# Remarks at a UN Security Council Thematic Briefing on UN Peacekeeping Operations

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AS DELIVERED

I’d like to thank the Secretary-General for taking the time to come and talk to us about peacekeeping, and more importantly for his efforts and willingness to look at peacekeeping reform in a way that we can make it more effective for those that need it.

I also want to thank my colleagues for participating in this important discussion. I think so much of what you said was valuable, but more importantly, there is a collective effort to reform peacekeeping so that it does do more for people on the ground in a way that’s not only just efficient, but in a way that’s effective. And I thank you for taking the time to do that.

If you ask the average person what the UN does, they’ll most likely say peacekeeping. The blue helmet is the most recognizable symbol of how the UN extends its presence and shows its value in the world. With over 100,000 total personnel and a budget close to $8 billion, peacekeeping is the UN’s most powerful tool to promote international peace and security.

We recognize, in particular, the courage of those men and women who risk their lives serving in peacekeeping missions. And we pay tribute to the over 3,500 peacekeepers who have lost their lives to keep others safe. By pooling troops and resources from many countries, peacekeeping helps share the burden of promoting global security.

When peacekeeping works well, we see countries that have been able to end internal conflicts, reestablish democratic political processes, and develop their own capacities to protect their people.

That being said, I think we can all agree that peacekeeping is far from perfect. Many of the Council’s past discussions on reform have focused on operations and efficiency issues. And that is all extremely important. Those efforts need to continue.

But when I think about UN peacekeeping, I go back to what I learned as a young accountant. Go back to the basics, ensure there are measurables, and accountability. We need to work smarter. We need to show results. We need to find value. And not just financial value, we need to focus on what the original intent was. Are we actually on track in accomplishing that intent, and are we meeting the needs of the people?

Because we cannot continue these massive missions forever, we need to focus on the people that we are supposed to be lifting up – the peacekeepers who lack the support or the direction they need, and the taxpayers who pay the bills.

The simple fact is that in many cases, UN peacekeeping is just not working.

In Darfur, a 17,000-strong force designed for yesterday’s challenges is not built for the needs of today. In South Sudan, where UN staff helped save hundreds of thousands of civilians, these vulnerable people have no hope of returning to a normal life. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the government uses the UN to neutralize only the armed groups that it wants to, leaving others untouched.

Outside of Africa, we have our mission in Kosovo, which, if we’re honest with ourselves, has no real reason for being. The risk is creating an artificial, subsidized peace that discourages real, homegrown resolutions to these crises.

That is why we need this kind of honest, strategic review. We invite Council members to join us in evaluating each of our peacekeeping missions as their mandates are renewed. Our goal is to identify those missions that lack the underlying political conditions for a resolution – which numerous studies have concluded, is central to mission success. To help guide us, we have developed a set of principles we think missions should be held to.

We have already touched on the first principle, which is that missions must support political solutions.

The mission in South Sudan, for example, involves a government entangled in a civil war. At this time, there is no credible political path to peace. The government lacks incentive to end the conflict and has made the job more difficult for our peacekeepers. We can’t manage our way out of this problem. While it may be easier to accept and prolong the status quo, we’re not doing ourselves, or the people on the ground, any favors. The Council must commit to putting its political pressure to bear on non-cooperative governments.

The second principle is also fundamental: We need host country cooperation. This is not to say that the Council should shy away from countries where it is not welcome or forego its Charter-mandated right to intervene when needed. But we need to acknowledge that, time and again, missions have failed to help those on the ground when host governments choose to obstruct them.

In Darfur, the government sought to restrict our peacekeepers from day one. It delayed visas, prevented freedom of movement and delayed customs clearance for food and equipment. The mission has suffered, which means the people on the ground have suffered.

Third, peacekeeping mandates must be realistic and achievable. Mandates should be targeted to the challenges facing the country and given the resources and the capabilities to do the job. At the same time, we must avoid mission creep.

It is common practice for missions to gradually snowball over time as they pick up more and more tasks and staff. What we end up with is a monster mission with unclear priorities and reporting lines.

In Lebanon, for instance, the mission does critical work to maintain stability along the Blue Line. But beyond these core monitoring tasks, the mission does everything from publishing magazines to providing a navy.

Fourth, we must have an exit strategy. We should agree early on what success looks like, and how to achieve it, and how to set the country or region on the path to independence from the mission. These strategies should be considered at the earliest stages of mission planning and should be central to the UN’s regular reporting.

Finally, we must be willing to adjust mandates, both when situations improve, and when they fail to improve. Lifting up the people of these regions must be our objective. When this is achieved, institutional inertia cannot be allowed to prolong operations. And when circumstances fail to progress, we must be willing to draw down or restructure the mission and look at other ways to bring about stability.

We have already begun to apply these principles to MONUSCO. The mission is working in a country where it is increasingly clear that the government is preying on its own people. Recent reporting revealed that the state was responsible for human rights violations, including the killing of 480 civilians. And yet we ask our peacekeepers to support this same government. This is why the changes we made to MONUSCO’s mandate last week were so critical. From now on, we will focus on the protection of civilians and support for democratic transition of power. We will develop an exit strategy, and we will demand real accountability from troop contributing countries.

My fellow Council members, I recognize that much of the commentary about peacekeeping reform in the weeks to come will center on budgets and troop levels. But I believe experience shows that funding is no guarantee for success. I also recognize that there are those who say this initiative represents a withdrawal of the United States from the global stage. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The United States will continue to lead, both here at the UN, and out in the real world. Part of leadership is knowing when something need to be fixed and having the will to do something about it. I look forward to working with all of you to do just that.

Thank you.