Peace Operations Partnerships:
Complex but Necessary Cooperation

Richard Gowan and Jake Sherman

In cases including Afghanistan, Kosovo, Somalia and the Congo, multiple organizations are working together to consolidate stability and build function-ing states. Although NATO and the UN are the main actors in global peace operations today, it is likely that a variety of other organizations including the African Union (AU), the Arab League and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) will play an increasingly prominent role in the future. These actors will need a great deal of help, ranging from military assistance to administrative back-up. The UN, NATO and EU will be called upon to play significant supporting roles. Managing these complex partnerships will be essential to making existing and new peace operations succeed.

Since the late 1990s, two big institutional players have dominated international peace operations. NATO deployed major military missions in the Balkans and Afghanistan, while the United Nations was in the lead almost everywhere else – with a focus on Africa and the Middle East. Other organizations, most notably the African and European Unions, also played an active part in peacekeeping but none have come close to NATO and the UN in terms of deployments. In late 2011, there were just over 260,000 soldiers and police officers on duty in peace operations worldwide. Over 140,000 of these were under NATO command (the vast majority in Afghani-stan) while nearly 100,000 were serving with the UN.
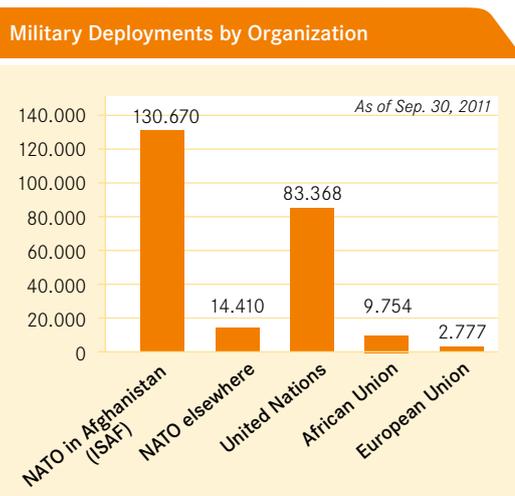
Yet, peace operations may be on the verge of a period of deep change. NATO forces are begin-ning to pull back from Afghanistan. The UN is also likely to make significant cuts to some long-standing missions in the next two to three years, shrinking its forces in the Congo, Haiti

and West Africa. New NATO or UN peacekeepers may be needed elsewhere, not least in response to turbulence in the Middle East. But there are strong financial pressures on both organizations to limit their overall deployments.

Meanwhile, other organizations may play a greater role in peace operations in the near future. Over the last year the African Union has expanded it forces in Somalia – now mandated to grow to 17,000 personnel – while taking an increasingly robust approach to Islamist militias. AU forces gradually secured control of Moga-dishu after prolonged block-to-block fighting, despite taking significant casualties.

Responding to events in Syria, the Arab League launched its first peace operation since the 1970s at the end of 2011. Its observer mission – meant to oversee the withdrawal of Syrian forces from urban areas - was quickly improvised and deeply flawed. But the League could well deploy more operations in the future.

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Military Deployments by Organization

As of Sep. 30, 2011

Organization	Deployments
NATO in Afghanistan (ISAF)	130.670
NATO elsewhere	14.410
United Nations	83.368
African Union	9.754
European Union	2.777

Source: Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2012,
Center on International Cooperation

Even ASEAN, famous for its cautious approach to conflicts, has approved a military monitoring mission to help calm the Thai-Cambodian border dispute. In the former Soviet space, the Cooperation and Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is forming a new peacekeeping force that could respond to a crisis such as the violence that shook Kyrgyzstan in 2010.

Police Deployments by Organization

As of Sep. 30, 2011

Organization	Deployments
United Nations	14.307
European Union	1.446
African Union	50

Source: Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2012,
Center on International Cooperation

None of these organizations is aiming to surpass the UN in terms of peacekeepers deployed in the foreseeable future. But peace operations may be entering a phase in which a growing number of regional organizations experiment with small and medium-sized missions (as the EU did in the 2000s) while NATO and the UN remain providers of larger military operations in the last resort *(see text box)*.

Yet, organizations such as the AU and Arab League cannot become peacekeeping powerhouses on their own. The AU has had missions in the field for nearly a decade, but it has often struggled to get the equipment it needs and to build up its headquarters capacity. Its mission in Darfur received support from the EU, UN and NATO, and was converted into an AU-UN mission in 2008. Its operation in Somalia relies on the UN for its supplies, while the EU is involved in training Somali soldiers in Uganda. After its initial foray into Syria, the Arab League requested UN assistance in deploying any larger peacekeeping mission.

So the next generation of peace operations is likely to be based on innovative inter-organizational cooperation. What forms will future missions take, and how will organizations pool their resources?

New Models for Joint Operations

Multi-organizational peace operations are not new. The UN emphasizes its belief in "peacekeeping partnerships", and the EU and NATO have also underlined the importance of working with others. But cooperation is often still troublesome. Administrative, operational and political concerns create frictions. AU cooperation with the UN has been upset by debates over the role of the International Criminal Court in cases including Darfur and Libya. In Afghanistan, NATO-UN contacts are often sparse after years of co-deployment, while the UN-EU cooperation in Kosovo during the EULEX deployment in 2008 was difficult.

Organizations aim to maintain the highest degree of operational autonomy possible, even where they are cooperating extremely closely. True hybrid missions (where organizations place their forces under common command structures) remain rare. The main current example, the AU-UN force in Darfur, has been complicated by disputes between the two organizations over issues such as senior appointments.

Yet having multiple organizations running parallel operations in a single theater is also inefficient. Even where two organizations have common goals (as when the EU and UN deployed missions to Chad in 2008) differing chains of command, risk assessments and rules of engagement can hamper cooperation.

In a period of limited resources, there will be pressures for organizations to pool their assets and reduce their reliance on parallel command systems. The new focus may be on "modular" missions, by which organizations provide different parts of a peace operation in a common framework. Options include:

- **Shared mission support frameworks:** *in future operations, multiple organizations could deploy different elements of a peace operation (UN troops, EU police advisers, etc.) but share a logistical framework, stockpiles of supplies, heavy airlift, medical facilities and other assets.*

- **Specialized military support:** *where one organization (such as the AU or UN) has a long-term peace operation, others (such as the EU or NATO) can deploy specialized military missions to carry out specific tasks such as building military bases or using drones to gather information.*

- **Niche civilian support:** *peace operations are required to take on a wide range of civilian tasks, and few organizations have easy access to all the specialists they need. In the future, organizations may be able to borrow experts from one another more efficiently, such as human rights experts from the UN or public finance specialists from the World Bank and EU.*

- **Common planning frameworks:** *where multiple organizations deploy simultaneously, they often fall out over risk assessments and planning priorities. However, it is possible to conduct joint planning – as in a 2011 common assessment of the situation in post-Gaddafi Libya by the UN, EU and World Bank – that can at least get all partners to agree on a common strategy for action.*

Where organizations with relatively limited peacekeeping capacities or experience – such as the Arab League or ASEAN – deploy, they may also need simpler forms of assistance from others. For example, a regional organization attempting to set up a relatively small operation such as the Arab observer mission in Syria could turn to the UN or EU for assets such as vehicles and secure communications equipment as well as assistance with mission management issues such as budgeting, accounting and human resources.

The Resilience of Military Peace Operations

Even if there is a shift towards lighter and non-military peace operations, there will still be a need for heavier military missions in some cases. In 2011, UN forces in Côte d'Ivoire undertook offensive operations to protect civilians, while peacekeepers in Haiti and Liberia helped secure tense elections. Light political missions could not have managed these tasks.

The UN remains well-placed to deploy heavier operations, as it can draw on significant numbers of troops from Asia and Latin America that are not committed to any regional organization's operations. Meanwhile, NATO nations still have a unique combination of land, sea and air assets although European defense cuts are taking a mounting toll.

Limits to Cooperation

Certain types of cooperation are likely to remain especially sensitive. The three most problematic ones will probably be intelligence, rapid reaction forces and political strategy. Western intelligence analysts are always worried by sharing material with organizations such as the UN for fear of leaks – and many developing countries argue that the UN should not get involved in spying. Cooperation in this area is likely to remain limited and informal, even if it is necessary where peacekeepers are in risky theaters.

Rapid reaction forces have always been a source of contention between peacekeeping organizations. In theory, well-equipped organizations such as the EU and NATO should be able to rush forces to assist the UN or less well-resourced regional organizations in major crises. The EU *did* hurry to help the UN in the Congo in 2003, and has set up a system of Battle Groups to carry out similar operations in future.

But there is no guarantee that rapid reinforcements will always be available. Military and political calculations are on a case-by-case basis. In 2008, the UN requested the EU for rapid military support during another crisis in the Congo but received no reinforcements. There is a need for ongoing dialogue between organizations about *how* to make rapid reaction possible – dealing with issues such as contingency planning – but it is probably impossible to ensure that reinforcements are *automatically* available.

Differences over political strategies can also complicate cooperation. During the post-electoral violence in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010-2011, for example, the UN insisted that incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo should accept his defeat at the polls. UN peacekeepers defended the election winner, Alassane Ouattara. But AU mediators initially searched for a power sharing agreement that would satisfy both leaders. The differences in organizations' positions arguably prolonged the crisis.

Where possible, the best way for multiple organizations to agree on a common political strategy is to work on the basis of a single mandate from the Security Council (as NATO, the UN, OSCE and EU did in Kosovo from 1999 and the AU and UN now do in Darfur). However, as the Arab League discovered in the Syrian case in 2011, it is sometimes necessary for regional organizations to devise new missions without a UN mandate. If two or more organizations co-deploy without the UN's blessing, top-level leaders must forge a shared political vision to guide the missions – otherwise, there will be great friction in the field.

Strengthening Cooperation

International and regional organizations often find themselves coordinating in specific crises with little warning. However, officials from across organizations and concerned governments will have a better chance of cooperating effectively if they work on three issues in advance: *(i)* researching and discussing each others' capabilities and weaknesses; *(ii)* nurturing strong formal and informal networks across organizations; and *(iii)* using these networks to share knowledge as freely and quickly as possible.

Ensuring that organizations are able to communicate about their needs and capabilities efficiently is not easy. Some, such as NATO and the EU, have well-developed bureaucracies at headquarters – but their complex decision-making procedures often leave outsiders confused. Other organizations, such as the AU and ASEAN, still have small and constantly overloaded secretariats.

The main players in peacekeeping have developed numerous joint working groups, memoranda of understanding and structured dialogues about their operations. The UN has a de facto "embassy" to the AU and the UN Security Council now holds regular meetings with the AU's Peace and Security Council. The UN also has a Brussels-based team liasing with the EU while EU, NATO and the AU all have representatives to the UN.[1]

More work is needed to open similar dialogues with emerging or potential players in peacekeeping such as the Arab League or CSTO. However, experience shows that structured dialogues can often grow stale after a few years, and that formal coordinating mechanisms are often sidelined when a crisis explodes.

Strong personalities can sometimes cut through these problems. The UN has recently deepened its working relationship with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and launched successful joint diplomatic initiatives on a number of crises thanks to close ties between the UN's envoy in the region and the ECOWAS leadership. But when it comes to making major decisions about peace operations, officials are inevitably constrained by diplomatic bargaining among national governments.

Making peacekeeping partnerships work is an art rather than a science. Officials who have worked planned and managed joint operations emphasize the unpredictability of their business. Nonetheless, it is important that these officials grasp the increasing possibility that peacekeeping is likely to involve more and more organizations – with very different background, priorities and abilities – in the years ahead. They must find ways to ensure that they can cooperate effectively when circumstances demand it.

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[1] For a more detailed discussion of related issues refer to the ZIF Policy Briefings of Mauricio Artiñano and Joachim Koops of March 2012.