protected from power politics and the paralysis it could entail. Similarly, the “normative clash” between Western countries and emerging powers—that play an increasing role in peacekeeping—on their respective vision of peacekeeping has not yet materialized.

Second, the consensus is being eroded by certain evolutions of peacekeeping operations that may, once again, challenge their relevance. These evolutions take place at the operational level and relate to the key principles of peacekeeping (consent of the host state, limited use of force, impartiality) as well as to the nature of the threats with which peacekeepers are confronted. While operations are increasingly deployed where there is no peace to keep, the three key principles that are supposed to distinguish peacekeeping operations from more traditional military interventions are also revisited. The extent to which these evolutions are new is debatable, yet from Mali to the DRC, South Sudan or the Central African Republic (CAR), one can observe trends that question the role of peacekeeping operations and that indeed led the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) to initiate a new review of peace operations.

A Prevailing Consensus...

Peace operations were created and have evolved on the basis of a broad international consensus on their purpose and methods. The missions are established to help stabilize post-conflict societies through a mix of security, political and economic activities that are carried out in support of the sovereign host state. The ultimate goal is positive peace that is supposed to emanate from structural changes and the local adherence to the virtues of democracy and economic liberalism. Most importantly, peacekeeping operations differ from war-fighting in the sense that they do not entail the use of force as a central *modus operandi*. Peacekeeping is not about fighting an enemy and the recent evolutions towards more robustness have not fundamentally changed this. Furthermore, peacekeeping operations are made possible by the consent of the host state on their deployment and mandate. This allows the sovereignty of host states to be theoretically preserved.

These various characteristics of contemporary peace operations build their consensual nature. They make them belong to low rather than high politics. This is not to minimise their political nature and the importance of state support to ensure their effectiveness. Peace operations' performance largely depends on the political and operational commitment of a few key member states. The point is rather that peace operations have to a large extent been preserved from the negative effects of power politics.

This is illustrated by the way peace operations are being created by the UN Security Council (UNSC). In most cases, UNSC resolutions are adopted on the basis of a text drafted by one of the three Western permanent members, and adopted unanimously. Most importantly, tensions that occur among permanent members of the Security Council on high politics issues do not significantly impact the creation and mandates of peacekeeping operations. For example, as the years 2012/13 were marked by a strong opposition between on the one hand the US, the UK and France and on the other hand Russia and China over Syria, which led Russia and China to veto four resolutions at the Security Council, this did not prevent the Council from passing resolutions establishing peacekeeping operations in Mali and South Sudan. In the same vein, the 2014 Ukraine crisis has not significantly impacted the ability of the Security Council to create an operation in the CAR. Back in 1999, the same level of tensions between the same countries over Kosovo and the NATO operation against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not prevent the Security Council from adopting Resolution 1244 (1999) that established the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) as well as the NATO operation in Kosovo (Kosovo Force: KFOR).

In all these cases, the recognition that peacekeeping could play a constructive role

in stabilization while not threatening any of the big powers' positions allowed for the creation of operations despite parallel discrepancies among great powers. Similarly, France has always managed to obtain the endorsement of the Security Council for its own national operations—in the Ivory Coast or the CAR for example—as well as for EU-led operations—in the DRC, Chad, or the CAR—regardless of the global political context and its translation in the Security Council.

In parallel, the increasing role of the so-called “emerging powers” in peacekeeping operations has not fundamentally challenged the prevailing consensus. The rise of China, Brazil or India has been largely debated in relation to the evolution of the international system, global power shifts and changing security governance norms and mechanisms. An interesting aspect of these debates is the extent to which emerging countries challenge the existing principles and practices and what impact this has on the structure of the system—multipolarity, interdependence, etc.—as well as on the primacy or positions of the US and the EU. Alongside China, Brazil and India have resisted or opposed Western or EU positions in different UN bodies—from the General Assembly to the Security Council and Human Rights Council—over the last five years, and called into question the legitimacy of the current international security architecture.

These discussions are of direct relevance to the crisis management field, as they raise the issue of the potential impact of the emerging powers' increasing presence in peace operations on the peacekeeping/peacebuilding underlying philosophy and praxis. In other words, what kind of peacekeepers/peacebuilders are emerging powers? Given their positions as potential challengers of the status quo, do they buy into the existing rules and practices (“norms-followers”), do they significantly shape them (“norms-setters”), or do they contest them (“norms-breakers”) as they become real stakeholders in the Western-dominated liberal peacekeeping/peacebuilding realm? More precisely, if normative divergences increasingly characterize the relationship between the “North” and emerging powers, how is this affecting the crisis management field and the “peace-keeping consensus”?

The involvement of emerging powers in peacekeeping may impact peacekeeping and peacebuilding policies as these countries put forward different ideas or policy options than the prevailing ones. Emerging powers agree among themselves on some guiding conflict management principles. In particular, their narrow understanding of the concept of state sovereignty is equated by a relatively strict adherence to the three peacekeeping principles (impartiality, consent and limited resort to force) and a general opposition to the conceptual overstretch that characterizes them.

The insistence on state sovereignty is not only driven by a certain conception of international relations, it also has practical implications as it shapes emerging powers' vision of the level of ambition of peace operations. Emerging countries would then promote a "light footprint" approach rather than heavier "generating dependence"¹ missions, insist on local ownership and state's responsibilities² and warn against transplanting models from one region to another.³ The critiques vary from one country to another—with China being a particular case given the nature of its political system—but reflect an overall uneasiness about the current practices. Moreover, it is the liberal approach as a panacea that is implicitly called into question. The Indian argument about its own "nation-building experience" or the Chinese rejection of "unified standards for peacebuilding endeavours" and emphasis on development as the central long-term objective of peacebuilding attest to these normative divergences.⁴ This may impact peacekeeping/peacebuilding mandates whenever emerging powers sit at the Security Council or at the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), or manage to get their position defended by others. In the longer run, it can also pervade the thinking about peacebuilding wherever it is discussed or implemented. Already mandates are regularly softened at the Security Council to accommodate China's positions.

This being said, the broad peacekeeping consensus has not been significantly challenged by emerging powers.

First, the characterization of emerging powers as an entity that could speak and act as such is empirically problematic. The issue of emerging powers that would challenge the politics of peace operations presupposes a relatively high degree of convergence among those countries that will not necessarily or systematically materialize. This raises the question of the existence of emerging powers as a political force bringing together liked-minded states and buttressing common interests. In general terms, such cohesion

¹ See Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, Special Political and Decolonization Committee of the General Assembly (GA), New York, 25 October 2010.

² See Statement by the Chinese Ambassador at the Security Council Debate on Post-conflict Peacebuilding, 22 July 2009.

³ See Statement by the Indian Permanent Representative to the UN at the GA Informal Meeting on the 2010 Review of the Peacebuilding Commission, New York, 10 May 2010; and Proceedings of the C-34 debates, GA/PK/203, United Nations, 22 February 2010, and GA/PK/204, United Nations, 23 February 2010.

⁴ See Lei, Z., "China's Influence on the Future of UN Peacekeeping," in de Coning, C., Stensland, A., and T. Tardy (eds.), *Beyond the "New Horizon,"* Oslo, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), 2010, pp. 92-93; and Statement by the Chinese Ambassador at the Security Council Debate on Post-conflict Peacebuilding, 22 July 2009.

has not tangibly materialized and disparities among emerging countries abound. China occupies a particular position among emerging powers: its political system distinguishes it from the “league of democracies” that are gathered in the India-Brazil-South Africa forum (IBSA), and its long-lasting rivalry with India—and lukewarm position on an Indian Security Council’s permanent seat—tends to downplay any prediction of a political alliance of emerging powers. At the UN, China’s Security Council’s permanent seat *de facto* places it in a different posture, while all three IBSA countries’ foreign policies are to a degree determined by their aspiration to join the restricted club. As a consequence, be it on the issues of sovereignty, degree of intrusiveness or conception of the type of political and economic model that peace missions should promote, the lines of convergence among emerging countries are more likely to be case-based than the result of a “Southern caucus.” Likewise, the prospect of emerging countries banding together in case of political disagreement over peacekeeping or peacebuilding between one of them and Northern countries does not appear to be the most evident scenario. Brazilian policy in Haiti is not unrelated to the US-Brazil relationship, and even if Brazil has shown evidence of its independence vis-à-vis Northern countries over the last years, it arguably shares as many interests with the US and the EU as with India or China. The same is true for India, whose relationship with the US may well prevail over that with China on a potential North-South disagreement over peacekeeping. Also, in the peacekeeping field *per se*, emerging powers present very different profiles that make any generalization difficult. With the exception of India, who has always been an important troop contributor to UN operations, the other emerging countries have only recently started to see peace operations as vehicles of their foreign policies.

Second, insofar as the critique of the liberal peace model is concerned, a united front has not seen light. Despite reservations on the degree of intrusiveness of peace operations, Brazil and India have overall little problem with the liberal peace approach. Indeed, Brazil’s policy as chair of the country-specific configuration for Guinea-Bissau in the PBC did not reveal any significant distance from the traditional peacebuilding agenda. Even China would most likely put up with economic liberalization—provided that state consent is given—and only question the political dimension of liberal peace. Most importantly, the increasing contribution of emerging powers to peacekeeping operations has not so far been matched by parallel efforts in the peacebuilding domain. Be it in the fields of humanitarian or development aid in post-conflict environments, emerging countries still lag behind countries of the North, both in the policy debates, in the funding of programmes or in their actual implementation. China has significantly

increased its bilateral aid to African countries, but keeps a low profile in peacebuilding debates. India recurrently puts forward its “unique nation-building enterprise”⁵ and comparative advantages in various peacebuilding areas (security sector reform (SSR), post-conflict transition, etc.). Yet its peacebuilding presence is by no means comparable with its peacekeeping weight. Overall, while peacebuilding could be an area where a normative disconnect between the prevailing norms and emerging powers’ preferences could be expressed, emerging powers tend to put up with the objectives and policies of the PBC, especially as full consent is given by host states through the “Statement of Mutual Commitment.” Finance also comes into play here. More than in the peacekeeping field, donors play a key role in the peacebuilding area. Emerging countries have increased their contribution over the past years, including through bilateral programmes, but apart from China, they still lag behind OECD countries in disbursement terms.

Third, a greater involvement of emerging powers in peace missions may impact their own conceptions of crisis management, in a way that would bring them closer to the current philosophy and practice. A mix of pragmatism and “socialization process” may develop as emerging powers get more involved and grasp the complexity of conflict management policies. Already current operations have shown how emerging powers implicitly draw a distinction between principled positions expressed in UN political fora on issues such as state sovereignty, host states’ consent or protection of civilians on the one hand, and country-specific situations or actions on the ground on the other hand. China is a case in point. Be it in relation to its “One China” policy, its state-centric approach to international relations or its narrow conception of sovereignty, China has revealed pragmatism and flexibility, for example by contributing to the Haiti mission though Haiti formally recognizes Taiwan, or by tacitly endorsing intrusive Security Council mandates and the broad interpretation of the peacekeeping principles. Brazil’s and India’s policies have equally been to a degree shaped by the operations they have participated in. And if sovereignty and host-state consent are central to their conception of peace operations, their own contributions, from Haiti (where Brazilian forces are much involved in coercively confronting criminal gangs) to the DRC, have shown that pragmatism often prevails over ideology.

Overall, although emerging powers see peace operations as a vehicle for raising their profile and possibly buttressing their national interests, the peacekeeping/peacebuilding

⁵ See “General Assembly Weighs in on UN Peacebuilding Architecture” (GA/11017, DPI, New York), 29 October 2010.

field may not be worth the fight that normative divergences can entail. Put differently, peacekeeping is not seen as an area where norms should be broken.

... in an Increasingly Volatile Environment

While the consensus on what peacekeeping should be about seems to prevail, peacekeeping operations are simultaneously confronted with an increasingly volatile environment that directly challenges their ability to operate. This volatile environment reflects the evolution of threats and conflicts on a broader scale, and is not specific to peacekeeping theatres. Yet it impacts peacekeeping in various significant manners.

In his address to the UN Security Council in June 2014 when he announced the need for a new peacekeeping review, UNSG Ban Ki-moon identified four aspects of peacekeeping requiring particular attention: the fact that “UN peacekeeping operations are increasingly mandated to operate where there is no peace to keep”; the fact that “some UN peacekeeping operations are being authorized in the absence of clearly identifiable parties to the conflict or a viable political process”; the fact that “UN peacekeeping operations are increasingly operating in more complex environments that feature asymmetric and unconventional threats”; and the need to “build on the renewed commitment of the Security Council to respond to our changing world.”⁶

Indeed, while peacekeeping operations are in principle operating where negative peace—or at least a lasting cease-fire—is in place, most of the large UN operations are facing situations of open conflict. It has been the case in the Eastern part of the DRC for some time, with the presence of more than forty armed groups and militias, some of which are benefitting from direct foreign support. The situations in Mali, South Sudan, and the CAR are equally unstable, with armed groups operating in Northern Mali and different parts of the CAR despite the presence of UN operations, while war broke out in South Sudan two years after the deployment of the UN operation. In both Mali and the CAR, the situation of ongoing conflict was even factored into the planning phase of the operation, which explicitly questions the very principle of “peace”-keeping. Furthermore, these four cases are also characterized by weak or absent political processes that would allow for the restoration of peace. In Mali, while the possible signing of a peace deal under the auspices of Algeria would certainly help stabilize the situation and facilitate the implementation of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization

⁶ UNSG Remarks at Security Council Open Debate on Trends in United Nations Peacekeeping, 11 June 2014.

Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) mandate, it would not address the root causes of the conflict. This directly impacts the mandate of these missions as it questions their role in mediating/intervening in the ongoing conflicts, possibly in support of the sovereign states. It furthermore complicates their deployment for security reasons. Military units may concentrate on force protection and be reluctant to deploy in the most dangerous areas, while the civilian component would also be constrained by ongoing fighting. In turn, the situation of conflict challenges the impartiality of the operation as it openly fights alongside governmental forces (as in the DRC), or is asked to do so (as in Mali).

Second, peacekeepers are increasingly confronted with asymmetrical threats emanating from terrorist or organized crime groups. Back in the 1980s, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had faced deadly terrorist attacks; similarly, the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq was the target in August 2003 of a bomb attack that killed, together with twenty-two UN officials, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sergio Vieira de Mello. The recurrent attacks on UN peacekeepers in Mali are therefore not totally new.⁷ However, the *modus operandi* of the armed groups—with the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)—creates new vulnerabilities for the peacekeepers. Two series of issues follow from this. One is whether peacekeepers should respond and how. The Mali operation's mandate explicitly excludes counter-terrorism, but self-defense carries the risk of dragging the UN contingents into military confrontation with the radical armed groups. The other issue is how these new vulnerabilities impact the operations' mandate, in terms of force protection vs. civilian protection, for example. Any configuration where Blue Helmets are directly and repeatedly targeted and ill-equipped to respond or even protect themselves is likely to reinforce the temptation of “bunkerisation” at the expense of mandate implementation.

Third, lessons from past operations—in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Rwanda most specifically—have led the UN to mainstream the protection of civilians in peace operations, often as a priority task of the mission. Starting in 1999 with the creation of the operation in Sierra Leone (UN Mission in Sierra Leone: UNAMSIL)—the mandate of which refers for the first time to the “protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence”⁸—the UN has progressively integrated civilian protection by peacekeepers into its new mandates. Twelve of the 17 UN peacekeeping operations under the aegis of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)

⁷ In 2014, MINUSMA suffered 38 fatalities—among which 27 were a result of malicious acts.

⁸ UNSC Res. 1270, 22 October 1999, para.14.

in 2015 are explicitly mandated to protect civilians. In the DRC, the mandate of the UN Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC), amended in December 2008, even makes the protection of civilians the primary task of the operation,⁹ as is the case for the operation in South Sudan since violence has broken out in late 2013. The civilian-protection mandate raises a series of questions for the peacekeepers in terms of training and equipment, but also in terms of the feasibility of civilian protection in wide territories (as in the DRC or the CAR) and the place of the use of force in the implementation of civilian protection (see below). Most importantly, the extent to which the contingents deployed are ready to operate in a civilian-protection mode, which may carry risks for themselves, is yet to be seen. As said before, force protection often prevails for contingents that are not trained to prioritise civilian protection.

This leads to a fourth development that relates to the merits of the use of force in peacekeeping operations, relating to the concept of robust peacekeeping. The UN has always had difficulty in reconciling its central role in the maintenance of international peace and security with the idea of coercion.¹⁰ The use of force is not absent from the UN prerogatives, but the nature of the organisation, its broad composition and the politics that emanate from its main organs have made coercion conceptually and practically uncertain. The idea of robustness within peace operations confirms this long-term trend. Robust peacekeeping is at the heart of what was called in the early 1990s the “grey area” of peacekeeping, an ill-defined activity situated between traditional peacekeeping and peace enforcement. The UN and its member states have faced great difficulty in handling this “grey area,” both in doctrinal and operational terms. At the core of the matter is the use of force by the military in situations that fundamentally are not about war-fighting.

The concept of robust peacekeeping emerged in the late 1990s as a response to the tragedies of Rwanda and Srebrenica, where UN peacekeepers did not intervene to stop massive violations of human rights, allegedly because they were not “robust enough.”

In 2000, the Brahimi Report referred several times to the necessity of “robust peacekeeping forces,”¹¹ as a lesson from past experiences. Subsequently, mandates of

⁹ See UNSC Res. 1856, 22 December 2008, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰ See Thierry Tardy, “The UN and the Use of Force: A Marriage against Nature,” *Security Dialogue*, vol. 38, no. 1, March 2007.

¹¹ The Brahimi Report mentions the word “robust” six times. It talks about a “robust doctrine” (p. ix), “sufficiently robust rules of engagement” (p. x), “robust peacekeeping forces” (p. xi), “robust force posture” (p. 1) and “robust rules of engagement” (p. 10 and 54). See Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, United Nations, A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 August 2000.

newly-created operations increasingly include the concept that UN peacekeepers must be given the political and operational means to successfully implement their mandate. In particular, the simultaneous attention given to the protection of civilians in peace missions has led the Security Council to instil a vocabulary of robustness in its resolutions.¹²

Robustness is understood as a way to give any operation a degree of credibility, in particular *vis-à-vis* spoilers. Robustness is designed to allow a peacekeeping force to protect itself, to provide freedom of manoeuvre and to prevent situations where the implementation of the mandate or more broadly the peace process is taken hostage by spoilers.

Robustness was tested apparently with some success through the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) that defeated the M-23 in the Eastern part of the DRC in 2013. UNSC Resolution 2098 (2013) that created the FIB mandated it to “neutralize” armed groups in Eastern DRC. It was presented by the UNSG as a milestone that “signalled the resolve of the Security Council to address the changing nature of conflict and the operating environment of UN peacekeeping.”¹³ Although it was composed of three countries operating largely outside the UN umbrella, the Brigade was formally part of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO). In theory, the FIB must not constitute a precedent, yet many in UN circles see the Brigade as a possible model for more robust operations against spoilers. As an example, the idea of a rapid reaction force being inspired by the FIB was mentioned in the context of the MINUSMA in Mali and the need for a more robust response to armed groups operating in the North.

In the meantime, the implications of more coercive interventions both for host countries’ sovereignty and the intervening states have been largely overlooked. Host states do give their consent to the presence of a UN operation, yet they are placed *de facto* in a situation of dependence that affects the nature of the relationship with the interveners. This relationship has started to be teased apart only recently. The idea that peacekeepers can resort to force on the territory of a sovereign country is not anodyne. It carries a meaning that goes beyond the framework of a given operation and touches on international politics and the principles that regulate it.

Most importantly, most troop and police contributing countries (T&PCCs) are

¹² See Victoria Holt and Glyn Taylor, *Protecting Civilians in the Context of UN Peacekeeping Operations: Successes, Setbacks and Remaining Challenges*, Independent Study, DPKO/OCHA, New York, 2009.

¹³ UNSG Remarks at Security Council Open Debate on Trends in United Nations Peacekeeping, 11 June 2014.

reluctant to adopt a pro-active posture that could lead them to confront the “spoilers.” The T&PCCs’ passivity may be related to the nature of the threat—such as in the case of terrorist groups in Mali—but most likely it is simply linked to the risk of escalation, as has been the case in most large operations (MONUSCO, the AU/UN Hybrid operation in Darfur: UNAMID, etc.) where there was no specific terrorist threat. T&PCCs also invoke a lack of equipment that any robust posture would require. In quite a few operations, UN battalions lack basic equipment such as transport vehicles, which inherently impedes their ability to act in any robust manner. At the political level, robust peacekeeping is often perceived by the T&PCCs from the global South as a concept developed in Northern countries that for most of them are absent from peace operations. What has been called the North-South divide in peace operations has not so far impacted the above-mentioned consensus, yet it takes a particular resonance in the context of these new peacekeeping trends. As a result, while robust peacekeeping has created a lot of expectations, it tends to remain largely theoretical, and is unlikely to see light in a truly UN context.

Peacekeeping practices have evolved over the last two decades in a somewhat improvised manner, and with little reflection on the broad implications of these changing practices. Robust peacekeeping is no exception. It is presented as a response to long-lasting weaknesses of UN operations, and although it might well be in some cases, it also reflects the ambiguities of UN and state policies in the management of international and intrastate crises.

Conclusion

The various evolutions that UN peacekeeping has faced over the last ten years tend to challenge peace operations in their nature. In principle, peace operations still abide by the key peacekeeping principles and enjoy the broad support of the international community. However, the latest developments have shown how, almost fifteen years after the release of the Brahimi report, peace operations are once again struggling to assert their legitimacy and impact. This is what makes Ban Ki-moon’s initiative to review peace operations necessary and timely. In this context, at least two sets of challenges need to be tackled. One pertains to the degree of consensus that peace operations need to enjoy in the international community, not only among the permanent members of the UN Security Council, but also within the broader community of peacekeeping stakeholders. This includes the main T&PCCs as well as the regional powers neighboring the operation’s host state.

The other set of challenges relates to what the role of the UN in crisis management should be. In recent years, expectations of what the UN could achieve through peacekeeping operations have been raised dramatically. By nature, peace operations are ambitious. They are about bringing peace to societies that have often gone through long periods of instability and war. As they are the most visible part of the international response to state fragility, they tend to raise expectations about what they are going to achieve.

However, the complexity and length of “bringing peace” is such that expectations are inevitably disappointed, regardless of the organisation—or state(s)—in charge of the peacekeeping/peacebuilding efforts. This is not to say that peacekeeping is doomed to fail; the point is rather that there exists a pernicious relationship between the level of ambition of UN peace operations’ mandates and the ensuing local expectations on the one hand, and what peace operations can realistically deliver on the other hand. “Limited achievements” are inherent to peacekeeping and peacebuilding. In the medium to long term, this misperception negatively impacts the legitimacy and credibility of the UN.

In this context, the UN and its member states must, once again, revisit the way mandates are being designed so as to minimize the expectation gap; dialogue with local leaders and civil society groups must also be clear about what the UN operation will realistically be in a position to achieve, and what it will not. This is particularly important in the field of civilian protection, where there is a tension between the moral imperative of protecting civilians that are physically threatened and the feasibility of such a task. SSR and good governance are also domains where the impact of external interventions is likely to remain limited in the short run. Second, as already put in the Brahimi Report, the UN should not be asked to do what it is not structurally, culturally and politically organised to do. Most specifically, any move towards a more assertive conception of the use of force should be accompanied by the utmost prudence, and in any case be *ad hoc*. This is so because a military option carried out by UN peacekeepers cannot be a long-term response to what are fundamentally political problems, and there might well be threats—such as the ones posed by radical armed groups—that the UN is simply not in a position to confront in any significant military manner.