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Priorities for the 2021 Peacekeeping Ministerial: Reflections from an Expert Roundtable

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Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations

On December 12, 2019, the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations organized a roundtable to identify potential themes and outcomes for the April 2021 United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial Conference, hosted by the Republic of Korea.

This meeting note was drafted by IPI and summarizes the main points raised in the discussion under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution. It does not necessarily represent the views of all participants.

Introduction

The Republic of Korea will host the next United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial Conference in April 2021. In the context of the secretary-general's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, the objective of the 2021 ministerial is to strengthen UN peacekeeping, in part by improving the performance and impact of UN peacekeeping operations, closing capability gaps through concrete pledges, facilitating new partnerships and strengthening existing ones, and promoting systemic changes that will improve operations.

The ministerial will also be a forum for member states to reaffirm their commitment to peacekeeping and highlight concrete progress in implementing the Declaration of Shared Commitments and other reform initiatives. Past ministerials have highlighted progress on related issues, such as the women, peace, and security agenda; protection and performance; partnerships; and safety and security.

To provide early input into planning, this expert-level roundtable identified potential themes and outcomes for the ministerial and preparatory meetings, including areas that would benefit from in-depth, concrete analysis. The meeting focused on eight issues: (1) protection of civilians (POC); (2) safety and security; (3) technology; (4) performance; (5) training and capacity building; (6) women, peace, and security (WPS); (7) conduct of UN peacekeepers; and (8) sustaining peace, including during peacekeeping transitions. The roundtable brought together representatives of the co-chairs of the ministerial, the UN Secretariat, and relevant civil society organizations and think tanks.

Protection of Civilians

There was general agreement among participants that UN peacekeeping operations need to be more effective in protecting civilians. Participants suggested linking assessments of the threat of violence against civilians to operational planning, increasing missions' capabilities related to POC, strengthening accountability mechanisms for POC, minimizing the harm missions inflict on civilians, and engaging local communities safely and effectively for a more people-centered approach to peacekeeping and protection.

One proposal was for member states to work with the secretary-general to develop a compact in advance of the ministerial endorsing key civilian, police,

and military capabilities that missions require to effectively protect civilians. These could include community liaison assistants, language assistants, POC and gender advisers, joint protection teams, POC specialists in the Office of Military Affairs and the Integrated Training Service, situational awareness capabilities, joint operations centers and joint mission analysis centers at the field and sector levels, and integrated planning units. The preparatory meeting on POC could be a useful forum for member states to develop and endorse this compact.

Participants also identified the need for mission budgets to reflect POC-specific capabilities. A4P champions could call on the secretary-general to take steps before the ministerial to ensure that peacekeeping budgets include these additional resources. Member states, whether through the Security Council or the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34), could also call on the secretary-general to provide informal and formal reporting on whether missions have these capabilities.

Participants also discussed how to enhance the role of UN police in implementing POC mandates. It was noted that police remain subordinate in peacekeeping culture, with limited influence in headquarters and in the field. In order to address this, the role of UN police in the planning and management of operations should be strengthened through the recruitment of dedicated police planners for missions, ideally on two-year cycles. Heads of police components in the field, with support from the police division at UN headquarters, should also be fully involved in all stages of planning. Additional ideas included putting in place a better system for evaluating the impact of formed police units and giving police realistic, flexible programmatic budgets to support mandated tasks. Some also suggested making statements of unit requirements more flexible so that formed police units could be split into multiple platoons.

For the purpose of the ministerial, participants called for more targeted discussions between member states and other stakeholders to identify and push forward specific goals for POC practices.

Safety and Security

The implementation of the Action Plan to Implement the Report on Improving Security of Peacekeepers (the Santos Cruz report) was a main topic of discussion. While the release of the report and subsequent implementation of the action plan did contribute to a decrease in peacekeeper casualties, challenges related to coordination within missions have ultimately hindered its effective implementation. Obstacles include low prioritization of the action plan and high training costs stemming from frequent turnover of uniformed personnel. Participants noted that the ministerial would be an appropriate avenue to discuss a more definitive framework to guide the long-term reform of peacekeeping and the implementation of the action plan. However, the details require further discussion, and priorities for long-term reform need to be clearer.

Technology

Participants expressed differing understandings of the role of emerging technologies in UN peacekeeping operations. Some participants spoke about the challenges these technologies can present. For example, some peacekeeping operations have been the target of online disinformation campaigns, and all missions need more security against the risk of cyberattacks. Others wanted to explore the potential of artificial intelligence and blockchain technology to enhance the work of peacekeeping operations. Toward this end, the UN Secretariat is planning to establish a new panel on digital technology and innovation in peacekeeping, which is expected to make concrete recommendations that member states can implement.

Despite the general interest in the role of technology in strengthening peacekeeping operations, the discussion underscored the need to agree on priorities. The ministerial will need to hone in on what technologies would be best suited to peacekeeping. There was a general consensus that missions' needs should drive this determination of priorities. Some participants also argued that other problems facing peacekeeping

operations—such as the lack of basic equipment—should take priority over new technologies when it comes to allocating resources.

Since new technologies are only effective if personnel know how to use them, participants discussed the particular capabilities and skills mission staff would need. Participants thus recognized the importance of training and capacity building. For example, it was noted that the Situational Awareness and Geospatial Enterprise program (SAGE) requires significant training of personnel. Moreover, these personnel often need additional skills or knowledge to generate usable data (e.g., data-driven protection strategies also require personnel to understand the peacekeeping-intelligence policy).

Training and Capacity Building

Training and capacity building is a major area of interest among troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and police-contributing countries (PCCs) and should be a topic of discussion at the ministerial. Participants outlined challenges facing capacity-building efforts, including personnel gaps for specialized positions and structural problems endemic to rotational arrangements among member states.

Participants discussed how to expand recent innovations, including rotational arrangements among groups of countries (e.g., the C-130 in the mission in Mali), joint pledges (e.g., the Norwegian-Serbian level II hospital in the former UN mission in the Central African Republic and Chad), and triangular partnerships that bring TCCs and PCCs together with member states able to offer particular training or equipment. Joint pledges in particular enable experienced TCCs to transfer knowledge and best practices to emerging TCCs. One participant noted, however, that the training and equipment provided through such arrangements need to be better geared toward the needs of the missions they are supporting.

While the UN Secretariat can facilitate these arrangements—including through the “light coordination mechanism” whereby the UN helps

match TCCs and PCCs with providers of training and equipment—member states need to take more of a leadership role in deploying mission-ready contingents. Participants underscored that member states need to ensure that their military personnel receive necessary training prior to deployment, as it is difficult to train them during operations. Moreover, those providing training should strengthen avenues for sharing information and lessons learned.

Participants noted that investing in and increasing the number of peacekeeping training centers—and ensuring that they prioritize leadership and management skills for senior mission leaders—are important steps in resolving this problem. One idea was to establish a peacekeeping leadership academy, which one or more member states could offer to lead. It was emphasized that more in-depth training and mentorship is needed not only for special representatives of the secretary-general (SRSGs) and deputy SRSGs but also for force commanders, police commissioners, and chiefs of staff.

Performance

Participants discussed several structural obstacles to peacekeepers’ performance, including the length of time required for recruitment and deployment, difficulties with performance management, and lack of flexibility to move civilian staff between duty stations. They noted that if member states are serious about performance, they should help missions build their capacity to conduct integrated planning and dedicated performance assessments.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment System (CPAS) was seen as a potentially important mechanism to shift the focus of missions’ monitoring, planning, and evaluation from outputs to impact. To strengthen the implementation of CPAS so its analysis can better inform decision making and make missions more effective, all mission personnel should be trained to use the system, and planning units should be augmented with dedicated performance-assessment positions. Missions have not yet come up with a long-term and sustainable plan for the system’s implementation and have not submitted any requests for

additional posts for planning units in mission budgets.

Several participants noted that the number of overlapping reviews and evaluation processes could risk the duplication of efforts by different mission components and suggested making planning more efficient to avoid this problem. They also advocated for clarifying the roles of different monitoring and evaluation tools being used by missions and for identifying gaps in their use to ensure that the data collected is informing the decisions of management.

In addition, participants discussed the challenge posed by declared and undeclared caveats, with some classifying caveats as a barrier to improving peacekeeping performance. They identified major points of contention, such as the challenge presented by those who fail to obey orders due to undisclosed caveats and whether this should be classified as a disciplinary issue or a performance issue. Participants widely agreed on the need for close cooperation between the Secretariat and member states to resolve this challenge through closed-door meetings in which TCCs could express their concerns and work with the Secretariat to develop the process for dealing with caveats envisaged in the A4P Declaration.

In advance of the ministerial, member states should focus on providing military and police personnel to strengthen integrated mission planning teams (the mission in Mali is the only one that currently has an integrated planning capacity). In this regard, member states should be encouraged to consider longer deployments (e.g., twenty-four months instead of six) or secondment of key positions (e.g., chiefs of U2, U3, and U9). Both of these changes would enable more investment in the training of personnel and allow member states to better develop and sustain country expertise.

Conduct and Accountability

Within the framework of the A4P reforms, participants paid particular attention to preventing and managing the risk of serious misconduct

(including but not limited to sexual exploitation and abuse), improving accountability for perpetrators, and increasing support for victims. TCCs have improved their responses to sexual exploitation and abuse, and some have worked with the Secretariat to develop a pipeline to train and support peacekeeping commanders to better engage them on this issue.

To consolidate recent improvements in responses to misconduct, participants recommended strengthening existing efforts. Suggestions included encouraging member states to establish networks through which to share best practices (e.g., on paternity claims and criminal accountability), ensuring that training programs for future commanders instill a commitment to conduct and discipline, and promoting information sharing on training between peacekeeping training centers, headquarters, missions, and country capitals.

The 2021 peacekeeping ministerial is an opportunity for member states not only to reaffirm but to expand their commitment to UN peacekeeping by addressing systemic challenges facing missions.

Women, Peace, and Security

Participants noted the need to continue building on the success of efforts to incorporate the WPS agenda into peacekeeping operations, which can be seen in part in the increased levels of female participation across missions. The secretary-general has prioritized the recruitment and training of female peacekeeping staff, including the creation of “talent pipelines” to recruit mid- and senior-level women into peacekeeping. However, participants pointed out how structural barriers in the security institutions of major TCCs and PCCs can hinder the training and retention of qualified female candidates. For example, mission leadership often confines female staff to stereotypically “feminine” roles, such as community liaisons. Furthermore, success in this area is often measured solely by the number of female peacekeepers without analyzing how inclusion can help missions achieve their mandated goals.

Participants discussed possible reforms the UN

could undertake to address structural barriers to increasing women's participation in peacekeeping, including investing in gendered training for mission leadership to address bias in staffing choices for female peacekeeping staff. Participants suggested using the ministerial as a space for member states to discuss and examine the structural barriers facing men and women within their domestic security institutions, with the potential goal of committing member states to generating new national action plans.

Sustaining Peace

In the context of UN peacekeeping transitions, participants emphasized the importance of strengthening the link between peacekeeping and sustaining peace. Peacekeeping operations can support peacebuilding efforts by reestablishing security, building state capacity, and creating an enabling environment for civil society through improved governance. There are opportunities, particularly in transition environments, for missions to bolster the UN country team (UNCT) and other non-UN entities in areas related to peacebuilding where these actors may have a comparative advantage. Toward this end, earlier transition planning can help align the peacekeeping operation and the UNCT around a common strategy and divide the responsibility for peacebuilding tasks.

The Global Focal Point arrangement for police, justice, and corrections was highlighted as an example of effective joint programming between peacekeeping missions and UNCTs. It was also noted that rule of law efforts, particularly security sector reform, are applied inconsistently across missions, limiting their potential to serve as a core exit strategy for peacekeeping. The upcoming review of the UN peacebuilding architecture in 2020 and the ongoing UN reform process should

identify lessons learned from past transitions for current and future missions.

Participants also discussed how to strengthen key agencies and increase support for rule of law efforts. Some identified the Peacebuilding Fund as a potential focal point for connecting the two agendas, especially given its existing role in promoting system-wide coherence on sustaining peace. Others called for institutionalizing the Peacebuilding Commission's informal role as an advisory body for the Security Council. In terms of supporting rule of law efforts, participants also recommended formalizing information sharing between UN headquarters, member states, host countries, and UNCTs. The ministerial could advance these efforts by organizing discussions around clear thematic issues such as violent extremism, transnational organized crime, corruption, and land-related conflict.

Conclusion

Since 2014, the ministerial-level meetings on UN peacekeeping have been institutionalized as a high-profile forum for member states to publicly reaffirm their commitment to UN peacekeeping and to pledge specialized personnel, equipment, and training partnerships needed to effectively deliver Security Council mandates. The next ministerial in Seoul is expected to continue this practice. In the context of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, the ministerial is also an opportunity to encourage member states to expand their commitment to address systemic challenges facing missions, including those related to planning, performance assessment, and leadership. In the lead-up to the ministerial in April 2021, member states can use the preparatory meetings to work with the UN Secretariat to identify concrete, high-impact pledges in priority areas.

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