

Protection of Civilians – UNITAR Training
Summary of Remarks

Thanks to UNITAR for organizing this event and to the Republic of Korea for its strong Council membership, its commitment to rule of law and humanitarian services for those displaced by violence, and its continued leadership of key UN functions, including of course now of ECOSOC.

Much of these remarks are taken from the book, edited principally by Dr. Trudy Fraser (here with us), for Springer Publishers entitled, “Fresh Perspectives on Peacekeeping and Atrocity Prevention.”

1. POC has gone in a very short time from a controversial, sovereignty threatening idea to the heart of the UN’s peacekeeping objectives. 1999 resolution on Sierra Leone UNAMSIL which was a fairly modest effort that was designed to protect civilians under threat but not to directly seek out spoilers. “UNAMSIL may take the necessary action to ensure the security and freedom of movement of its **personnel** and, within its capabilities and areas of deployment, to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, taking into account the responsibilities of the Government of Sierra Leone.”

That was the standard mandate for a decade – if you see something, do something, but don’t look for trouble.

2. POC changes the dynamic for peacekeepers, especially when mandates are developed to permit robust operations such as with the Intervention Brigade in the DRC. The Brigade was authorized in 2013 **for targeted offensive operations to neutralize armed groups that threaten State authority and civilian security**, specifically to seek out and neutralize the M-23, one of the three major spoiler groups operating in the region. And while the brigade mandate officially does not ‘set a precedent,’ other countries facing threats from spoilers have sought similar capacities, most recently Mali. Despite the fact that officials at DPKO seem pleased with the results of the brigade, and have expanded it in the past year to include other spoilers, there is concern in several quarters about UN peacekeeping becoming a partisan activity, aligned with state interests even in situations where trust in the state has been severely compromised. We are concerned about operations that sacrifice impartiality that comes from an increasingly robust mandate such as the authorization for a force intervention brigade in the DRC in 2013. It is, to say the least, difficult to perform military functions against spoilers or others and not be seen as partisan – this has implications for the safety of the rest of the UN country team.
3. POC mandates have expanded, in some instance beyond the reasonable expectations for peacekeepers and their skills sets. With limited exceptions, POC in some form is always a part of that expansion. If you have the chance to read the latest Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) report, and it’s very long, try to focus on all the tasks that peacekeepers have been requested to perform – from rebuilding damaged infrastructure to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities. A staggering array of skills and character traits are now required of peacekeepers, in addition to their risks and skills as soldiers.
4. Protecting civilians is more than about troops and equipment. It is also about trust building, with the host government and TCCs, but also and especially with communities. Given that

peacekeepers are often serving in communities with different cultures and languages, there are often no natural affinities. Moreover, building trust is a difficult skill to manage, especially while holding an automatic weapon. As operations become more coercive, there is danger that local residents will see PKOs as extensions of a sometimes unpopular central government rather than independent agents attempting to protect civilians that the state cannot or will not protect itself.

- It is in this context that the matter of gender and child protection advisors becomes so important. The ability to connect with local constituents is critical, especially in contexts where prior abuse has raised suspicion levels. Being able to relate to local constituents adds huge value to the potential success of POC.
- In this context it is also critical that those entrusted with POC are not themselves guilty of abuse. We must uphold the values we seek to protect. My military family understood that abuse by some puts all operations at risk. The scandals emanating from CAR and the unresolved abuses in Darfur stain a larger area than that occupied by the perpetrators.
- It is important that we know more about when peacekeepers should arrive, but also when they should leave. States do not want and we should not seek to become a permanent occupation force.
- Finally, we must do more to ensure that POC is tailored to geographic and cultural context. In counseling, you don't apply theories to persons but persons to theories. People in Syria need help but they don't want their circumstances confused with people in CAR. Peace operations take place, more and more, under difficult conditions, but we can't forget the uniqueness of those conditions, their histories and social contexts.

5. As DPKO reminds us often, we often protect civilians in harsh conditions, with limited or insufficient resources, and with partners who sometimes lack the will or capacity to do their part. In the SG's peacekeeping review, there can be found an appeal for peacekeepers to "renew their resolve" to serve and protect people. But we also as a UN system have a responsibility to renew our resolve to prevent conflict situations from happening in the first place and to ensure that, once violence can no longer be prevented, response mandates are clear, effective and properly resourced.

6. We are concerned about the now common UN tendency of raising expectations and then being unable to fulfill them. POC is now a core part of the UN's peacekeeping brand. Peacekeeping operations often deploy amidst the unrealistic expectation that they will be able to protect all civilians at all times. The dynamic nature of the places in which PKOs operate, often with limited resources, means the security situation can change very quickly. It is thus essential that the Council negotiates mandate renewals with TCCs in a timely, flexible and sensitive manner. Fire departments respond to fires but good departments also help prevent fires from happening in the first place. We have created an expectation that people will look for the blue helmets when all national protective remedies have been exhausted. If we fail to meet that expectation, more than people die. Reputations die as well.

7. We are concerned about the growing and not unwarranted perception that POC is what a Security Council function with little or no regard for other stakeholders, including relevant UN offices. As Amb. Rosenthal of Guatemala said recently in relationship to the UN's peacebuilding report, and as DSG Eliasson says often in many contexts, we must develop the culture wherein core UN functions in all three UN pillars become system-wide tasks. POC is one such core task. We must address crises at earlier stages, we must recommit to robust political engagement, and we must use all available UN and regional resources to make it possible for us to meet expectations to protect as many civilians as we can once the peace fails.