

Balancing Expectations with Assets: A German Perspective on UN Peacekeeping

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Abstract

While both East and West Germany became members of the United Nations in 1973, contributions to UN peacekeeping emerged as a relevant policy option for Germany only after the end of the Cold War and reunification. Current German UN peacekeeping commitments will be analyzed against this background, as well as possible priorities offered for the purpose of shaping Germany's future peacekeeping profile.

Germany and UN peacekeeping—that seems to be a somewhat difficult relationship. At first sight, such a statement may seem surprising, given the fact that:

- Germany has already been elected to the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member five times;
- Germany has for many years been one of the main financial contributors to the UN budgets;
- Germany has been a strong supporter of the UN in several important political fields (such as human rights and international criminal justice);
- Germany has over the years occupied high-level posts in the UN system, e.g. Klaus Toepfer as Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP); Inge Kaul as Director with the UN Development Programme (UNDP); and Angela Kane as UN High Representative for Disarmament. In addition, Germany held the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2010;
- Germany even held a top job in peacekeeping when Gen. Manfred Eisele was Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for Planning and Support in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) at the UN Secretariat (1994-1998).

Even though all these examples have no doubt shaped the German UN profile, there seems to be some room for improvement, particularly in regard to UN peacekeeping. Germany's ranking 59th in the latest list of UN troop and police contributors is indicative of this assessment.¹

¹ See http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2014/dec14_2.pdf (as of 31 December 2014).

In this analysis, several underlying factors can be identified that contribute to such a relatively low German peacekeeping profile, each reinforcing the other.

- a. The historic factor. When the UN was founded in 1945, this was initially directed against Germany (and the other WWII axis powers). Germany's UN membership started only in 1973: the then two German states, the Federal Republic of Germany (West) and the German Democratic Republic (East) joined the Organization upon approval by the UN General Assembly. Only then were the procedures and structures of the UN system learned. Naturally, it took some time to incorporate UN specifics into the scope of policy making and career planning. Despite this late arrival—maybe even because of it—the UN has featured positively in German public opinion from the beginning. Interestingly, while the world has changed continuously since 1973, the UN has kept its high approval ratings among the German public. This consistent element facilitates decision making on UN contributions today.
- b. The political factor. Throughout the Cold War period, Germany was divided (East vs. West), with the frontline cutting right through the country. Besides being concerned with overcoming the burdens of the division, however, there were other regional issues of high interest on the political agenda, such as the European economic integration process, the CSCE/OSCE process (Helsinki Final Act 1975), and negotiations on the implementation of regional arms control regimes. Therefore, after joining the UN, political priorities were diverse, and political resources limited.
- c. The military factor. During the Cold War period, both German states were key members of their respective military blocs. As for the Federal Republic of Germany, the NATO alliance provided us with security for decades. The German military, through regular training and exercises, became more and more integrated into NATO structures and procedures. As a result, NATO became synonymous with peace and security, as German membership was considered a prerequisite for economic prosperity. Security policy for Germany was focused rather exclusively on NATO, and this mindset took root—in politics, in the military, and in the public.

After the end of the Cold War (1989), the sole focus on NATO as a security provider developed into a more multi-faceted view of peace and security. More options (including more organizations) regarding the maintenance of peace and security evolved and became relevant.

At this particular time, the UN was overwhelmed with demands for more and newer peacekeeping operations (e.g. in Central America, in Africa, and in Europe/the Balkans) without being properly prepared. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's "agenda for peace" (1992) responded to this critical situation. The "agenda" reflected on the whole spectrum of future UN peace activities, including preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peace-building, and, in fact, opened up the international discussion not only on policy options in international crisis management but also on the role the United Nations in particular should play in a world that had changed dramatically since the period of East-West confrontation.

When UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali presented his "agenda for peace" upon request by the Security Council, Germany was still domestically occupied with many challenges in the process of unification. However, the country opened up slowly but visibly vis-à-vis UN peacekeeping (the first meaningful participations took place in Cambodia, Somalia, and the Balkans). The fact that Manfred Eisele, a German general, was appointed UN Assistant Secretary-General (DPKO) in 1994 was an important factor in generating more interest in the UN in Germany, particularly in regard to UN peacekeeping. Eisele's sheer presence at United Nations headquarters as the top blue helmet was not only an interesting story for the German media, due to the wide range of complicated conflicts and demanding post-conflict situations UN peacekeepers were confronted with from Angola to Tajikistan to Haiti, just to name a few. More significantly, in historic terms, Eisele's appointment to the top job in UN peacekeeping symbolized the progress that had been made by Germany in international affairs since the end of World War II. In fact, it had been a long journey: from rubble and devastation on a large scale resulting from a bloody, destructive war that was deliberately led by a criminal German regime, Germany had step by step developed into a modern, competitive, and successful economy, come to terms with its neighbours, committed itself to mutual understanding and cooperation, and promoted European integration. When General Eisele became one of the highest-ranking UN representatives in peace and security, it could be considered a symbol of the trust and confidence the world was ready to invest in the new Germany.

Less than one decade later, after 9/11, the international focus of crisis management moved to Afghanistan. Germany took its share, and has been involved in Afghanistan with a strong military contingent (ISAF). In addition, other peace-support operations, mainly led by NATO (such as KFOR in Kosovo) and the EU (such as the naval anti-piracy operation "Atalanta" off the Horn of Africa) have been supported until

today. There were also German contributions to UN missions, although rather small in numbers (e.g. UNOMIG,² UNMEE³).

Where do we stand today? There are at least three relevant observations to be made:

- Since ISAF terminated its mission in Afghanistan at the end of 2014, a discussion has been evolving whether Germany—with its resources now freed up—should not contribute more to UN peacekeeping. The debate is taking place in a variety of different fora, from policy-making circles to civil society.
- There is a domestic political discussion on “more responsibility” for Germany in the international arena, which has been triggered by the Federal President, the Foreign Minister, and by the Defence Minister. Often misunderstood by the public, this discussion does not focus primarily on future military commitments. However, it does not exclude them, either. As a bottom line, the question needs to be answered whether Germany, in its own interest, should change from a security recipient to a security provider in international affairs.
- There are expectations vis-à-vis Germany from our partners and friends (including the UN) for us to assume a stronger share in international security. During their visits to Germany in recent years, top UN representatives (including the Secretary-General and his Deputy) have repeatedly asked for more ambitious German contributions to UN peacekeeping missions. Those expectations have grown even more explicit as recent UN peace operations have been confronted with new—sometimes even unprecedented—challenges that call for a collective response from the UN membership as a whole. After all, being a nation whose economy depends to a large extent on export and good trade relationships worldwide, Germany itself has a vested interest in peace, security, and stability on a global scale.

Simultaneously, in the domestic arena, ideas have been developed on strengthening the German profile, especially in regard to UN peacekeeping. Recently endorsed MoD⁴ guidelines focus on four major fields of action, each of them containing a catalogue of proposed activities:

- (1) Personnel: Here a strategic approach is considered imperative in order to be competitive regarding nominations for senior leadership and/or management positions. Also, it could be worthwhile to create a national pool of UN-experienced personnel—civilian, police, and military—from which one could pick candidates

² UN Observer Mission in Georgia.

³ UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

⁴ Ministry of Defense.

when qualified personnel are needed.

- (2) **Peacekeeping Presence:** In recent years, German contributions to UN missions have mainly consisted of individual staff officers, military observers, or experts in specialist areas. While all these contributions have their benefits and no doubt serve the purpose of their respective mission mandates, Germany could reconsider its contribution tactics. As one of the largest financial contributors to the UN, the largest economy in Europe, and a country with a strong political profile in the world, it seems obvious that German contributions to UN missions could be more substantive in nature. In fact, it is in the interest of Germany, as an export nation that depends on free and stable markets worldwide, to promote peace and security, thus preventing conflicts from breaking out or renewing, respectively.

Given several generations of UN missions, the focus for Germany should be on modern, multidimensional peacekeeping operations (while not excluding the deployment of UN military observers). Through broad mandates, those missions often reflect a variety of challenges (from the protection of civilians and security sector reform to the promotion of the rule of law and a possibly robust performance, just to name a few). Those challenges are a reality in modern crisis management, and all UN member states, following the spirit of the UN Charter, are encouraged to adjust their peacekeeping activities to meet those challenges through tailored contributions.

Finally, it should not be overlooked that since the 1990s the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations has been maintaining a standby database, fed by member states with information on their potential contributions to UN peacekeeping operations and taking into account national priorities and constraints. Those standby resources, however, have been activated only in rare cases. But does the reluctance displayed so far necessarily have to be a constant factor? Since Germany has offered standby capabilities both civilian and military, it should be evaluated whether or not those resources, at least in part, could be released from time to time.

- (3) **Peacekeeping Training:** Even though Germany does make use of well-established UN-certified national training institutions, with respect to UN peacekeeping, improvements are still feasible. For instance, it would be worthwhile to establish cooperation and/or exchange programmes with countries that have a long-standing tradition in UN peacekeeping. Their experience, knowledge, and lessons learned may prove a useful basis for mutually beneficial training activities. The Scandinavian countries, India, or Brazil come to mind as potential partners in this regard, among

others. Step by step an international peacekeeping training group of interested national training centres could be formed, with a special focus on UN peace missions. Of course, UN personnel—both from the Secretariat and from field missions—should form part of this new, modernized training approach.

- (4) Peacekeeping Reform: The ongoing debate in the context of the “UN Peace Operations Review” coincides with an inner-German initiative to contribute more substantially to peacekeeping reform that was triggered by the “New Horizon” initiative, launched in 2009 in New York by both the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support. Interestingly, this reform initiative did not originate from Member States but from the Secretariat—an indication that resources have been too limited to fulfil broad and multifaceted peacekeeping mandates given to the UN by the Security Council mandating on behalf of the entire UN membership.

Since launching, “New Horizon” has aimed convincingly at strengthening the partnership between Member States (both troop/police contributors and financial contributors) and the Secretariat. Some innovative ideas have since been generated, as is reflected in the progress reports delivered by the UN Secretariat.

However, there is still a need for the reform impetus to be reinvigorated. With roughly 120,000 peacekeepers in the field—close to a historic peak—the UN must adapt to changed (changing) circumstances in many mission areas. This is where the High-Level Panel (Chair: José Ramos-Horta) is likely to play an important role as pacesetter for change. One key element should be to enhance the credibility of UN peacekeeping, starting with an acceptable deployment time after the mandate has been approved, and ending with properly equipped and properly trained personnel arriving in the mission area. The reform debate, on both the global and national levels, also needs to tackle critical issues, such as the protection of civilians, which has become a regular feature in recent UN peacekeeping mandates. Another question that requires clarification is the relationship between the UN and regional actors (regional organizations) in stabilizing peace and security.

Germany will develop its own proposals for enhancing the national UN peacekeeping profile, and will feed them into the reform process on the UN level. According to the comprehensive understanding of national peace and security policy, these proposals will be coordinated between various government branches (e.g. the Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence, and Ministry of the Interior).

Against the overall background of a current global peacekeeping scenario that is in the process of adapting to changing conditions in the field, together with a variety of players on global, regional, and national levels, it is evident that the peacekeeping debate is enormously complex and political in character. Quick reform fixes are not likely to happen. Still, as the credibility of one of the UN flagship activities is at stake, all UN member states should contribute to the best of their abilities in order for the current reform process to be concluded successfully.

As for Germany, initiatives and contributions will have to be matched with specific national conditions. In that sense, it will be a logical step—both in historic, political, and military terms—that UN peacekeeping develop into a more prominent element of the German peace and security agenda. While contributions to UN peace missions spell responsibility on a global scale, they also form part of the multinational integration path chosen by Germany. Commitments, therefore, will continue to be balanced vis-à-vis international players on a wide range beyond the UN, including NATO, EU and OSCE. A smart way out of this competitive situation could be in developing a German peacekeeping trademark: a capability that Germany offers to UN peacekeeping as a continuous, reliable commitment.