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‘Pragmatic Peacekeeping’ in Practice: Exit Liberal Peacekeeping, Enter UN Support Missions?

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ABSTRACT

Global politics impact on UN peacekeeping and four trends are worth noting. UN peacekeeping is being downscaled, there is less emphasis on human rights, more multilateral support to use UN peacekeeping in situations of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency, and an increasing frequency of support to parallel regional and ad hoc coalitions. Pragmatic peacekeeping in practice comprise these four trends and will entail increasing support to regional and ad hoc coalitions, in the form of a new category of UN Support Missions. The article outlines key financial, legal, operational and accountability issues that emerge with UN Support Missions.

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Introduction

For close to a decade, the UN has been under the double pressure of a high number of fatalities and a pressure from member states to cut costs, with a contraction of civilian staff of 45 per cent since 2010 (Coleman 2021), particularly from the United States who capped US contributions to the assessed budget at 25 per cent under the Trump administration (Council on Foreign Relations). Since 2013, there has not been launched a large new UN peacekeeping mission, but large missions have been closed in Côte d’Ivoire, Darfur, Haiti, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Day 2020).¹ On the African continent four large missions remain – in the Central African Republic (CAR, MINUSCA), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, MONUSCO), Mali (MINUSMA) and South Sudan (UNMISS). These are also under pressure to cut costs and prepare their exits (Coleman 2020; Day 2020).

A notable trend over the last decade or so is the increasing frequency of parallel deployments and closer collaboration between peacekeeping and ‘coalitions of the willing’, particularly involving peace enforcement and counter-terrorism missions (Novoseloff and Sharland 2019; Karlsrud 2017; Hunt 2017; Nel 2020). Regional and ad hoc coalitions have been included in the missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) and South Sudan (UNMISS). The Force Intervention Brigade in MONUSCO was a force composed of troops from Malawi, South Africa and Tanzania, with an explicit mandate to carry out offensive operations to ‘neutralize and disarm’ rebel groups in the

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east of the DRC (UN 2013b, 7). Similarly, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has also had a mandate to support an ongoing peace enforcement mission since 2006. The United Nations Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) is a field support operation led by the United Nations Department of Field Support (DFS). The UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has been tasked to support the ongoing counter-terrorist operations of the Group of Five Sahel Joint Force (G5S-JF).²

This article argues that the UN move to support regional and ad hoc coalitions can be read into larger tectonic shifts in the international system leading to a shift from liberal to ‘pragmatic peacekeeping’ (see e.g. Moe and Stepputat 2018). During the last decade, multilateralism and the liberal world order have come under increasing pressure (Patrick 2015; Mearsheimer 2019). The US and its allies increasingly see UN peacekeeping as a tool of a wider toolbox and want to make it more efficient and fit for purpose. Member states of the UN are in a predicament – should they stick to the core principles of UN peacekeeping – impartiality, consent of the parties and non-use of force except in self-defence – and risk that the organization becomes irrelevant? Other tools, despite their failures and contradictions, may then be more attractive for the US and its allies to deal with low-intensity conflict around the world. These tools include ad hoc counterterrorism coalitions, either including own troops, or given financial, logistical, training and other forms of support.

Concurrently, China is ascending as a global financial and military power. China is increasing its engagement in UN peacekeeping and other multilateral instruments, ‘but is yet to translate its peacekeeping experience into a cohesive set of principles regarding robust peacekeeping’ (Fung 2019, 527). African states largely welcome the peace operations model that China is pushing – ‘African actors and China hold overlapping positions, de-emphasizing liberal democratic peacebuilding principles but supporting robust operations that reinforce host-state stability’ (Coleman and Job 2021, 1463). While the increased engagement of China is welcome among some, there is resistance from France, the United Kingdom and the US on the Security Council. Western powers have long been in the lead on UN peacekeeping. The increasingly assertive position taken by China increases transaction costs in multilateral arenas for the US and other incumbent powers.

These developments can usefully be analysed as the double effects of a ‘Kindleberger trap’. Charles Kindleberger, one of the architects of the Marshall Plan, argued that when the US replaced Britain as the global power in the 1930s, it failed to take the lead in providing global public goods – such as security, financial stability, or freedom of the seas – that were commensurate with its new position as a global hegemon. This contributed significantly, in his view, to the Great Depression and the Second World War. Joseph S. Nye Jr. coined this fatal mistake as the ‘Kindleberger trap’ (Nye 2018). In his analysis of China’s ascendancy to become a global power, Nye worries that China will make a similar mistake and not contribute enough to safe-guard the international order, and may become a ‘disruptive free rider that pushes the world into a Kindleberger Trap’ (Nye 2018).

This article considers UN peacekeeping to be one of these global public goods, with a liberal prefix, and although it was not provided for in the UN Charter, it has developed into a central tool to maintain international peace and security (see e.g. Karlsrud 2018). So far, China’s engagement with the liberal constructs of global governance created during the US’ reign is mixed. On the one hand, China seems to choose an engagement strategy rather than rejecting established institutions, strengthening its position within existing

multilateral organizations, and advocating for the strengthening of the multilateral system (Howard 2021, see also Paris, this issue).³ China has ramped up its engagement with UN peacekeeping over the last two decades, and increasingly, its engagement is also matched with clear policy stances on thematic issues. For example, China is putting increasing pressure on the human rights component of UN peacekeeping, in terms of preventing human rights language in mandates and other UN documents as well as seeking to curb human rights positions within UN peacekeeping (Zürcher 2020). What we are witnessing may thus be a variation of the Kindleberger trap, where China is contributing to the continued provision of global public goods but stripping them of the liberal values that have marked the unipolar period from the end of the Cold War until today.

In reflecting on all of these linked trends and drawing from examples of UN support to regional peace operations and ad hoc coalitions, as a heuristic device I propose a new type of UN peace operations – *UN Support Missions*.⁴ UNSMs would enable member states to draw upon and sustain the significant investments made in the well-developed UN peace operations support system and use this system to support regional peace operations and ad hoc coalitions in instances where counter-terror and counter-insurgency operations are needed. This would combine the interests of, e.g. China,⁵ France and the USA, as well as host states – more use of force, less focus on human rights, more multi-lateral support to counter-terrorism, and using financing to engage in low-intensity conflicts at a minimum of costs. However, the impact on UN peacekeeping operations, and on the UN's roles as a provider of humanitarian aid and an impartial mediator of conflicts is likely to be detrimental.

The article draws on a review of policy and academic literature and is informed by more than 30 background interviews conducted during field work in Addis Ababa, Bamako, N'Djamena and New York.⁶ This article unfolds in three further sections. The first section examines the relationship between power shifts in global politics and the development of the peacekeeping tool in the international peace and security toolbox. The second section revisits the example of the UN Support Office to Somalia before zooming in on the discussions around MINUSMA and alternatives for support to the G5 Sahel Force. I then move on to outline the key financial, legal, operational and accountability issues that have to be dealt with to establish UN Support Missions as a separate and new category of UN peace operations. The final section reflects and sums up.

The Kindleberger trap and tectonic shifts in global governance

China is rising as a contender to the US' hegemonic position in global politics. When the US replaced Britain as the global power in the 1930s, it failed to provide the global public goods that a hegemon should produce to safeguard global governance and its own interests. The failure of the US to produce these global goods during the 1930s was the cause of the Great Depression and the Second World War, according to Charles Kindleberger, one of the architects of the Marshall Plan. Joseph S. Nye Jr. coined this fatal mistake as the 'Kindleberger trap' (Nye 2018).

For Nye, the current question is whether China is ready to shoulder the responsibility to be a lead provider of global public goods as it is increasing its power. Following such a view, the current transition from unipolarity to multipolarity leads to an underproduction

of global public goods, of a distinct liberal kind. However, the current concern of Western powers is not an underproduction of global public goods by China, but rather that China and other states increasingly are taking an active position in multilateral institutions, increasing transaction costs for Western powers. Some point to rising powers as an explanation for the increase in ad hoc initiatives and low-cost institutions (Abbott and Faude 2021).

Faced with increasing transaction costs in existing multilateral institutions, to some degree caused by the entry of new states and increasing powers of states like China and India, incumbent powers like the USA are instead developing new shorter-term and more effective instruments to deal with global governance issues (Hale and Held 2017; Patrick 2015). The flipside of this development is a potential underproduction of liberal global public goods through the existing multilateral system, partially compensated by an increased production of global public goods through ad hoc initiatives and low-cost institutions, but not necessarily with a liberal predisposition.

UN peacekeeping and global politics

Since its conception after WWII, the development of UN peacekeeping has roughly reflected changes in global politics. Reform of peacekeeping has been a constant, and UN peacekeeping has over time shown itself to be an adaptive and flexible tool, from the early engagements in the Middle East, to robust engagement in the Congos in the 1960s, to multidimensional missions with a core mandate to protect civilians, developing since the deployment of UNAMSIL to Sierra Leone in 1999.

With the exception of the robust UN peacekeeping mission in the Congos (The United Nations Operation in the Congo 1960–64), UN peacekeeping operations during the cold war were primarily deployed as an impartial interpositionary force to monitor ceasefires and peace agreements in state-state conflicts. Following the end of the cold war, in the liberal moment dubbed the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 1989), UN peacekeeping rapidly expanded in number and scope to deal with internal conflicts, aiding peace – and statebuilding, framed in the liberal paradigm (Paris 2004; Osland and Peter 2021). Multidimensional peacekeeping operations were developed to provide assistance to elections, security sector reform, judicial reform and so forth. Now the tectonic plates of the international system are again shifting.

The US has put significant pressure on UN peace operations during the last five years, and four large missions have been closed.⁷ MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS are also under pressure to cut costs.⁸ Consequently, since 2015, the total budget for UN peacekeeping is down from \$8.5 to \$6.6 billion, a cut of 23 per cent (UN 2015b). In the same period, civilian staff has been cut by 36 per cent, and a total of 45 per cent if counting back to 2010 (Coleman 2021). Further reductions and exits are also likely – as Day (2020, 29) notes, ‘we may have entered an era of much-reduced emphasis on peacekeeping and a growing reliance on SPMs [Special Political Missions] and UNCTs [United Nations Country Teams]’. De Coning notes that the significant cuts will lead to a path dependency that will be difficult to turn around for UN peace operations – ‘even if the new Biden administration reverses these policies, it would take the UN years to recover from the consequences of this loss of peacekeeping capacity’ (de Coning 2021).

China is increasing its economic power. It is also taking a more active position at international organizations. Rising powers like China and India have been frustrated with their

influence on operational and policy decisions at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) as their voting power have not kept pace with the rapid increase of the size of their economies.

Similarly to its engagement in other policy domains, China has been increasingly supportive of UN peacekeeping, starting with a selective engagement in the 1990s (Yin 2017), and then gradually not only providing troops to traditional peacekeeping operations, but also multidimensional peacekeeping operations with a robust mandate (Yin 2017). China's previous hostility to intrusive interventions was replaced with a division between 'good' and 'bad' interventions, with UN peacekeeping operations in the former category. Notwithstanding, the support of UN peacekeeping operations is matched with policy positions that align with long-standing positions of China on sovereignty, political stability and state-led economic development, human rights is seen as a domestic issue (Kuo 2019). Consequently, China has been seeking to limit or prevent human rights language in UN Security Council mandates, and has been actively trying to cut human rights positions within UN peacekeeping (Zürcher 2020; Charbonneau 2017; Harju 2019; Paddon Rhoads 2019; Hirschmann 2019; Katayanagi 2016). China is also wary of the robust turn of UN peace operations (Zürcher 2020). As Howard succinctly states – 'China's rise poses challenges to contemporary notions of peacekeeping as a tool for furthering human rights and democratic norms' (Howard 2021, 212).

Finally, UN peace operations are also under pressure from within. The UN Secretary-General has 'frequently signalled doubts about the effectiveness' of large-scale peace operations, and has 'called for the UN to provide more funding to AU and other African stabilisation operations' (Gowan 2021). A closer look at the Sahel, and the role that UN peace operations are playing there, is useful when trying to understand how these trends may impact on the future course of UN peace operations.

Counterterrorism and UN peace operations in the Sahel

While the 2000s were marked by large-scale interventions by Western states in Afghanistan and Iraq, there was a notable shift in strategy in the 2010s, replacing large-scale stabilization and statebuilding interventions with targeted counter-terrorism operations (Karlsrud and Osland 2016; Karlsrud 2019). As Western states have gradually ended their large-scale interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, they have turned to more limited deployments and support to counter-terrorism operations across the Middle East and Africa. Concurrently, there has been a pressure to cut costs. From these converging trends, United Nations peace operations crystallize as a possible tool to manage low-intensity conflicts in these theatres (Karlsrud 2020).

In 2013 the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was the first UN peacekeeping operation that was deployed to a conflict alongside an ongoing counterterrorism operation (Artinano et al. 2014) – the French *Serval* operation, later transitioned into *Barkhane* (Ministère des Armées 2021). Mali and the subregion have since seen a flurry of counter-terrorism and countering and preventing violent extremism (C/PVE) initiatives and can be considered a laboratory for the evolving relationship between UN peace operations and counter-terrorism.

The security experiments in Mali have so far been unsuccessful. For good reasons, jihadist groups have multiplied and expanded their reach. They have often been able to

provide the modicum of protection, security, justice, and basic welfare that national and local authorities repeatedly have failed to offer (Rupesinghe and Bøås 2019). While the initial conflict started in northern Mali, armed attacks and intercommunal conflict have in recent years moved to the centre and western regions (Locherer 2021). Northern Burkina Faso and western Niger have also seen a dramatic deterioration of security and vulnerable populations at risk in the subregion are at record levels. Ostensibly trying to fight terrorists, the national armed forces and militias of all the three countries have perpetrated repeated grave human rights violations (Human Rights Watch 2021), killing more civilians and suspected criminals than the jihadist groups they are supposed to protect civilians from (The People's Coalition for the Sahel 2021). Internally displaced persons (IDPs) levels have surpassed the levels reached under the crisis in 2012 (IDMC 2021), and although initially starting in the north, the conflict has moved south in several stages. First to the centre region, and moving west in 2020 and 2021.

Mali has been further destabilized by several coups over the last years, and new rulers have reached out to new actors to get support in their fight against terrorism. In 2021, the junta ruling Mali after the 24 May coup in 2021 also engaged in talks with the Russian Wagner Group to protect high-ranking Malian official and train Malian troops (Rono 2021). The Wagner Group deployed to Mali in late 2021 and have since been involved in numerous attacks resulting in more than 500 civilian casualties (Serwat et al. 2022).

Support to counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations present obvious challenges to UN peacekeeping operations, that at least in principle should operate according to the three core principles of peacekeeping – impartiality, consent of the main parties, and non-use of force except in self-defence (Nel 2020). These are nearly impossible to maintain in many cases where the peacekeeping operation is perceived as an active party (Hunt 2017; Karlsrud 2019; Laurence 2019). Experience from MINUSMA has shown that UN peace operations and counter-terrorism is an uneasy match (Attree and Street 2018). MINUSMA draws more than half of its forces from countries in the region, most of them immediate neighbours (Albrecht and Cold-Ravnkilde 2020). In response to the criticism that MINUSMA is being drawn into a counter-terrorism operation, the Secretary-General has strongly recommended that member states establish a separate UN support office to support the G5S-JF, along the lines of UNSOA in Somalia (UN 2020a). This would at least create some distance between MINUSMA and the G5S-JF, although local populations likely would not notice the difference (de Coning and Karlsrud 2021).

Accordingly, MINUSMA has since 2017 been tasked to support the G5S-JF with fuel, field rations, engineering support and casualty evacuation (UN 2017a). While initially presented as a temporary measure, MINUSMA's support has increased since 2017. G5S-JF is an ongoing counter-terrorism operation, composed of troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The Secretary-General has stated that '[u]nder no circumstances does the United Nations deliver life support supplies to combat areas' (UN 2020a, 11–12). MINUSMA only has a mandate to operate in Mali, but the Joint Force operated across all the five countries until Mali's withdrawal, effective from 30 June 2022 (africanews 2022). The support from the UN is premised on the implementation and monitoring of a human rights compliance framework. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides support for the implementation of the framework (OHCHR 2021).

A UN support office to the G5S joint force?

Considering the challenges that MINUSMA is facing when being asked to provide support to the G5S-JF, the UN Secretary-General has since 2017 repeatedly proposed that the UN Security Council mandates a separate support office (UN 2021b, 2021c), financed by assessed contributions, voluntary contributions or a combination of the two.

A UN support office to the G5S-JF would ease the logistical burden on MINUSMA but repercussions on the UN's ability to be an impartial actor will linger on. It is unlikely that local populations will differentiate between MINUSMA and the support office, strengthening the view that the UN is part of the conflict, in Mali and in the neighbouring countries where the G5 Sahel operates. This will continue to have a very negative impact on the mediation and humanitarian work that various parts of the UN, including MINUSMA, is doing in Mali and the subregion, making the UN a continued target of terrorist attacks.

African states are continuing to press for African solutions to African problems. The African Union, Mali and its neighbours have repeatedly advocated for a counterterrorist mandate for MINUSMA (see e.g. Weiss and Welz 2014; AU 2015), but support from other countries on the UN Security Council has been limited. The second best solution would be a UN support office for the G5S Joint Force, as this would also give access to UN assessed contributions. Russia and China has both been supportive of providing support to the G5S Joint Force in one form or another. In a debate on the G5S Joint Force in November 2022, Russia said that 'international assistance should be based on the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and the principle of "African challenges, African solutions"' (UN 2022b). In the same debate, China called for a 'serious study of the Secretary-General's proposal for sustained funding for the Joint Force, including through assessed contributions' (UN 2022b). As Coleman and Job (2021, 1468) succinctly argues – 'African actors embrace robust protection, stabilization and counterterrorism activities, which China is willing to support within a "developmental peace" framework, as long as state sovereignty is respected – priorities many African actors share'.

UN support missions⁹

As discussed earlier in this article, innovation and change are some of the hallmarks of UN peace operations. The creation of the UN Support Office for the African Union Mission in Somalia (UNSOA) is testimony to this, and is a possible example to build upon for possible future support to non-UN missions. It was established to support the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), funded by assessed contributions. In 2015 it was replaced by the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS). UNSOA/UNSOS has been controversial, as it was mandated to support an AU warfighting mission, and also moved the UN closer to fund African Union operations from the UN assessed contributions budget. With regards to UNSOS, the USA has made it clear that it is reluctant that the AMISOM support model is an exception that should not be repeated (de Coning and Karlsruud 2021), with particular reference to the assessed contributions financing model. Other states such as Norway, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, have however been supportive of looking at the UNSOS model, arguing that one should 'build on what exists, propose holistic improvements and draw inspiration from other contexts including the United Nations – African Union partnership in Somalia' (UN 2022b).

Since 2017, the UN Secretary-General has repeatedly recommended that the UN Security Council establishes a separate UN support office for the G5S Joint Force (see e.g. UN 2021b, 2021c). If a support office is repeated in Mali, a new category of UN peace operations may be solidifying in shape and form – *UN support offices to regional and ad hoc counterterrorism operations*. Such a development would enable the organization to be responsive and nimble to member states’ needs but betray the ideals that the organization rests on. Developed to support large multidimensional peace operations in vastly different theatres around the world, the UN has developed a niche capacity to provide logistical and bureaucratic support to complex operations. The UN can also confer much needed legitimacy to counter-terrorism operations conducted by fledgling governments. A future scenario, translating pragmatic peacekeeping into practice, may then be UN support missions operating in support of and alongside regional and ad hoc counterterrorism operations, drawing upon the logistical and bureaucratic support system of the UN, but without the need to adhere to UN peacekeeping principles of impartiality, consent and non-use of force.

Such operations would likely continue to be conducted by the UN Department of Operational Support, who currently is backstopping UNSOS in Somalia. This would require a new set of rules, regulations and organizational culture to enable the UN to provide the support that counter-terrorism operations need. As Paul Williams have noted, ‘UNSOA was rooted in an organization that was prepared to do no more than robust forms of peacekeeping but had to support an AU mission that was fighting a war’ (Williams 2017). But what would such operations be likely to entail?

In financial terms, these missions would be funded with a combination of 75 per cent UN assessed contributions and 25 per cent by African states (AU 2015).¹⁰ As already mentioned, possible support for financing such missions could be found with China and Russia, African member states, and also some Western member states like Norway. The US has long been opposed to use assessed contributions to fund non-UN missions, but according to Richard Gowan, this could change:

Geopolitical dynamics in the wake of the Ukraine war may force even the Council’s more sceptical members to adjust their positions on the issue. [...] An AU Assembly decision clearly outlining the member states’ commitment to cover their share of the split at the AU summit in February 2023, for instance, could create momentum toward a Council resolution and assure U.S. and British diplomats that the AU will pay its share. (Gowan 2022)

Second, the legal protection that UN peace operations enjoy will not be transferrable to UN Support Missions. Attacks on UN *peacekeeping* operations are criminalized under Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC 1998, 5). However, if the UN peace operation is a *peace enforcement* operation, it would lose its legal protection and become legitimate targets under international humanitarian law (IHL) (UN 1994). Such operations would ‘lose their immunity lose their protection against direct attack at least until they end their participation in the armed hostilities and possibly, as the ICRC has argued, until the end of the conflict itself’ (Khalil 2018).¹¹ This is already probably the case for UNSOS and MINUSMA, and would be amplified with the establishment of a separate support office to the G5S Joint Force. The provision of support to military forces conducting offensive operations within their own borders would also require further legal unpacking.

Third, support to counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations would involve combat logistics which necessitates a higher acceptance of risks for the UN support office and its logistical partners. Commercial transport providers and/or UN troop contributing countries operating in countries with long supply lines in dangerous territories may have to accept even higher levels of risks than what they are exposed to today.

Fourth, the UN would impose accountability mechanisms such as a human rights due diligence policy and a conduct and discipline policy with corresponding monitoring mechanisms (UN 2013a). UNSOS has a Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell (CCTARC), and the G5S-JF has set up a Civilian Casualties Identification, Tracking and Analysis Cell (MISAD) but its effectiveness is yet to be documented (UN 2021d). The OHCHR also has a project providing monitoring and support to the G5S-JF (OHCHR 2021).

The financial, legal, operational and accountability issues described here would require changes to UN rules and regulations that would require General Assembly approval. Such an approval would formally amount to the establishment of a separate category of UN Support Missions, mandated to operate in support of national and/or sub-regional counterterrorism coalitions and classified as peace enforcement operations.

Conclusions

Ongoing shifts in global politics are likely to impact on UN peace operations, as similar shifts have done in the past (see e.g. Paris 2023, this issue). The present shift towards pragmatic peacekeeping is currently resulting in a ‘strong downward pressure on peacekeeping’ (Day 2020, 29), increased prevalence of and support to regional and ad hoc coalitions such as the G5S-JF (Reykers et al. 2023), and increasing pressure on the UN to support such coalitions (see e.g. de Coning 2021). This corresponds to the two first trends identified in the introduction to this special issue, namely a scaling down of operations and the inclusion of new tasks for UN peacekeeping, including stabilization and counterterrorism, under the umbrella of UN ‘peace operations’. The editors also pointed to increased disagreement among the member states, including the great powers, on the nature, role and form of peacekeeping operations. The findings of this article would support such an argument to a certain degree, but also shows that there is an increasing alignment among powerful states such as China, France, Russia and the US to mandate UN peace operations to deploy to places like Mali, where there was and is an ongoing counterterrorism operation, and also to consider increased support from the UN to regional and ad hoc coalitions.

While large multidimensional peacekeeping missions is on a downward path, the UN has a very well developed logistical and bureaucratic support system and can confer much needed legitimacy to international stabilization and counter-terrorism interventions in support of fledgling governments. While the US has been sceptical of providing support to counter-terrorism operations through UN assessed contributions, the bureaucratic expertise and physical infrastructure of the UN system of providing support to complex operations in difficult places is unmatched, and can be a tempting tool to support regional and ad hoc coalitions with.

The transition from unipolarity to multipolarity and its consequences for multilateral organizations are yet difficult to discern. This article argues that we are witnessing a new form of a Kindleberger trap, where UN peace operations are maintained to the

degree that they are responsive to the combined needs of incumbent and new powers, but perhaps with less reverence of the ideals that the UN is founded upon. There is a confluence of interests in the wish to regulate low-intensity conflicts at minimum costs. The UN presents itself as a useful tool that, with some modifications, can continue to be used for international security, in the shape of support to counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations. However, from a liberal internationalism point of view, the dangers are clear – liberal internationalism in the form of human rights and democratization is slowly being dispelled with (see also Buitelaar 2023, this issue). This results in a particular form of the Kindleberger trap – the underproduction of *liberal* global public goods.

Some argue that peacekeeping is a flexible and nimble tool that can be reformed to deal with new challenges in new configurations. Conversely, it could also be argued that in an increasingly post-liberal world UN peacekeeping may be too much of a liberal construct with a success story over the last two decades premised on meddling in internal affairs. With the closing of several missions and constant pressure from states to either downsize the large missions or mandate them to take on stabilization and peace enforcement tasks in cooperation with sub-regional ad hoc coalitions, UN peacekeeping may be forced to leave its principles behind to continue its existence. A future scenario is then UN Support Missions operating in support of and alongside ad hoc coalitions, drawing upon the logistical and bureaucratic support system of the UN, but without the need to adhere to UN peacekeeping principles of impartiality, consent and non-use of force.

In his speech launching *Action for Peacekeeping*, UN Secretary-General António Guterres maintained that ‘peacekeeping operation is not an army, or a counter-terrorist force, or a humanitarian agency. It is a tool to create the space for a nationally-owned political solution’ (2018). Reminding member states about these basic principles, the Secretary-General is undertaking a Sisyphean, but necessary task. However, there is strong interest to have a tool in the multilateral toolbox that can be tasked to manage low-intensity conflicts in states of low to medium strategic interest of key powers. There is thus a distinct possibility of the creation of a new type of peace operations – UN Support Missions. These would be led by the UN Department of Operational Support and would require the UN General Assembly to provide a separate set of rules and regulations.

The UN peace operations landscape will thus be divided into three categories. UN peace operations would be focused on traditional and long running conflicts and will in the long run become less multi-dimensional, shedding some of the intrusive tasks adopted under the liberal ascendancy, such as civilian experts covering a diverse set of substantive tasks, including protection of civilians, gender, sexual and gender based violence and human rights. UN Special Political Missions will continue to operate where transitions already have been undertaken, with more situations to follow over the next years. UN Support Missions will be established to support regional and ad hoc coalitions in situations where there is low appetite in the Council to give the UN a mandate for more intrusive liberal tasks, but where there is a strong need for international support.

Notes

1. United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI); African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), joint mission with the African Union; United Nations

- Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH); United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL); United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).
2. The Group of Five Sahel consists of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. Mali has since withdrawn from the G5S, but MINUSMA has continued to provide support in terms of life consumables to the other four countries (see e.g. UN 2022a).
 3. E.g. arranging a high-level briefing in May 2021 at the UN Security Council (UN 2021a).
 4. I first developed the idea of UN Support Missions and presented it at the workshop ‘An Informal, Online Discussion on the Future of UN Peacekeeping’ arranged by the International Peace Institute on 7 May 2020 (notes on file with the author). The report from the workshop further developed an alternative version of this idea, under the label UN Operational Support to Counter-Terrorism Operations (Dahir, Sarfati, and Sherman 2020, 3–4).
 5. Fung argues that China ‘was receptive to MINUSMA’s implied counterterrorism mandate’ (2019, 527).
 6. Background interviews were conducted in Bamako in 2017, Addis Ababa in 2017 and 2022, N’Djamena in 2022 and New York in 2018. Remote interviews were conducted with two interlocutors during Covid-19 in 2021 (Bamako and New York).
 7. This has been paralleled with an increasing focus on transitions and handover of tasks from UN peace operations to the rest of the UN system, see e.g. Day (2020).
 8. At the end of 2022, MONUSCO was operational in the Ituri, North and South Kivu provinces, in addition to the headquarter in Kinshasa after it withdrew from the Kasai and Kasai Central regions in 2021 and from the Tanganyika province in 2022.
 9. This section draws on a policy brief co-authored with Cedric de Coning and published by the International Peace Institute’s Global Observatory (de Coning and Karlsrud 2021).
 10. There has been some uncertainty on whether the African Union would be able to rally member states to provide funds, and whether contributions also could be made in kind. The AU Peace Fund stood at about \$321 million in August 2022, but had not been used in any significant degree (Amani Africa 2022).
 11. Mona A. Khalil previously served as head of the legal team supporting UN peacekeeping operations in the office of the UN Office of the Legal Counsel (2010–5).

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