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The Strategic Context: Peacekeeping in Crisis, 2006–08

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There is a consensus that the UN needs a stronger strategic culture, but its strategic circumstances militate against this. Since 2006, the UN has struggled with a series of crises that have overshadowed efforts to develop the idea of integration. It also faces a systemic crisis, in that its framework for deploying missions has been undermined in Darfur. In addition it faces a paradigmatic crisis, as many of its assumptions about transitions from war to peace have been shown wanting in cases from Afghanistan to the Democratic Republic of Congo. At a time of increasing rivalry among major powers, not least in the Security Council, the UN may not develop comprehensive strategies aimed at transforming post-conflict societies. But it may be able to achieve more limited but politically credible goals.

The 2005 *Report on Integrated Missions* spotted a basic but sizeable flaw in the UN's attitude to integration. It defined an integrated mission as 'subsuming various actors and approaches within an overall political-strategic crisis management framework'.[1] But it was 'clear that the UN lacks a system-wide "strategic culture"'.[2] The organization's planners seemed to be struggling to achieve a 'context-driven' approach to peace operations – an approach based on identifying key challenges and aligning military, civilian and financial resources to address them. This diagnosis was widely accepted, and when the then Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, approved guidelines for the Integrated Mission Planning Process (IMPP) on 13 June 2006, the words 'strategy' and 'strategic' made a combined total of 62 appearances in the space of 20 pages.[3] The guidelines explicitly (if inelegantly) defined integration in terms of a strategy-making process:

> An Integrated Mission is one in which there is a shared vision among all UN actors as to the strategic objective of the UN presence at country level. This strategic objective is the result of a deliberate effort by all elements of the UN system to achieve a shared understanding of the mandates and functions of the UN presence at country level and use this understanding to maximize UN effectiveness, efficiency and impact in all aspects of its work. An Integrated Mission is one in which structure is derived from an in-depth understanding of the specific country-setting [...] form (mission structure) should follow function and be tailored to the specific characteristics of each country setting.[4]

But if this looked simple on paper, events conspired to make it seem irrelevant that summer as the UN stumbled into a series of missions in an increasingly ad hoc fashion. As argued immediately below, events in Timor-Leste and the

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Middle East in the weeks before and after the launch of the IMPP guidelines sparked a period of crisis for the UN that continued into 2008. The second and third sections of the article claim that this crisis is not just a matter of a series of difficult missions coming in quick succession. Rather, it is both a systemic and paradigmatic crisis – and a fundamentally political one.

It is a systemic crisis because the operational framework for UN missions has been unable to meet the demand for peacekeepers in Darfur, a case that has become the highest profile test of its capacity. It is sometimes suggested that Darfur should be treated separately from other UN operations (this author has, for example, suggested that it 'overshadows' more effective missions).[5] This article nevertheless contends that Darfur must be treated as an integral element of the UN peacekeeping system. The scale of the mission mandated in 2006 threatened to destabilize that system. More crucially, however, Sudan's blocking tactics not only delayed the force but damaged peacekeeping's wider political credibility, creating a political (rather than 'simply' operational) systemic crisis.

The loss of political credibility stemming from the Darfur crisis is related to the paradigmatic crisis affecting the IMPP's conception of how to 'to maximize UN effectiveness, efficiency and impact'. Elements of the vision championed by Annan, a component of 'liberal peace', have been thrown into doubt not only in Darfur, but in cases from Afghanistan to Burundi. These setbacks reflect the failure, of the kind of thinking that informs the IMPP, to take into account the nature of politics both in the Security Council and in countries where the UN deploys. The *Report on Integrated Missions* was right to point to the UN's lack of 'strategic culture', but the IMPP's aim to resolve this through the search for 'shared understanding' is technocratic and insufficiently political.

That peacekeeping must be more political – in the sense that there is no point in deploying troops and police where there is no peace agreement or diplomatic process to support – is hardly new. The IMPP is partly intended to remedy this. But as Lakhdar Brahimi and Salman Ahmed have argued, shifts in the global balance of power largely tend in the opposite direction: towards a further *loss* of political clarity. They note that, 'The current geopolitical landscape is far more fragmented than in the immediate post-Cold War "honeymoon" period.... As a result, recent [peace] operations have deployed not only without the benefit of a comprehensive peace agreement in place, but also without the necessary leverage in hand to overcome political deadlock during the implementation phase.'[6]

Thus, the UN planners following the IMPP guidelines are meant to identify a 'shared objective' on the basis of a 'shared understanding' of a conflict in spite of intensifying competition between states. But while the integration idea focuses on relations between elements of the UN family, it must respond to the trend in intergovernmental politics if it is not to be smothered. Discussions about integration are too often based on a denial of the trend. But that does not mean the idea is dead. This article concludes with brief thoughts on a technically imperfect but politically more credible version of integration that could emerge in the future.

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The 2006-2008 Peacekeeping Crisis: Real or Imagined?

The authors of the 2005 *Report on Integrated Missions* observed that a major obstacle to integration was the simple fact that staff in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) were often too busy to consult others.[7] In the summer of 2006, they got busier. On 11 June, two days before Kofi Annan formally endorsed the IMPP guidelines, the government of Timor-Leste requested a new UN mission to help sustain peace after riots and the deployment of an Australian-led military force. This was a significant embarrassment for the UN, which had held up its previous performance in the nascent Pacific state as proof of its competence in holistic civilian-military missions. Although DPKO staff blamed the new crisis on a premature drawdown of peacekeepers by the Security Council in 2006, it was an unfortunate event against which to launch the framework for deploying more holistic missions in future. But the Timorese events were overshadowed by the seizure of an Israeli soldier by Hezbollah on 12 July, sparking the five-week Lebanon war. While that conflict led to the expansion of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), negotiations on the enlarged force were chaotic.[8]

Rather than develop an integrated mission under the civilian authority of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), European governments that were to provide the majority of troops insisted that UNIFIL II should be a military-only affair. Security Council Resolution 1701 of 11 August, mandating the deployment, made no reference to the three UN political missions already operating in Lebanon, let alone other elements of the UN family there. In private, diplomats gave a variety of reasons for these omissions, including the Beirut government's fear that the approval of an integrated mission would brand their country as a' failed state'.[9] Rumours that Kofi Annan would bring the entire UN family in Lebanon under a super-envoy never eventuated.

No sooner had Annan approved the guidelines for achieving a 'shared understanding' of the UN's role in a post-conflict environment, therefore, than hard politics intervened to show how the Security Council could upset the best-laid plans (or more accurately, planning procedures) of the UN Secretariat. While the council did authorize an integrated mission for Timor-Leste (UNMIT) on 25 August 2006, this was overshadowed not only by events in the Middle East but also by the council's decision a week later to mandate a peacekeeping force of over 20,000 troops and police for Darfur.[10] A mood of incipient crisis infected the DPKO and the circle of friendly commentators. Security Council Report, a think tank generally sympathetic to the Secretariat, warned that 'the United Nations may again see itself in a situation in which it is under resourced, under staffed and attempting to implement complex peacekeeping mandates with the potential for resumptions of conflict in these highly unstable environments.'[11]

The IMPP guidelines thus entered the world in particularly unpromising circumstances. In the short term, the spurt of panic of mid-2006 may have been excessive. By the end of the year, sufficient progress had been made in Lebanon and Timor-Leste (if not in Darfur) for the *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2007* to conclude that UN peacekeeping had proved 'surprisingly

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successful' under pressure.[12] Nonetheless, the UN subsequently reeled from one peacekeeping crisis to the next, including a series of flare-ups of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), host to the UN's largest current mission (MONUC), and Timor-Leste; repeated setbacks in efforts to deploy significant forces to Darfur; and the failure to find a clean exit strategy for the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). By late 2007, the overall picture for international peacekeeping was bleaker than it had been 12 months before. The *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2008* struck an unusually gloomy note in summarizing the year:

> 2007 was a difficult year for peacekeeping, and presaged serious challenges ahead... [P]eacekeeping was becoming a victim of its earlier successes, the reflex solution to conflicts and crises even in the absence of a peace agreement or viable peace process. Repeated warnings of overstretch did not forestall the authorization of ambitious new mandates by the Security Council and regional organizations. The complexity of operations began to outstrip the ability of international organizations to keep pace.[13]

If this warning was blunt, it was not unusual – indeed, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guéhenno made similarly negative statements in late 2007. These tended to concentrate on the difficulties inherent in specific operations, most often Darfur, but suggested that a more systemic crisis was unfolding.[14] Some commentators, including long-time observers of the Secretariat, were inclined to discount such arguments on the grounds that 'UN peacekeeping is always in crisis'.[15] Had not Guéhenno already warned the General Assembly in 2004 that 'peacekeeping is once again at a crossroads' and that serious resource deficits were looming?[16] Was the UN's strategic situation really so bad, or were officials being merely difficult?

More optimistic analysts could point to some signs that, despite the many challenges of 2006–08, the UN was moving towards a better-defined strategic culture, at least at the conceptual level. The idea of integrated missions proved central to this process. In 2006, the Peacebuilding Commission met for the first time and, although immediately entering into tortuous procedural debate, its members eventually concurred that its primary role was to facilitate integrating UN efforts in the field.[17] While initially confining its duties to oversight of policy in Burundi and Sierra Leone, the commission made small but concrete contributions to holding the international community's efforts together.[18] The UN also benefited from a growing consensus on the need to align integrated missions with initiatives by other international organizations, notably NATO's 'comprehensive approach'. The participants in a seminar on these parallel policies organized by the Norwegian government in Brussels in October 2007 concluded that 'political discussions within the UN, European Union (EU) and NATO basically raise similar concerns and questions', but they brightly concluded that there were 'indications' that 'the international community is getting better at integrated operations, something that has been confirmed through a decrease in the number of conflicts and killed people around the world'.[19]

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Throughout 2007 and early 2008, it was notable that, just as professional UN watchers sank deeper into gloom, international leaders were sounding increasingly positive notes on the UN's role and the importance of integrated missions in particular. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown visited the UN Security Council in April 2008, among other reasons, to call for reforms to ensure that 'when Security Council resolutions authorize peacekeeping missions, the whole UN system also is able to authorize action on stabilization and reconstruction' and 'a single envoy is given authority for coordinating international efforts on peacekeeping and recovery in post-conflict zones'.[20] While UN officials and experts grumbled that Brown appeared unaware of the progress already made by the organization on these fronts – and was ignorant of how the various elements of the UN family interrelate – the speech represented an intellectual victory for the idea of integration: it was no longer a technical issue, but the stuff of high political rhetoric.

By the time of writing in the second quarter of 2008, therefore, it could be claimed that while UN peacekeeping might be stumbling from short-term crisis to short-term crisis, there are long-term trends in favour of effective and coherent integrated peace operations. There is at least one precedent for strategic thinking on UN operations advancing while a crisis unfolded on the ground at the same time: the Brahimi Report was being drafted just as the UN mission to Sierra Leone skirted disaster in 2000. And there is certainly no shortage of precedents for assuming that progress at the UN is slow. A 2008 review of the Peacebuilding Commission's performance in facilitating integration describes it as 'a young body still finding its feet', adding that 'three years is a credible time-span within which a new intergovernmental body should be fully functional'.[21] Nevertheless, while the ramifications of the interlinked peacekeeping crises of 2006–08 will be better understood a few years hence, trends against the achievement of a durable strategic culture at the UN – and, by extension, integration – are already identifiable.

The Peacekeeping 'System' and 'Paradigm': Definitions and Tensions

To make the case that UN peacekeeping faces a systemic and paradigmatic crisis, it is necessary to define these terms more clearly. The definition of the 'system' involved here is relatively specific. It is not intended to signify the 'UN system' in its broadest sense, but rather the operational, managerial and political mechanisms required to maintain UN missions (integrated or otherwise) in the field. The burdens placed on these mechanisms are huge. By the first quarter of 2008, the number of UN military and police personnel in missions had risen to over 90,000, and was likely to grow to over 100,000 through the year.[22] Sustaining this deployment level requires rotating approximately 200,000 personnel per year. In the meantime, other international organizations – including NATO, the African Union (AU) and the EU – are also heavily involved in 'peacekeeping'. Excluding forces deployed in Iraq, there were approximately 75,000 non-UN 'peacekeepers' worldwide in 2008.

Systemic success and failure can thus be defined in operational terms according to the UN's ability to find the personnel and resources to fulfil its operational

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needs. But the system is not simply an operational matter: meeting its requirements is a political business that involves three categories of states interacting through a 'hierarchical relationship of supply and demand, both in terms of manpower and money'.[23] These are the states in which large-scale peace operations are deployed (mainly in Africa); those supplying the bulk of peacekeeping forces (most notably in South Asia and Africa); and those providing most of the funding for peace operations (the United States, EU members and Japan).

The continuation of the UN peacekeeping system relies not only on the physical availability of resources, but also on an uneasy political compact between these categories of states. The UN 'paradigm', as embodied in the IMPP and other official statements, should serve to keep this compact together. But this paradigm is hard to pin down: it refers to the set of assumptions and concepts that have informed UN practice in the field over the last decade, of which integration is one frequently cited (if elusive) element. As other articles in this volume emphasize, this bundle of ideas remains amorphous and difficult to operationalize – the mantra 'form follows function', now so well established in discussions of integrated missions, militates against the creation of overly detailed models for operations.[24] Nonetheless, several assumptions, associated with what some have called the 'liberal peace', underpin policy thinking at the UN, which in turn informs the IMPP and integration processes as well as the package of tasks contained in peacekeeping or peacebuilding – key components of the UN 'paradigm'.[25]

These notions of system and paradigm are not only theoretically useful, but (not coincidentally) also align with the declared priorities of UN officials. In his 2004 'crossroads' speech, Guéhenno identified two areas 'crying out to be addressed':

> The *first* concerns the processes by which we get the right capabilities – the troops, the specialized components, the police, the civilians – on the ground in time to implement the mandates of peace operations. The *second* relates to how these capabilities are best organized and deployed on the ground; how we *integrate* and rationalize the joint efforts of the UN system and the rest of the international community to assist the consolidation of sustainable peace.[26]

These stated goals thus provide useful markers against which to measure the UN's performance. When we consider integration, the logistical challenge of maintaining large deployments is not always immediately relevant: some high-profile integrated missions, such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, are on a relatively small scale.[27] But if the UN peace operations architecture is taken as a whole, it is inevitable that sustaining bigger missions absorbs time and energy to the detriment of more limited deployments. In October 2006, grappling with the implications of that summer's deployments, Guéhenno complained to journalists of the 'enormous challenge' of supporting the number of personnel now under DPKO's purview and of ensuring 'proper oversight in all areas'.[28]

The following April, Ban Ki-moon argued that the previous year's surge in activity had 'entailed redirecting efforts that would have otherwise been

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dedicated to strategic management, regular evaluation and review, building a risk management and doctrinal framework of policies, procedures, and training and other forms of guidance and preparing qualified, trained staff in all areas'.[29] Systemic strains had, in short, blocked progress towards oversight, operational effectiveness and building a strategic culture.

Ban's solution was to split DPKO into two departments, one with operational responsibilities and the other responsible for field services. While he highlighted that this would ease the oversight problem, he was curiously ambiguous about its potential impact on the organization's strategic culture. He had previously noted that the split 'creates a new set of challenges' and recognized the validity of an alternative case for a 'single [consolidated] department dedicated to planning, deploying, managing and sustaining all peacekeeping and related field operations'.[30] While the long-term impact of the split has yet to be seen, Ban's qualifications highlight the continued contradictions between meeting immediate systemic challenges to UN operations while simultaneously developing the paradigm meant to guide them.

They even raise the possibility that the current UN system may be inherently unable to deliver on integration because of the pressures it faces. To evaluate this claim properly, however, we must first see how serious those pressures are, and how the specific case of Darfur has proved to be a systemic crisis, not an isolated tragedy.

Systemic Crisis: The Challenge of Darfur

When judging the health of the system by the delivery of capacities to the field, one should note that there were significant signs of strain well before the events of 2006. In 2004, Guéhenno described the UN's force-generation position as 'mixed', with particular shortfalls in specialized assets such as helicopters.[31] He noted that the UN was then deploying 54,200 troops, nearly 6,000 police and over 11,000 international civilian staff in peace operations. This was six times more personnel than the UN had in the field in 1999, and the figures continued to rise. At the start of 2006 – with the total number of UN military and police nudging 70,000 – the authors of the *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations* highlighted the problems associated with this level of growth, in terms of finding troops for new missions and deploying them rapidly; they noted that in 2005 'the UN Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) . . . took over nine months to deploy just 3,600 troops – 40% of its mandated strength. By contrast, when the UN deployed to Sierra Leone in 2000, it was able to move more than 12,000 troops into the field in its first nine months – almost its total planned size.'[32]

If the UN was demonstrating systemic operational problems before mid-2006, the deployments demanded by the Security Council in 2006 threw the whole system into doubt. The decision to expand UNIFIL to 15,000 troops was fulfilled through the means of European troop suppliers using their own logistical arrangements, rather than resorting to the UN's. This permitted a rapid deployment but highlighted the comparative weaknesses of the usual UN mechanisms. But it was those mechanisms that the Security Council mandated to deliver the even larger

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force proposed for Darfur, a logistician's nightmare far from any ports and with little infrastructure.

Although the Darfur deployment was delayed and distorted by the political factors discussed below, it would have been a huge test of the UN's capacity to find military and police assets in any case. The mission as envisaged in Resolution 1706 of August 2006 had a proposed size of 17,300 military personnel and 3,300 police. Relative to the UN forces already deployed elsewhere in Africa, the figures represented an increase of roughly 30 per cent for the military and 61 per cent for the police.[33]

Meeting these targets would require not merely an expansion of the UN's African commitments, but a completely new scale of deployment on the continent. The UN had undergone steep increases before: its combined military and police forces had jumped from 45,815 to 64,720 in 2004, a comparable leap mainly driven by African operations.[34] But it was widely assumed that the high tempo of operations resulting from these earlier increases meant that the South Asian and African troop contributors that provided four-fifths of UN forces in Africa were reaching the limits of what they could, or at least would, deploy. This was the sense in which Darfur first appeared to be a systemic test: it required the UN not only to address the challenges of one mission but also to manage the competing needs of other missions and the associated demands on its force contributors.

It seemed possible that the UN peacekeeping system could react through shifting some of the forces already deployed in Africa to Darfur (where troops already committed to the existing AU mission could also be rehatted). The UN has always juggled forces between missions – when UNIFIL was set up in 1978, for example, it drew on units previously assigned to observe the Israeli–Syrian ceasefire on the Golan Heights – but, by 2006, it was becoming the norm in African contexts. In 2005, the Security Council refused to expand the UN mission in Côte d'Ivoire but agreed to the switch of units from neighbouring Liberia to make up the shortfall. In 2006, the Council approved the redeployment of contingents from Burundi (where the UN was drawing down) to the DRC.

Although the UN was thus growing used to switching troops between its missions by 2006, concerns were raised over the possibility of 'cannibalizing' existing operations for the sake of Darfur. The most acute critique of this process in the run-up to the Security Council's decision to mandate a UN force in Darfur in 2006 came from Pierre-Antoine Braud.[35] Braud worried that 'peacekeeping in Sudan could overshadow, and even marginalize, efforts to stabilize other countries'.[36] He was specifically concerned that troops might be moved from the fragile DRC to Darfur before the former achieved stability. For Braud, this moving between missions was less a function of force availability, let alone the relative needs of the missions, than something forced by the UN budgetary process. Noting that 26 per cent of the peacekeeping budget – then running at US$5 billion – would come from the United States, where UN bashing was prevalent in the wake of the oil-for-food scandal, he predicted that the creation of a Darfur mission would require a reduction in the budget of other missions.[37]

This view spread, and by August 2006 peacekeeping analysts feared that a Darfur deployment could create a systemic crisis for peacekeeping by gobbling

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up personnel and resources needed elsewhere, taking the UN 'past the point of overstretch'.[38] In retrospect, these predictions are tinged with irony: in reality, the UN's greatest difficulty in Darfur has not been to prevent the destabilization of wider peacekeeping, but to get any forces into the region at all. The Sudanese government has followed a strategy of obstructionism, initially taking advantage of the language of Resolution 1706, which 'invites the consent' of Khartoum as a precondition for deploying UN peacekeepers. Its prevarications ensured that the UN did not deploy in late 2006 as envisaged, leaving the international community to create an African Union–UN hybrid mission (UNAMID) that (according to Resolution 1769 of 31 July 2007) 'should have a predominantly African character'. Although the Security Council stated only that troops should come 'as far as possible' from African countries, the Sudanese have exploited this to preclude virtually all non-African personnel, even for posts for which Africans are not available.

This has meant that the UN has not been able to draw on the Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani personnel that make up nearly half its forces in Africa for UNAMID. Although several African countries have stepped forward to fill this gap, they have not yet provided (and most do not have) many of the specialized assets the mission needs. While UNAMID was formally launched in 1 January 2008, its initial growth was excruciatingly slow. In May 2008, Ban Ki-moon noted that the UN faced an 'urgent need to enhance the mission's engineer capability' if it was to dig the mission in before the rainy season, and also faced gaps in its ability move forces around.[39] The mission's leadership predicted that the force would only be 80 per cent deployed by the year's end.

Cumulatively, these problems indicate that the decisive impact of the Darfur crisis has not been to destroy the UN's peacekeeping framework as a whole, but to show how a determined government could use political demands to block its operations. It is arguable that, had the Sudanese government been less obstructive, the UN might still have found it almost impossible to build a force. Violence in the DRC through 2007 (discussed below) meant that the Security Council could not draw down troops there. But the 'international community' was readier to sustain the expansion of peacekeeping than Braud foresaw: by mid-2008 the Security Council had mandated missions with a total annual budget of US$7.36 billion. While these were the subject of rancorous discussions in both the General Assembly and the US Congress, UN spending had not hit its ceiling.[40] Nonetheless, Darfur has been particularly damaging for the UN because it has not fulfilled its mandate in spite of a high level of international support for its activities.

Can it, then, be described as a systemic crisis? Not in the sense that Braud predicted: in global operational terms, the UN has kept going. It unquestionably showed symptoms of worsening overstretch, such as a shortage of international civilian staff: in 2006–07, its missions in South Sudan and Timor-Leste both had a vacancy rate of 30 per cent or more. Nonetheless, the UN framework continues to be relatively operationally resilient. But the UN has faced a *political* systemic crisis, as Sudanese obstruction has demonstrated how easy it is to manipulate and undermine the UN's mandates and operational machinery, while the

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crisis has gained ever more publicity. This challenge parallels a phenomenon defined by David Steven and Alex Evans as 'intentional systems disruption', involving 'achieving maximum impact through minimum effort'.[41]

Steven and Evans analyse this in terms of terrorism, where 'attacking the critical networks ... that underpin modern life' may create 'mass disruption' that is more powerful than mass murder from a psychological point of view. But we can see similar dynamics in how Sudanese actions have affected the UN peacekeeping system. Rather than attack that system head-on (which would, after all, be beyond its capabilities), the government in Khartoum has identified and exploited the political frailty of the UN's operational system, with psychological results that stretch beyond the immediate case. The next section shows how this form of systems disruption can create a paradigmatic crisis for the UN as well, affecting also integration.

Paradigmatic Crisis: The Threat to Integration

If the Darfur crisis is identified as a case of 'intentional systems disruption', a series of other issues affecting UN peacekeeping during the crisis of 2006–08 can be factored in. These are all cases where governments have withheld or conditioned their consent for peace operations in such a way as to complicate or prevent their functioning effectively. In early 2006, the most obvious examples were Burundi (where a new government demanded the drawdown of UN peacekeeping forces ahead of schedule) and on the Ethiopian–Eritrean border (where the Eritreans disrupted UN operations from 2005 on). The authors of the *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations* concluded that 'as peace operations expanded through 2006, so did the level of resistance to them by state and non-state actors',[42] highlighting not only Darfur but also the DRC and Afghanistan.

Disruption was most explicitly aimed at integration in Afghanistan, although not until January 2008. Throughout 2007, concerns grew over the failure of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to coordinate assistance and work effectively with the large NATO force and smaller (but financially significant) EU presence in the country. The UN's proposed response was to appoint a high-powered envoy – Britain's Lord Ashdown, formerly High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina – to give UNAMA's efforts new momentum and coherence.[43] Although Ashdown had long been suspicious of UN cant, he echoed the language of the IMPP: Afghanistan needed a 'strategy that all (including, crucially, the Afghan government and the international military) can buy into'.[44] He was blunt that 'we will lose if we do not start doing things differently. What we need is a strategy, not a disconnected collection of uncoordinated tactics'. Yet the Afghan government apparently feared that talk of strategy was a cover for unwelcome interference in its affairs, and in January 2008 blocked the appointment.[45]

While a well-respected alternative – Norway's Kai Eide – was found for the post, this episode had worrying implications for the concept of integration as well as for the other components of the UN paradigm. The integration concept is in large part based on the presumption that the better the UN could provide security

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and aid, the more welcome it would be. This in turn reflected the presumption on the UN's part that its understanding and conceptualization of what comprised 'security' and 'aid' were universally understood and acceptable, even desired. Yet Afghanistan's leaders – like their counterparts in Africa – appeared to be prioritizing their political autonomy over the benefits of an integrated UN plan. The concept of 'strategy' embedded in the IMPP guidelines was proving politically unsound. This is why we can speak of a paradigmatic crisis for UN peacekeeping.

To understand the significance of that crisis, it is necessary to recall the principles that informed Kofi Annan as the integration idea evolved. These were captured in his 2002 report *No Exit Without Strategy*, which, while it did not address integration directly, provided the intellectual foundations for the IMPP. It promulgated 'three objectives whose fulfillment has often brought about successful, comprehensive peace-building': consolidating internal and external security, strengthening political institutions and good governance, and promoting economic and social rehabilitation and transformation.[46] Each of the headings came with a list of subobjectives – the economic and social dimension, for example, covered everything from infrastructure rehabilitation to psychosocial trauma counselling. The basic concepts were presented as a common-sense list of post-conflict priorities, and managing these transitions in a coordinated fashion offered the overriding logic for integration.

Yet, as alluded to above, implicit in Annan's three objectives was an understanding of the sort of (liberal) peace that post-conflict states presumably wanted the UN to arrange. It drew on policy literature that was far more explicitly liberal in its terminology and inspiration: 'Although each post-conflict situation (like each conflict) possesses unique attributes, recovery typically involves a "triple transition": from war to peace; from a controlled to a market economy; and from authoritarianism (or totalitarianism) to democracy.'[47]

While this formula reflected certain experiences of the 1990s, it is not clear that it is a sound basis for handling all conflicts. Indeed, in the cases we have noted, local actors (and especially governments) have shown themselves ready to complicate these processes or resist them altogether. Often, the processes themselves throw up unintended consequences: the Afghan government might have been more open to Ashdown's appointment had it not been approaching national elections. Similarly, Burundi's leaders might not have asked the UN to pull troops out early if they had not believed that the 'internationals' had wanted a different outcome from the elections they supervised.

An even more troubling case study of how political and security transitions diverge from the liberal peace standpoint that underpins the UN paradigm (and integration) is the country where the UN worked hard on the integrated mission concept: the DRC. There, successful elections in 2006 delivered a government that seemed less interested in finishing the transition from war to peace in 2007 than in using force against its opponents in the east of the country, dragging a wary UN along with it. When government forces were decisively defeated by militias in December 2007, the *Financial Times* announced that the UN mission had been 'in disarray', and was 'beset by scandals' and 'loathed by civilians who

have suffered the most from the violence'.[48] The idea of well-aligned political and security transitions had fallen apart: it might be described as an example of '*unintentional* systems disruption'.

In early 2008, the Congolese government took an initiative that seemed calculated to disrupt any efforts by the UN to shape the third objective identified in *No Exit Without Strategy*: economic reform. In May 2008, the Congolese government announced a US$9.25 billion deal with China by which it would swap minerals for infrastructure projects. The *Financial Times* again expressed concern: 'like many of Beijing's big state-backed projects in Africa, this one pits a Chinese commercial model for engagement with the continent against the bureaucracy of western development assistance.'[49] This had clear implications for the UN's efforts. If these were meant to align security and economic assistance, but the model and ability to implement it was now in question, how could it carry any political credibility?

Although the efforts to disrupt UN operations are scattered, they nonetheless suggest the varieties of resistance to peace operations that may be repeated in future; in private, UN officials worry that other potential spoilers are learning from these examples. There has not, of course, ever been a golden period in which the UN did not encounter resistance: many of those that oppose it today are far less ruthless or subtle than Slobodan Milošević. Yet it is clear that the current wave of disruptive activities represents an extremely troubled strategic environment in which to develop the UN's strategic culture. If the IMPP guidelines emphasize the creation of a 'common understanding' between elements of the UN system, the cases we have identified underline the point that any UN strategy is liable to be implemented under significant political pressure. There is thus a risk that, in searching for elusive internal agreement, the UN family will fail to prepare for external threats.

The natural response to this risk is, of course, to repeat the 2005 report's emphasis on context: for example, the UN could supplement more robust forces with better intelligence, and develop a new generation of mediators to handle complex post-conflict political work. There is also a growing tendency among peacekeeping analysts to distance themselves from the 'certainties' of the liberal peace. Ian Johnstone has, for example, advocated a more 'deliberative' approach to peacemaking and peacebuilding that would emphasize inclusive dialogue over elections, as well as greater awareness of contextual forces.

While this renewed emphasis on flexibility is welcome, it remains overshadowed by the problem of whether UN operations enjoy the political space to be flexible. For while the UN must respond to its immediate circumstances, these cannot be detached from another layer of competition: the struggle for advantage between major powers in a period of emerging multipolarity. Kofi Annan launched the idea of integration in the era of US hegemony, but the challenges to the UN identified above are often associated with the waning of that power. Symptoms range from the instability in Afghanistan to the reduced influence of US-backed international financial institutes in Africa. This indicates the deepest challenge of all to the implementation of integrated missions: their reliance on the Security Council for their overall strategic direction.

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This reliance is inherent in the 2006 IMPP guidelines. Expanding on the importance of 'common understanding' to integrated strategies, the IMPP is meant to align all members of the UN family with a Security Council mandate, which catalyses their relationships:

> The IMPP aims to assist UN actors to achieve a common strategic and operational plan that is responsive to the objectives of the UN system and the Security Council mandate through a shared understanding of the priorities, programme interventions and organizing principles, clear delineation of responsibilities, and an organizational structure that supports these priorities ('form follows function'), based upon agencies' mandates.[50]

Insofar as the various members of the UN family have a plethora of competing mandates – and associated institutional interests – this task is likely to be easy or hard according to whether the Security Council provides clear objectives in its own mandate to give an integrated mission focus, a theme Annan foreshadowed in *No Exit Without Strategy*:

> A good exit strategy results from a good entrance strategy. In this connection, the Security Council is expected to reach agreement on a clear and achievable mandate based on a common understanding of the nature of the conflict. The Secretariat should provide the candid and well-informed analysis that the Security Council's decision on an effective peace strategy will require. The members of the Council are expected to use their influence to ensure from the outset that the necessary means of implementation are available, and it is up to the General Assembly to authorize a timely budget allocation.[51]

One does not have to be a connoisseur of UN prose to see the similarities in the language between this and the IMPP guidelines: the near-obsessive repetition of the words 'strategy' and, most importantly, 'understanding'. Reading the two documents together, it is easy to see a rather straightforward normative logic emerging: if the Security Council can base a mandate on a 'common understanding' of a conflict, a 'shared understanding' of what to do should emerge within the UN family. But then, it is equally true that one does not have to be a connoisseur of Security Council negotiations to see that this normative logic was at best optimistic, at worst dangerous, in terms of the politics of the emerging multipolarity.

The Security Council thus risks heading in a direction diametrically opposed to the logic of *No Exit Without Strategy* in the years ahead. The resurgence of 'competing national interests' identified in the quotation from Brahimi and Ahmed is liable to result in a conflictual Security Council. The likelihood of UN field missions receiving clear strategic guidance from New York will be concomitantly reduced. Furthermore, the compact between UN troop contributors and the peacekeeping's financiers is also likely to suffer from deepening divisions between West and South – symptoms of this trend, including clashes between the Security Council and General Assembly over the division of oversight of peacekeepers, are already easily perceptible.[52] The systemic crisis will thus deepen on both operational and political levels, and so will the paradigmatic crisis outlined

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above. A striking indication of the resulting level of concern in the UN Secretariat was provided in January 2008 with the publication of its principles and guidelines, formerly the 'capstone doctrine', for peacekeeping. In contrast to the strong normative statements of the Annan years, the doctrine sounds distinctly downbeat on what can be expected from the Security Council:

> While the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation only requires nine votes from the Security Council's fifteen members, anything other than unanimous Security Council backing can be a serious handicap. Divisions within the Security Council are likely to send mixed messages to the parties [in a conflict], and may undermine the legitimacy and authority of the mission in the eyes of the main parties and population as a whole.... On the other hand, by showing the parties that it is actively engaged in the peace process and is determined to stay the course, the Security Council can greatly enhance a United Nations peacekeeping operation's impact on the ground.[53]

The peacekeeping guidelines also make a plea for 'sustained consultations' with troop-contributing countries 'at all stages'.[54] Although these guidelines shares the IMPP guidelines' attachment for the words 'strategy' and 'strategic', they do not use them with quite such wild abandon as the earlier document: combined, they appear 41 times in 100 pages. If the IMPP guidelines were published as the UN's peacekeeping crisis of 2006–08 broke, the peacekeeping guidelines reveal some of the disillusion that followed. The ambitious agenda of shaping Security Council practice was been replaced with a more limited desire to avoid major discord.

This sense of peacekeeping's limitations spills over into the attitude to integration, which might best be described as cautious. The assessments leading to integration must be 'honest', joint planning may be 'slow', and 'forcing integration where it is not needed may well be counter-productive'.[55] This being so, 'full application of the IMPP may not always be necessary or feasible'.[56] It would be wrong to say that the peacekeeping guidelines are against integrated missions – but nor does the document go out of its way to promote them. Has the strategic environment shifted decisively against integration? Has the broader paradigm that informed peacekeeping in the Annan era run out of credibility?

Conclusion: A More Imperfect Integration

This article contends that UN peacekeeping is currently navigating a series of interrelated crises – immediate, systemic and paradigmatic – and that if its operations are to survive, it will be necessary to resolve the political problems underpinning them. This would require limiting the political space for spoilers to launch 'intentional systems disruption', and finding some sort of political settlement between the members of the Security Council on how to avoid paralysing the institution. This might amount not to a 'common understanding' of challenges, but a more limited *modus vivendi* based on a pragmatic assessment of powers' shared interests.

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Such a *modus vivendi* is likely to continue to place limitations on the UN's ability to build a strategic culture; the challenge for the Secretariat may often be to develop minimalist positions that governments agree to rather than maximalist strategies aimed at transforming societies or the UN system itself. Ban's decision to prioritize oversight over strategy-making in splitting the DPKO suggests pessimism on this score. Indeed, the UN will almost always have to accept that its missions will work in the context of concerted competition for resources and diplomatic advantage by external powers in the countries where it deploys. The leverage of its missions, even if reasonably well integrated, will be duly reduced – all too often, they will simply be expected to keep enough order for competition to go on.

This will require the UN to improve some tools, such as mediation. And counter-intuitively, this might actually benefit both its strategy-making and integration processes. If the UN family is confined to relatively limited goals, it may be easier to agree on how to achieve them, and create case-specific integrated missions to meet them. The resulting modes of integration are likely to be highly imperfect, based more on tactical convenience than strategic vision. But they might at least be politically credible. Yet even achieving this level of imperfect integration would require governments to lay out more focused mandates than they have over the past decade. It requires a degree of optimism to believe that they will do so in the near future.

Sadly, the crises facing peacekeeping may need to get worse before the Security Council can agree on how to resolve them. Just as it required the disasters of the mid-1990s to pave the way for the Brahimi report, the current level of strain may have to peak before serious discussions can be held on what the next generation of missions will look like. If Darfur has demonstrated the weakness of the UN system, there may yet be worse ahead.

NOTES

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