



Challenges “Considerations” Study A Review of Its Implementation and Impact for Mission Leadership

Major General (Retd.) Robert Gordon, Senior Adviser, Challenges Forum

The Partnership of the International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations (henceforth the Challenges Forum) worked throughout 2009 and 2010 in developing and writing a study on the theme “Considerations for Mission Leadership in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations”. Eventually published in December 2010, its development was the work of a partnership between the Challenges Partners and the Secretariat of the United Nations. This partnership was reinforced by commentary and review by over 20 senior peacekeeping practitioners and mission leaders. In his Foreword to the Study, the then Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Alan Le Roy, said: “I am grateful for the intention of the Challenges Partners to make Considerations a living document, which will be reviewed and updated on regular intervals in the coming years, so that it may *continue to serve as a valuable tool to mission leaders and all other staff serving in peacekeeping operations around the world*” (Author’s italics). One year later, it is timely for the Partners to review its implementation and impact, with a view to identifying further needed work.

The New Environment

Since the inception of the Considerations¹ project, following the publication of the UN Principles and Guidelines in 2008², the global context for peacekeeping has changed significantly. Foremost is the impact of the global financial crisis, which has put a resource pressure on peacekeeping like never before. The days of carrying on as normal, but with an increasingly bigger budget, have gone. The principal financing member states for UN peacekeeping are those most affected by the financial crisis, which has imposed constraints upon all public spending. Peacekeeping will not be an exception to this. The UN is now required to do more with less. Efficiency, cost effectiveness and rigor in driving down costs are all now essential requirements for mission leadership. This is unfamiliar territory for many of them.

At the same time the consensus for peacekeeping looks uncertain. At the level of grand strategy, the partnership between the finance contributing countries and troop

¹ For simplicity, from now on the full name of the Study will be reduced to Considerations”.

² Also known as the Capstone Doctrine. Challenges Partners, under Challenges’ auspices, were instrumental in hosting and managing seven of the eight international workshops in 2006-2007, used by DPKO to help develop and seek international involvement, contribution and buy-in for the Principles and Guidelines document.

contributing countries is fragile. Efforts to get better value in peacekeeping from a stronger focus on quality rather than quantity are bumping against the issue of reimbursement costs and their needed review³. In this atmosphere, initiatives to drive a more robust and capable peacekeeping posture are constrained. Political divisions within the Security Council have compounded these difficulties. The challenges of Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Syria and Palestine have been too much for the unity of the Council, and the UN's peace and security structures look fractured and irresolute. Meanwhile, at the operational level, it is evident in a number of missions that the host nation's consent for the presence of the peacekeeping mission is eroding. Mission leadership has to deal with this issue and the transition to something other than peacekeeping that is required. But there is little appetite amongst donors to write blank cheques for development without measurable progress in governance and the rule of law, and so difficult decisions have to be made at the operational level in an area where the UN still lacks expertise and capacity.

In addition to these significant pressures on senior mission leadership, it is arguable that the very paradigm of conflict is changing and that the UN's peace and security apparatus has yet to catch up. Just as the nature of conflict, which involved the UN, changed in the 1990s from inter-state to intra-state conflict (requiring a major conceptual and operational re-think of peacekeeping leading to multi-dimensional peacekeeping⁴) so there is evidence that it is changing again. Much of present day conflict, in areas where international peace operations are deployed, is driven by criminal not political activity. From Afghanistan to Somalia, through the DRC, Darfur and South Sudan, to parts of West Africa, and Haiti, the driver for conflict and instability is most often organized criminal violence in pursuit of and in competition for economic rents.⁵ This violence and conflict thrives in an environment where there are weak institutions, poor governance and the absence of the rule of law. UN peacekeeping is struggling to manage this new paradigm of violence with conceptual and physical mechanisms still trying to make the change from traditional to multi-dimensional peacekeeping.

All this serves to show that the context for UN peacekeeping has moved on, and that the pressure on mission leadership has increased. Considerations was an attempt by the Challenges Partnership to ease some of this pressure by identifying, in a structured way, the variety of challenges faced by senior leadership within a mission, using the framework of the core functions of peacekeeping. The Partnership recognized that contemporary peacekeeping existed in an uncertain, complex, ambiguous and dynamic world and that any assistance they could give to the Mission Leadership team in dealing with this world would be beneficial. Clearly, the need for good leadership has not changed. Indeed it is the one constant in a changing context for peacekeeping. But is the mere calling for good leadership enough, or do we need to do more to help develop it?

³ UN troop reimbursement costs were reviewed in 1992, with an ad hoc increase in 2002, and then again in 2011. Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping 2011.

⁴ See *UN Peacekeeping Principles and Guidelines* 2008: Chapter 2

⁵ See World Bank's *World Development Report* (WDR) 2011

Mission Leadership

It was observed by an Under-Secretary-General⁶ that the UN still tended to throw its leaders into the deep end of the pool without really knowing whether they could swim or not. This both recognizes the difficulties of ‘swimming’ in contemporary missions and the risks inherent in the selection and deployment of senior leaders from Member States. To meet its objectives of fairness, universality and legitimacy, the UN must recruit its senior leaders (political, developmental, and security) from the spectrum of its contributing member states. Some leaders are a known quantity and have learned their trade on earlier missions. Many are new to the UN, and while being recommended as senior leaders by their own member states, they have not necessarily conceptualized or experienced the step change in complexity between senior leadership in a national context and senior leadership within UN peacekeeping. So they learn to swim on the job; some manage, some do not.

To help support the recruitment and selection of appropriate senior mission leaders (and by this term it is meant members of the Mission Leadership Team (MLT))⁷, a small team was formed in DFS (called the Senior Leadership Appointments Section (SLAS⁸)) to provide support to succession planning, leadership requirements and vacancy management for senior field appointments, as well as to support the identification and targeted search for potential senior leaders up to their selection for post by the Secretary-General. In this way they act as quasi headhunters for the organization in creating candidate lists for potential consideration. But they also perform a valuable, if necessarily limited, candidate management service in guiding and counseling the candidate senior leader through the UN selection procedures. However, SLAS has no mentoring or coaching function, and while being clear on the requirements for mission senior leadership they have as yet no capacity or mandate to test, exercise or develop it.

Much of this is being addressed following recommendations in the UN’s Civilian Capacity Advisory Group Report of 2011,⁹ which has some strong sections on leadership and accountability. The Secretary-General’s subsequent Report to the General Assembly and Security Council on this undertakes “to strengthen the capacity and accountability of senior United Nations leaders ... to build on existing initiatives to select leaders based on competence, to examine ways to conduct a more rigorous review of the track record of potential leaders, including on gender mainstreaming, ... to use innovative and appropriate methods of assessment... and in terms of improving the capacity of senior leaders to manage the United Nations response to conflict, ...to explore ways in which training for leaders can be improved within existing

⁶ DPKO’s Senior Leaders’ Programme 2011.

⁷ The core members in an integrated mission are the SRSG, Principal DSRSG, DSRSG RC/HC, Force Commander, Police Commissioner, Director of Field Support and Chief of Staff.

⁸ Headed at the P5 level and staffed by only an additional 2 professionals.

⁹ *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict*. Senior Advisory Group Report. Feb 2011.

resources”¹⁰. What has been written for civilian capacity must of course equally apply to military and police senior capacity. Moreover, the growth and development of staff within the UN system itself requires additional focus and resources. Currently there is no attempt in the Secretariat to stream, train and develop the UN’s international peacekeeping staff as future senior leaders.¹¹ But at least there is now a clear agenda and needed focus on senior leadership within peacekeeping, with a strong emphasis that any selection process should be based primarily on competence. It remains to be seen, however, in the context of the current financial constraints, whether sufficient resources will be made available for this training and development.¹²

Currently the only UN-owned mechanism for the education and training of senior leaders is the Senior Mission Leaders’ (SML) course. Run bi-annually, and lasting two weeks, the SML course is a mentored activity which puts about 24 senior leaders from all peacekeeping disciplines through an overview of the complexity of multi-dimensional peacekeeping, with a focus on the responsibilities of the MLT. Course participation is drawn from recommendations forwarded by member states as well as candidates from within the wider UN family. Competition for places on the course is now tight and DPKO/DFS run a selection panel for course participants run by middle managers of the various peacekeeping pillars within the Secretariat, including from SLAS. There is no formal assessment or evaluation of participants on the course, but by their attendance they become known to the UN system and usually, during the course, have the opportunity of a session with a representative from SLAS. None of this represents an evaluation and selection process, despite the participants having been put under a certain amount of exercise pressure and being given the opportunity to show how they work in teams and in a multi-national, multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary environment.¹³ Clearly, there are a number of factors that go into the selection of a senior leader, many of them are political. The common denominator however, must be senior leadership competence. Currently there is no established mechanism for properly assessing or developing this. Indeed, only a limited proportion of newly appointed senior leaders have actually gone through the SML course process.

There is much anecdotal evidence from the past of senior leaders being thrown into their roles with no training or induction for their responsibilities. A common theme from the Reviewers¹⁴ of Considerations was that they wished they had had something like an SML course or the Considerations Study to help them before they took up

¹⁰ Secretary General’s Report: *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict*, 19 August 2011

¹¹ This is in contrast to best practice within most national public sector staff development programmes, such as military or police staff colleges and civilian public service training colleges.

¹² In 2010 DPKO’s training budget was cut by 40%.

¹³ By the end of an SML course the mentors, (all very senior and seasoned peacekeeping practitioners) generally have a good idea of who will make a good mission senior leader and who will not; or to extend the USG’s metaphor, who will swim, who will float and who might sink. While subjective, no formal use is currently made of this knowledge.

¹⁴ See Annex 3 of *Considerations for Mission Leadership in UN Peacekeeping Operations* for a list of these Reviewers.

their positions. Even now, senior mission leaders comment that their preparation for their role involves a frantic tour around the various offices of the Secretariat in New York before being dispatched to the mission¹⁵. This is often compounded by there being no one in position to hand-over to them, as gaps in senior leadership positions, while fewer, are still common.

The Senior Leaders' Programme (SLP) is an attempt to improve this situation. Like the SML, it is run by a very small staff of the Integrated Training Service within DPET/DPKO.¹⁶ It is a five-day programme for appointed senior mission leaders, many of whom have been in mission for some time. As such, it provides a useful and necessary update to new senior leaders on the current thinking and developments concerning peacekeeping within the UN Secretariat. It does not (and cannot as currently configured) provide any personal development or guidance into the leadership challenges likely to be encountered by new leaders within the missions. Separately, the Office of Military Affairs in DPKO is currently developing a 5-8 day mission-specific induction training programme for heads of military components. It is hoped that, once implemented, this might become a model for the training and preparation of other senior leaders.

Overall, up until now, those involved in senior leadership training in the UN have shared a concern that the Organization, caught up in the crises and constraints of the present, have not invested the deserved focus, resources, and senior level engagement on the critical subject of senior mission leadership. The changing environment and the resource pressures on missions might have changed this and given an urgent but welcome focus on leadership. Initiatives such as the Civilian Capacity Report and the Secretary-General's recent commitment to its recommendations, hopefully, have created a new climate of practical engagement on the issue of senior leadership and its selection, training and preparation.

The Impact of "Considerations"

Given that commitments to improve UN selection procedures for senior leadership have now been made at the highest level, Challenges Partners may want to focus on the preparation and training of this leadership. The aim of the Considerations Study was to contribute to conceptual thinking and a wider understanding of the core functions of multidimensional peace operations in order to assist the development of operational level guidance material for DPKO's peacekeeping practitioners in the field. In pursuit of this aim, the Challenges Secretariat has been active in having the Study translated by the Challenges Partners into the six official languages of the UN. At the same time Partners are encouraged to publish and use the Study for the preparation of their own peacekeepers. In this way the Study has become one of the guidance texts available for member states alongside other training texts (such as the UN Principles and Guidelines) and instruction programmes (such as Peacekeeping Operations Training Institute¹⁷). The Challenges Partners are forwarding information

¹⁵ Interviews with Senior Leaders' Programme 2011.

¹⁶ A team of two headed by a P4.

¹⁷ POTI specializes in offering a wide spectrum of distance e-learning courses, free to African member states. Its course "Principles and Guidelines for UN Peacekeeping

to the Challenges Secretariat about ways in which they have been making use of the Considerations Study within their national and regional training environments, the sum of which will be presented in a separate Challenges Paper.

For the UN, the Study is now a pre- and through-course reading text for the SML¹⁸. It is also used by the African Union's equivalent SML on the ground of its similar relevance to AU peacekeeping. In addition, it has been distributed by the Challenges Secretariat to a number of regional senior leadership training courses (such as have been held this year in Nairobi and Addis Ababa). Finally, it is also now being used by UN DPKO's SLP and by UN DFS' Senior Mission Administrative Resource Training Programme (SMART)¹⁹. In all these programmes, the feedback about the utility and helpfulness of Considerations has been very positive. Its structure, using an OIOS-logic model, assists an understanding of the senior leaders' responsibilities for giving planning guidance. Its identification of key activities, and their benchmarks, priorities, risks, challenges and considerations are what senior leaders need to assist their decision-making, without being too prescriptive. In other words it has become a valuable textbook and guide for senior leader training.

In terms of assisting the development of operational guidance, the original intent was to contribute to a new articulation of the Peacekeeping Handbook²⁰. This publication was looking dated when the UN Principles and Guidelines was being written. Its replacement is still an aspiration and no doubt Considerations will play a part in providing some of the guidance material needed. More directly, work in the past year has been going on in areas such as the nexus between peacekeeping and peacebuilding an area linked to the Challenges' Considerations work. The recently published DPKO/DFS Early Peacebuilding Strategy²¹ guidance document has had a close and co-dependent evolution with Considerations, in the helpful way anticipated by the Challenges Partnership when the Considerations project was first conceived.

Next Steps

From this it would seem that Considerations is being used "as a valuable tool to mission leaders and all other staff"²². Nevertheless, its use would be enhanced if every potential mission leader was given a reading pack including Considerations and also if it was included in the body of guidance material available on DPKO's Best Practice intranet web site. To this extent it probably suffers from being a Partners' publication rather than an official publication of the UN Secretariat. Accordingly its use within missions by senior leaders remains informal rather than institutionalized. Those senior leaders keen to learn more about their profession and their

Operations', based on the 'Capstone doctrine' and therefore a valuable text for designate senior leaders, is free to all.

¹⁸ Used in Amman Nov 10, Pretoria May 11 and Madrid Nov 11.

¹⁹ SMART is an annual training programme, split into three one-week modules, for potential senior Field Support personnel. Its focus is field support but Considerations provides a useful planning context for its studies.

²⁰ *Handbook on UN Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations*, 2003.

²¹ *The Contribution of United Nations Peacekeeping to Early Peacebuilding: A DPKO/DFS Strategy for Peacekeepers*, 27 June 11.

²² USG DPKO Foreword to Considerations.

responsibilities will find access to it. But the responsibility is personal. This is consistent with all senior leadership training and career development within the UN to date. The UN Secretariat still does not really “own” and manage its staff (and their training) in a systematic way which treats them as a precious resource upon which the success or failure of a mission and future peacekeeping depends. Rather they are expected to fend for themselves in an extreme articulation of free market forces. They are “thrown into the pool”. Their personal training is therefore their business. To change this culture will take time and some significant management reforms. The Secretariat is aware of this but advocacy amongst the member states must be pursued and battles won in the 5th Committee. It follows that there remains useful work to be done by the Challenges Partnership in championing and helping the preparation and training of senior leadership.

One area of useful development would be exploring the concept of close mentoring of new senior leaders. Effectively this is the temporary provision of a practiced “swimming partner” during those early days of immersion. This would be particularly beneficial during any customized training/induction programme. New senior leaders do not know what questions to ask and what is important. Someone to advise and guide them through this process is needed. Mentors would be experienced but retired practitioners (such as the Reviewers of Considerations) who understand the challenges of peacekeeping and can help guide the senior mission leader during his/her preparation, in the early days of deployment and thereafter whenever requested. There is no such system yet institutionalized within the UN, although it is best practice in other similar complex organizations.²³

A further clear direction for Partners was the proposal discussed by the Partners in New York in February 2011: “Considerations for Mission Leadership in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations – Experiences in the Field and Best Practices for the Future.”²⁴ This recommends looking at specific missions as companion case studies to the more generic Considerations Study from which to draw lessons and best practice. The case studies would cover the spectrum of field missions so that senior leaders, having absorbed Considerations, could pick from them those most appropriate to their requirement and guidance needs. This theme will be picked up at the next Partners meeting in Cairo.

At a more general level the Partners need to keep a close focus on the whole issue of senior leadership and the selection, training and preparation of senior leaders. This will require a culture change, both within the Secretariat and the providing member states, as well as a richer dialogue between the two concerning who and what is needed. Member states tend to underestimate the challenges and responsibilities that their nominees will face in the field and could do more to ensure that their less experienced nationals are properly trained and qualified for the complex environment of contemporary missions. Ultimately, unless member states have confidence in the senior leadership of peacekeeping missions they will continue to be reluctant to commit their resources and their people to support them.

²³ NATO has such a mentoring programme for its new senior field commanders.

²⁴ See Challenges Discussion Note on Project Proposal 1 February 2011

In conclusion, the peacekeeping environment has become more challenging since Considerations was first mooted. The onus of delivery is increasingly being put upon strong and effective senior leadership. Recommendations on senior leadership and accountability have been made to the Secretary-General, to which he has committed. Now appropriate attention needs to be paid to the training and preparation of suitably qualified senior leadership within the Secretariat. Member states have an important role in this, both in championing progress and in better understanding the senior leadership requirement. Considerations has gone some way to providing a training and guidance resource for senior leadership. The Partnership will wish to explore what more can be done.