

Security Council Open Debate on Peacekeeping Operations: New Trends June 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. King Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations.

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his tireless efforts to build a flexible and sustainable United Nations peacekeeping force, able to respond not only to the challenges of today but also to anticipate those of the future.

Peacekeeping is at the very core of the United Nations. We are all indebted to those who have served as United Nations peacekeepers, and my country acknowledges those who have given their lives in pursuit of this noble cause. Over the past seven decades, 1 million Blue Helmets have deployed in over 70 operations across four continents, serving with distinction to prevent the outbreak of conflict, manage and contain violence and support countries in building peace after conflict.

As we have heard this morning, including from the Secretary-General, much has changed over the years in terms of the context for United Nations peacekeeping operations, yet the essential purpose of peacekeeping has remained the same, as have many of the means that peacekeepers employ to achieve their purpose. Let us take, for example, the proactive use of force. The United Nations has a history of using offensive action to counter threats. The solemn phrase “by all necessary means” has featured in mandates over many years as a powerful statement of the Council’s intent to uphold international peace and security.

As the Ambassador of Jordan has referenced, as far back as 1961 the United Nations Operation in the Congo launched offensive operations against Katangese forces. One could argue that this was the genesis of multidimensional peacekeeping. In Sierra Leone in 2000, troops of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone engaged in combat operations against the Revolutionary United Front. Special forces, artillery and attack helicopters were used in that operation — the same capabilities being employed to excellent effect by the Force Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) today, with strong support from the Council.

The protection of civilians is now rightfully established as a central tenet of United Nations peacekeeping, reflected in the fact that the majority of the Council’s peacekeeping missions are clearly and specifically mandated to protect civilians. The Secretary-General’s pronouncement in April that United Nations peacekeepers should not wait for instruction from Headquarters before taking action to protect civilians was an unambiguous directive affirming the need for proactive force measures for that specific purpose. We must all now work to ensure that the intent of the Council and the commitment of the Secretary-General are operationalized effectively to the benefit of the civilians who require protection.

One of the most pronounced new peacekeeping trends in recent years has been the inexorable growth in the demand for peacekeeping. Today, its scale and size are unprecedented. A record number of United Nations military, police and civilian personnel are serving on more missions than ever before — deploying to vast, remote and volatile environments where increasingly they confront non-State actors employing deadly unconventional tactics and where, as the Secretary-General has said, there is in fact no peace to keep and the risk of violence reoccurring is constant.

Yet public expectations are increasing about what peacekeeping can achieve. Scrutiny of peacekeeping effectiveness has never been more acute, the drive for efficiency never more pressing. So as we mobilize to confront those challenges, we must commit ourselves to adapting, innovating and continually improving. We must strengthen our capacity to deploy rapidly where the lives of civilians are at risk. Facing uncertainty, missions should be planned in a more flexible and iterative manner.

By prioritizing mandate elements and sequencing tasks using benchmarks, we can better meet

mission objectives. Recent experiences in Mali and South Sudan show that we need to improve planning and mission support, whether generating fresh troops or through inter-mission cooperation. We must continue to strengthen ties with regional and subregional organizations whose member States are so often the first responders when conflict erupts. We welcome Rwanda's advice that we will have an opportunity to examine this in more detail next month.

We must embrace new technologies in support of peacekeeping. Unarmed, unmanned aerial systems providing intelligence day and night have been crucial in helping MONUSCO to neutralize armed groups preying on civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Simple measures, such as installing perimeter lighting and cameras around United Nations bases, can free personnel from static security tasks so they may increase active patrolling, expanding further their protective footprint.

Those cost-effective enablers will not lessen the demand for boots on the ground or for other air assets in the sky. Rather, they allow those in the field to achieve their mandates in a safer, more effective and efficient manner. We encourage the Secretary-General to deploy those resources as he sees fit to meet the needs of each mission. We must all work collaboratively with the new United Nations Panel of Experts examining how other technologies can be leveraged to support peacekeeping. Of course, technologies only augment human capacity, so we must redouble our efforts to improve training to better prepare personnel to conduct mission tasks and to confront the risks they face.

Ultimately, peacekeeping will only ever be a band-aid measure without a stable peace. That is where the coordination of peacekeeping and other Council instruments is so crucial. The now routine partnering of peacekeeping with preventive and protective sanctions measures, such as arms embargoes, is a vital factor in mitigating conflict and preserving the space for post-conflict reconstruction. We must not lose sight of the importance of the civilian side of peacekeeping to help build national capacities to address local problems. Done effectively, security sector reform; disarmament demobilization and reintegration; and reforms of justice and rule-of-law institutions can be the glue that binds a nation in the post-conflict phase.

The doubling of a number of United Nations police authorized by the Council over the past decade reflects a growing recognition that strengthening the rule of law is the basis for lasting stability and security. United Nations police are performing ever-expanding roles, from combating sexual violence and transnational crime to engaging communities to prevent conflict. We believe that the role of police in peacekeeping is something the Council should examine in a more systematic way.

To conclude, we must all see today's debate as an opportunity to take stock, revisit our assumptions and question current practices in peacekeeping. Collectively, as the peacekeeping partnership, we must resolve to heed the lessons learned and we need to continually refine our approach. We owe this to the men and women who serve as United Nations peacekeepers and to the many people they protect in our name.