



Center for Civilians in Harm's Way

PREPAREDNESS & Peacekeeping

This paper is one in a series that examines how the act of helping civilians brace for violence can complement and benefit efforts in many fields related to peace and conflict.

Local capacity for self-preservation has powerful implications for protection, human rights, nonviolent resistance, development aid, disaster risk reduction, early warning and response, humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, and security sector reform, as well as efforts to manage conflict, reduce recruitment into violence, mitigate displacement, and prevent conflict returning.

The knock-on effects of civilians being better prepared for inexorable violence have scarcely been considered (even within the field of protection). Nothing else has such crosscutting potential as preparedness: It is the hidden common denominator of our work.

Aid service providers will often be the best situated to support local preparedness. But by getting better joined up with such providers, the practitioners in these other fields may see a very impactful multiplier upon their work on the ground.

Augment mission capacities.

1. Peacekeeping is at a crossroads in its short troubled history. According to the recent report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, "There is a clear sense of a widening gap between what is being asked of UN peace operations today and what they are able to deliver."¹ It quoted directly from the Brahimi report on peacekeeping 15 years earlier, which said, "There are hundreds of thousands of civilians in current U.N. mission areas who are exposed to potential risk of violence, and U.N. forces currently deployed could not protect more than a small fraction of them even if directed to do so."²
2. The Panel concluded "it is an unfortunate reality that no amount of training and good leadership, or troops and helicopters, will ensure the protection of all civilians across the 11 million square kilometres that 106,000 uniformed UN peacekeepers are today asked to operate across."³ That is to say, 15 years have passed, the same dire conclusion is being made—and a new generation of thinking is needed.
3. As is often noted, a mission's capacity frequently does not "add up" to its mandate. Consider now the significance of stronger civilian preparedness. In many aspects (motivation, mobility, provisioning, intelligence, and the number who can contribute to protection), getting joined up with civilians can increase resources and reach exponentially.
4. This is the calculus. When peacekeeping missions are chronically hamstrung by caveats about protecting civilians *if* facing "imminent threat" and *if* "in the area of operation" and *if* "resources available" allow, then a local population may be able to help its protectors with the strategic arithmetic.

5. There may be no greater imperative for the future of peace operations than to find and systematically leverage more capacity from outside the given mission. It is time to seriously consider not only how missions can “rescue” civilians—but also how civilians can “rescue” missions.

Prepare for more burden sharing and harmonization with the populace.

6. A few missions have modalities such as Joint Protection Teams, Community Liaison Assistants, Focal Points, Community Alert Networks, local protection committees, and community protection plans. Are these mechanisms indigenous enough to communities at risk? The JPTs are located in provincial capitals and make only brief, infrequent visits. The CLAs are actually hired *away* from communities and assigned to peacekeeping bases.
7. Are these methods focused enough on the average civilian’s cultivable abilities for self-help? Focal Points are designated nodes whose role it is to radio out emergency calls in the expectation that peacekeepers will come and protect. The CLA’s are trained—but in the mission’s own terms of what constitutes expert protection. As Michael Barnett observed of internationals who see their job as rescue, their “expert knowledge” nearly always trumps “local knowledge.”⁴
8. The question is, where do we think the knowledge and capacity for protection actually resides? Perversely, one reason JPT visits are sporadic is because there is deemed to be a shortage of qualified staff on the ground.⁵ In peacekeeping (and other fields) we tend to see protection as a technical occupation—forgetting that it has often been mastered by the average civilians for millennia.
9. If we have difficulty finding locals of the desired skill level to work with, then we are overshooting the critical audience. These are lost opportunities for burden sharing. Moreover, we will not be supporting capacity broadly—at the very moment when supporting widespread local capacity is paramount. But if and when the JPTs and other modalities cited here truly center on the capabilities of local communities, then the preparedness support process can provide them a very useful process for consultation and collaboration.
10. There are many peace operation tasks that could be better executed if the mission and the local populace were better joined or synced up. In joining up, they complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses. The Panel itself called for more “people-centered” missions and concluded that, “Missions should make every effort to harness or leverage the non-violent practices and capabilities of local communities... to support the creation of a protective environment.”⁶
11. There would be some prerequisites. (1) The mission should have established enough local presence, trust, and situational awareness to safely work with communities. If the mission is not that firmly established, it could perhaps turn to what is often the best platform available: an aid service provider. The Panel states that, “Humanitarian organizations play essential roles in protecting civilians. Where appropriate, *timely coordination between missions with humanitarian actors* is indispensable in pursuing unarmed strategies as these partners often work closely with communities.”⁷ [Emphasis added] As a prominent refugee organization concludes, “UN peacekeeping missions do not and cannot ‘own’ the concept of protection... there is a huge range of protection actors present in the field alongside most peacekeeping operations,” the broadest category by far being humanitarian NGOs.⁸
12. (2) The mission has carefully considered the questions of consent and neutrality and how parties to the conflict might view the mission’s relationship with communities. Such principles should guide the mission—but not paralyze it. The Panel concluded that the “principles of peacekeeping should never be used as an excuse for failure to protect civilians... Two decades of peacekeeping experience in more volatile settings calls for a flexible and progressive interpretation of these principles.”⁹

13. (3) The civilian populace has concluded that any risks of associating with the UN mission are outweighed by the threats that they face, and want such intercession even if they do not fully trust or understand the mission. [One ICRC survey found that two-thirds of civilians under siege in twelve war-torn countries had wanted *more* outside intervention, and only 10% wanted none. ¹⁰]
14. There are a range of mission tasks for which burden sharing and harmonization between peacekeepers and local providers and populations makes sense. They would involve rudimentary tactical skills which civilians have shown they can master many times before (in the paramilitary-style governance of disaster risk reduction regimens, or roles in undergrounds, resistance groups, civilian auxiliaries, etc.). Generally, the tactics relate to *sybiotic information flow*, *synchronized physical maneuver*, and/or *shared abilities and resources* between the two.
15. Peacekeepers' "protection-of-civilians" tasks to which these skill sets could be applied include: (a) community policing, (b) early warning—early response, (c) separation / buffering / interpositioning, (d) assisted evacuation, (e) safe areas, (f) facilitation of humanitarian aid, and (g) landmine awareness.
16. There are other mission tasks to which these skills can apply as well. Some are very sensitive. Civilians would need to decide if the threats they face warrant playing such a collaborative, almost auxiliary role to the mission. And the mission would have to decide if and how civilians could safely be tapped for these tasks. These include: (h) intelligence gathering, (i) cordon & search, (j) area domination, (k) force protection, (l) monitoring and reporting rights violations, and (m) recruitment prevention and demobilization of local combatants.
17. Preparedness support can help peacekeeping missions "rescue" civilians—and civilians "rescue" missions.

Endnotes

¹ *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, 16 June 2015. This is the preliminary report presented to the Secretary General on 16 June 2015 by the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations; pp. ix and vii.

² *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305 – S/2000-809, 21 August 2000; p. 11.

³ *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, 16 June 2015. This is the preliminary report presented to the Secretary General on 16 June 2015 by the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations; pp. 26-27.

⁴ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2011; p. 222.

⁵ Erin A. Weir and Charles Hunt, DR Congo: *Support Community-based tools for MONUSCO*, Refugees International, Washington, DC, May 3, 2011; p. 4.

⁶ *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, 16 June 2015. This is the preliminary report presented to the Secretary General on 16 June 2015 by the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations; p. 23.

⁷ *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, 16 June 2015. This is the preliminary report presented to the Secretary General on 16 June 2015 by the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations; p. 23.

⁸ Erin A. Weir, *The Last Line of Defense: How Peacekeepers Can Better Protect Civilians*, Refugees International, Washington, DC, February, 2010; pp. 22-23.

⁹ *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, 16 June 2015. This is the preliminary report presented to the Secretary General on 16 June 2015 by the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations; p. 32.

¹⁰ Thomas G. Weiss, *Halting Genocide: Rhetoric versus Reality*, The City University of New York; p.25 (Citing: Greenberg Research, *The People on War Report* (Geneva: ICRC, 1999), xvi.)