

# The Global South and UN Peace Operations

Written by Thomas G. Weiss and Giovanna Kuele

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THOMAS G. WEISS AND GIOVANNA KUELE, FEB 3 2019

The countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America provide around 92 percent of all military and police personnel for United Nations (UN) peace operations, while contributing about 15 percent of the budget. China—hardly a legitimate representative of the Global South as the world’s second largest economy and a permanent member of the Security Council—inflates the latter number because its financial contribution amounts to over 10 percent of the total. The West thus foots the bill; but since the late 1990s when even traditional peacekeeping became more dangerous, they have been unwilling to send their own personnel where the risks are high and their national interests minimal. One former force commander summarized to one of the authors, “The willing are not capable, and the capable not willing.” In short, the West makes use of “hired help” from developing countries, or what David Malone and Ramesh Thakur dubbed “racism in peacekeeping.”[2] Philip Cunliffe views the North-South rift as a reflection of liberal imperialism.[3] Nonetheless, are troop-contributing countries from the Global South merely victims and passive? If not, why and how have they actively contributed to UN peace operations? Before answering those questions, we provide a brief overview of how and when the UN’s military landscape changed. We conclude by examining the nature of various long-standing reform proposals under consideration that have particular resonance for the Global South.

### The South-North Divide

Three main explanations emerge for why and how countries from the Global South have contributed to UN peace operations: regional interests and cooperation; wider, international recognition and prestige; and financial benefits. Notwithstanding the constraints of the “division of labor,” developing countries are not hesitant to exploit their overwhelming presence of “boots on the ground” to pursue their own interests.

Despite the lack of data by country to quantify how all countries contributed troops to UN peacekeeping from 1948 to 1989, developed countries played a leading role. Their contributions were from two main groups of countries, “Western internationalists” (Canada, Ireland, Austria, and the Nordics) and the West’s three permanent (P-3) Security Council members (United States, United Kingdom, and France).[4] The former were essential in the early days of peacekeeping; they provided troops and supported conceptualization, operationalization, and training. The later have had an ambivalent relationship because traditional peacekeeping, in order to remain true to the principle of neutrality and host-country consent, kept them at arms-length with a few exceptions. During the Cold War, the Global South accepted—even desired—such a low profile from the P-3.[5]

In the 1990s, however, the major Western powers were active in the operations in Cambodia, the Balkans, Somalia, and Latin America; their interests, unsurprisingly, were at stake. Particularly following the debacle in Somalia and the withdrawal of US forces after “Blackhawk Down,” their troop contributions (both the P-3 and internationalists) to UN operations diminished. Part of the explanation was the increasing number of coalition operations outside the UN—for instance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led intervention in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2017 or the Kosovo Force (KFOR) from 1999 to the present.[6] Figure 1 depicts troop contributions by region for the period between 1990 and 2017.

Decisions about UN peace operations, however, remained under the authority of the Security Council in which the P-3 were the usual penholders for resolutions. Their contributions totaled 1.6 percent of uniformed personnel but

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40.52 percent of the peacekeeping budget, while China totaled, respectively, 2.8 percent and 10.25 percent.

## Figure 1: Uniformed UN Peacekeeping Contributions by Region (1990-2017)

Source: IPI Peacekeeping Database.

Figure 1 also depicts another trend: the increased contributions from the Global South, particularly from 1992 to 1995 and then again in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, they have become more consistently vocal in advocating the primacy of the UN's role in the maintenance of international peace and security. For instance, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (the BRICS coalition) have reaffirmed their commitment to the UN as the central mechanism for international security. Their latest Summit Declaration stated: "We emphasise the important role of United Nations peacekeeping to international peace and security, and the contribution of BRICS countries in this regard." While the quality of personnel and equipment vary, nonetheless some generalizations are useful across the three variables identified earlier.

### Regional Interests

It is not a coincidence that African countries have provided, since 2013, the majority of troops on the continent where most of the peacekeepers are deployed. Currently, six out of the fourteen on-going peace operations are in Africa, including those with the largest budgets. Ethiopia is the single largest Troop and Police Contributing Country (T/PCC), providing 7,597 UN blue helmets. Virtually all of them are in the three missions deployed at its bordering neighbors South Sudan and Sudan. The third top T/PCC is another important regional power, Rwanda, which provides 6,528 troops to the missions in South Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR), Darfur, and a few police (146) to Haiti. While Ethiopia has historically contributed to UN peacekeeping, Rwanda started in this century.

In addition, African countries have expanded regional mechanisms for addressing insecurity. In the 1990s, after the UN's failures in responding to the genocide in Rwanda and the civil war in Somalia, a wave of regionalization took place. Claiming "African solutions for African problems," the African Union (AU) was created in 2002, including the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) the following year. Since then, and in contrast with the UN, the AU has sought to develop the African Standby Force (ASF) and regional Standby Forces for rapid deployment. For instance, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Standby Brigade deployed to the Democratic Republic Congo (DRC) in 2013 (as the Force Intervention Brigade, part of the UN mission). Moreover, the AU is engaged in three peace operations: African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), which it operates without partners; African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (AU-led RCI-LRA), in which it leads; and the UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), operated in partnership with the UN. However, financing has been a serious constraint for the AU and Ethiopia, which have taken the lead in calling for UN financing.

Ethiopia provides over 4,000 troops to AMISOM, in addition to a considerable number of troops deployed in Somalia outside that mission. As direct interests are involved, including avoiding spill-over from the Sudan and the Horn of Africa, the regionalization of peace operations presents obvious disadvantages but advantages as well due to

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proximity: often troop contributors share a common background and are able to deploy faster than countries farther afield.[7] At the same time, they may prioritize their own agendas over that of the country suffering from an armed conflict. Furthermore, many African countries lack adequate equipment and training.

Regional interests also were key to the Global South's participation in the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). South American countries have historically contributed to peacekeeping, but with limited uniformed personnel until the beginning of the twenty-first century. While Argentina and Chile contributed from the outset in 1948 with resources and observers to the UN Truce Supervision Organization UN Mission (UNTSO); Brazil contributed in 1956 with military to the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) I, the first armed peacekeeping mission.[8] After the Cold War, there was a modest increase with deployments in Africa and Central America. However, the most substantial increase, as Figure 1 shows, began in 2004 with the MINUSTAH. Brazil sent 37,449 uniformed personnel during the thirteen years of the mission's duration. In addition, all the UN's force commanders were from Brazil. In the aftermath of the earthquake in 2010, Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina contributed 50 percent of the total of UN troops to help in the additional efforts.

The cooperation between South American countries for MINUSTAH helped improve regional coordination in security and defense.[9] Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Paraguay, and Uruguay have collaborated for peacekeeping training bilaterally (e.g., exchange of mobile training teams between peacekeeping training centers) and multilaterally (e.g., the creation of the Latin American Association of Peacekeeping Operations Training Centers, ALCOPAZ). Boosting regional cooperation, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was created in 2008 as a reflection of the commitment of regional solutions for regional problems.

## International Prestige

Brazil, an emerging power, also sought to increase its international visibility through peacekeeping, most importantly to fortify its case for a permanent seat on the Security Council.[10] Along with such other regional powers as India and South Africa, emerging countries have long called for a more representative council. They seek not only to make international security decisions at the UN more inclusive; but they also hope thereby to advance other foreign policy goals.

A word is in order about China, the only P-5 member that is a significant troop contributor. Although originally it disdained peacekeeping, China sent troops for the first time in 1992 to the UN Transitional Mission in Cambodia (UNTAC) and started to contribute substantially in this century, currently ranking as the tenth largest T/PCC. Moreover, since 2016 it has become the second largest source of financing, after the United States.[11] China's accelerated economic growth and military modernization, together with the expansion of its investments abroad, have advanced its role in the international system and at the UN. As China's overseas business grows, its traditional opposition to interference in the domestic affairs of other countries has become more elastic, especially in Africa, as its involvement in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)—sending peacekeepers and supporting the political process—suggests.

South Asian states, in particular India and Pakistan, have also long sought to advance their respective public images, perhaps as a reflection of their own rivalry and also as beneficiaries of the second oldest UN peacekeeping operation in Kashmir since 1949, the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). India ranks fourth as largest T/PCC and has traditionally contributed to peacekeeping—including a significant role in the creation of the UNEF I—and has sought thereby to enhance its global status as a great power.[12] In contrast, Pakistan, although also motivated to shape its image and currently ranked as the sixth largest T/PCC, has contributed significantly only since the 1990s and has attempted to decrease its isolationism while increasing its alignment with international organizations.[13]

## Financial Benefits

Another South Asian larger contributor is Bangladesh, which now ranks as the second T/PCC and has consistently participated in UN operations over the last three decades. Since the 2001 Brahimi Report, discussed below, the

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reliability of countries that lack adequate training and equipment for robust peacekeeping has been stressed. Some countries with weak economies may respond to requests for troops for the potential financial benefits. The economic gains derive from comparatively attractive compensation for soldiers as well as reimbursements to the country. In addition, as peacekeeping can also be a tool for improving international image, the country may also be in a position to attract more foreign assistance.[14]

## From Brahimi to HIPPO

In the twenty-first century, eminent individuals convened in Secretariat-organized panels have played a role in defining what more, or less, could be accomplished by peacekeepers. Two in particular concern us here to understand better the politics of troop contributors: the 2000 Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (also called the Brahimi Report) and the 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (HIPPO).

The chair of the first panel was former Algerian foreign minister and respected UN crisis manager, Lakhdar Brahimi. It responded to the turbulent decade of the 1990s and what was perceived as major UN failures to address international peace and security. While the report reaffirmed the foundational principles of UN peace operations, it also underlined that rules of engagement should be sufficiently robust. Accordingly, three conditions were necessary for successful peacekeeping operations: political support, rapid deployment with a robust force posture, and a sound peacebuilding strategy.

The emphasis on the need of robust rules of engagement led to the formulation of the Capstone Doctrine, which is the primary guideline for UN activities on the ground. Particularly, the report stated that blue helmets should be willing to run the risks of complex missions. Since some are not, in addition to the lack of adequate equipment and training, the “reliability” of some T/PCCs was clearly a problem. The report also recommended that the Secretariat should send a team to verify preparedness by potential TCCs and reject those that do not meet minimal standards. This pledge was made again on the 2017 report Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers.

For the basic needs of P/TCCs from the Global South, the report recommended that they should have more access to Secretariat briefings and Security Council debates about specific missions for which they committed or actually deployed troops. This seemingly obvious procedure was the exception rather than the rule. Another recommendation, the increase of quick impact projects that provide short-term infusions of assistance, are valuable for the local population (e.g., paving roads), which ultimately facilitate the reception of peacekeepers on the ground.

Not all of the Brahimi report’s recommendations were favored by many developing countries, including the suggested creation of the Electronic Information and Strategic Analysis unit in the Secretariat (EISAS) to support strategic decision making. Since the 1990s, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has blocked the establishment of an independent intelligence capability in the Secretariat, feared as a tool for powerful states to advance their own interests. In an ironic reversal of roles after the Cold War, primarily the NAM and not the Western powers have resisted providing the Secretary-General and the Secretariat with an independent intelligence capability.

Fifteen years later, the HIPPO had a similar mandate to that of the Brahimi panel: review the state of UN peace operations and provide recommendations about adaptations. The HIPPO report was more inclusive in two essential ways that reflected perceived shortcomings by the earlier panel. First, the majority of the members were from the Global South—including the chair José Ramos-Horta, the Nobel laureate from East-Timor. Indeed, three members were added to the original fourteen after criticism about too few women and poor regional representation. Second, in contrast with the Brahimi panel whose members worked primarily in New York headquarters, the HIPPO team held extensive consultations with member states and civil society across the globe, including visits or consultations in such important capitals of the Global South’s P/TCCs as Ethiopia, Brazil, Pakistan, and China.

The HIPPO report—noting the gap between demand for blue helmets and what they actually deliver—emphasized four essential shifts in establishing and conducting peace operations: Political solutions should accompany military and technical engagements for lasting peace. UN missions should be responsive to ever-changing situations on the ground. Stronger partnerships should prevail; and the world organization should be field-focused and people-

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centered.

Many of the 166 recommendations reproduced or expanded those from the Brahimi panel and were of especial pertinence from the point of view of the Global South. For instance, the HIPPO report recommended that, for achievable mandates, a common understanding was needed, which requires more engagement by the Global South's T/PCCs and regional actors with the UN Security Council and the Secretariat.

At the same time, other recommendation reflected concerns that had not been openly discussed at the UN in the previous decade and that did not reflect well on some of the Global South's T/PCCs. For instance, on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), the report highlighted that immunity for blue helmets was not meant to provide impunity from prosecution for guilty peacekeepers; it recommended a series of measures to ensure accountability. SEA has become a tool to reinforce the South-North divide. Rather than trauma and accountability, the major sources of financing in the West, especially the United States, have used allegations of SEA against T/PCCs from the Global South, among other things, to delegitimize their claims on relevant debates.

On other areas, nonetheless, divergence has made way for some convergence. The HIPPO recommended stronger cooperation with and predictable financing for AU peace operations. The Security Council is considering using UN assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis. While China and France are backing the initiative, Washington has resisted.

Whereas financing has divided the P-5, the militarization of UN operations has divided the Global South. The militarized approach to peace operations, including for instance combating violent extremism, was supported mostly by western and African countries.[15] The Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, which call for a preparedness to use force to protect civilians, illustrate the divergence of opinions among developing countries. While Rwanda led the charge to agree on the document, which some of the largest T/PCCs and many Western countries supported, others never endorsed it (China, Russia, India, and Pakistan). In this context, the HIPPO was a mid-way response to this debate—indicative of the primacy of politics in face of the excessive militarization of peace operations. Nonetheless, it does not deny that the use of force might be necessary to protect civilians or a mission's mandate.

## Conclusion

Both the Brahimi and the HIPPO reports reflected the evolution in the politics of knowledge and norms surrounding UN peace operations—on both more traditional peacekeeping and more robust military engagements. Some issues characterized by the South-North divided are blurred (e.g., the militarization of peace operations), whereas for others (e.g., financing AU peace operations) convergence seems possible. At UN headquarters and in the field, developing countries have had an active role in shaping both the nature of operations and of debate.

Unsurprisingly, the motivations to contribute troops vary across the Global South. Most seek to heighten their international image, and emerging powers often also have regional interests in their neighbors, while others have used peace operations to realize financial benefits. In this regard, some Western governments have criticized the inadequate training and equipment of many current T/PCCs but themselves are unwilling to deploy their best soldiers to the most dangerous assignments under the UN flag. If UN missions continue to be deployed to dangerous and complex places, the challenges facing blue helmets will only become more strenuous and politically intractable.

## Notes

[1] As of January 2019, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) replaced the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). We use the term “peace operations” to cover the gamut of UN military undertakings—from the traditional, consensual “peacekeeping” to more robust Chapter VII operations.

[2] David Malone and Ramesh Thakur, “Racism in Peacekeeping,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 30, 2000. <<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/racism-in-peacekeeping/article1340656/>>.

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- [3] Philip Cunliffe, *Legions of Peace: UN Peacekeepers from the Global South* (London: Hurst & Company, 2013).
- [4] Alex J. Bellamy and Paul D. Williams, "The West and Contemporary Peace Operations," *Journal of Peace Research*, 46:1 (2009), 39-57.
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] For regionalization of peace operations, see Alex J. Bellamy, Paul D. Williams and Stuart Griffin, *Understanding Peacekeeping*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 301-320.
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- [9] Carlos C. V. Braga, "MINUSTAH and the Security Environment in Haiti: Brazil and South American Cooperation in the Field," *International Peacekeeping*, 17:5(2010), 711-722.
- [10] Kai M. Kenkel, "'South America's Emerging Power: Brazil as Peacekeeper,'" *International Peacekeeping*, 17:5 (2010), 644-661.
- [11] Courtney J. Fung, "China's Troop Contributions to UN Peacekeeping," *United States Institute of Peace*, 212, July 2016.
- [12] Kabilan Krishnasamy, "'Recognition' for Third World peacekeepers: India and Pakistan," *International Peacekeeping*, 8:4 (2001), 56-76.
- [13] Ibid.
- [14] Kabilan Krishnasamy, "Bangladesh and UN Peacekeeping: The Participation of a 'Small' State," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 41:1 (2003), 24-47.
- [15] Louise R. Andersen, "The HIPPO in the room: the pragmatic push-back from the UN peace bureaucracy against the militarization of UN peacekeeping," *International Affairs*, 94: 2 (2018) 343-361.

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