

Protection, Resilience and Empowerment: United Nations Peacekeeping and Violence against Civilians in Contemporary War Zones

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Civilian protection mandates in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations have become increasingly common since 1999. This article suggests that these mandates should be recalibrated to help build resilient local communities and empower civilian populations to have a greater say in their national governance structures. However, while peacekeepers could reasonably give greater emphasis to building local resilience, the empowerment agenda is largely beyond their means. This leaves some UN peacekeeping operations in the perilous position of working to protect civilians at the operational level without addressing some of the key structural conditions that give rise to violence against civilians.

Keywords: protection; United Nations; peacekeeping; resilience; empowerment

Introduction

How to protect civilians in the world's war zones is now a major topic of debate within various international institutions and forums. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies engaged in humanitarian relief and development activities have long debated what 'protection' means and the best ways to achieve it in periods of both war and peace (e.g. Slim and Bonwick, 2005). More recently, UN peacekeepers have also been given explicit mandates to protect civilians from imminent physical violence. Nevertheless, the theory and practice of the 'protection of civilians' (PoC) agenda remains a work in progress with ongoing debates about what PoC means in practice and what training, doctrine and capabilities UN peacekeepers require in order to carry it out. Both the UN Departments of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Field Support (DFS) recognize that PoC involves a range of activities beyond protecting individuals from imminent physical violence. In the field, UN peacekeepers trying to implement these mandates have developed a variety of innovative techniques, especially in contemporary Africa where PoC mandates have been most sorely tested in the Sudans, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) and Côte d'Ivoire (see Holt and Taylor, with Kelly, 2009).

This article suggests that UN peacekeeping operations could usefully recalibrate their PoC strategies to help build resilient local communities and should be deployed in parallel with peacemaking processes designed to empower civilian populations to gain a greater say in their national governance structures.¹ Peacekeepers could enhance local resilience by better supporting local information flows, local preparedness and maintaining communal cohesion; co-ordinating more effectively with other relevant actors, including UN agencies and non-UN actors engaged in alleviating civilian suffering; by refocusing peace-building activities, either

through peacekeepers being used as 'early peace-builders' or via the missions established by the UN Peacebuilding Commission (DPKO/DFS, 2011); and by including benchmarks designed to help strengthen the resilience of local communities in their exit strategies. Nevertheless, in extreme situations even fairly resilient local communities will be unable to overcome the challenges of warfare without external assistance. The UN secretariat and its Member States must therefore ensure that their peacekeepers are ready, willing and able physically to protect civilians in such dire circumstances.

The empowerment agenda, however, is more difficult and largely beyond the means of peacekeeping operations. Empowering civilians is also hugely controversial because it raises difficult questions about the UN's role in promoting democracy and 'good governance'. Nevertheless, civilian empowerment remains one of the best ways to reduce violence against civilians during war and reduce the risk of future wars over the longer term. Consequently, peacekeeping operations should be supported by parallel processes of conflict resolution which actively promote democratic governance structures. Without such peacemaking initiatives, some UN peacekeeping operations will remain in the perilous position of working to protect civilians at the operational level without the means of addressing some of the key structural conditions that give rise to violence against civilians.

Protection of civilians in contemporary UN peacekeeping mandates

Since 1999 the UN Security Council has addressed PoC in armed conflict as a thematic issue and has assigned PoC mandates to 12 UN-led peacekeeping operations in Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan as well as several additional multilateral missions, including some led by the European Union and African Union (for background, see Williams, 2010; Wills, 2009).² These mandates have raised many important conceptual and practical questions including: who needs protection (i.e. who counts as a 'civilian')? When do they need it and from what threats? Who can alleviate those threats? How many foreign peacekeepers will be needed? What capabilities, doctrine, training and rules of engagement do these peacekeepers require? Will such missions require greater levels of resources? And will they entail greater risks for peacekeepers and locals alike? Ultimately, as one analysis asked, is civilian protection 'mission impossible' for UN peacekeeping (Holt and Berkman, 2006)?

In practice, UN 'protection of civilians' mandates have contained various geographical, political and operational caveats (see Table 1). Geographically, the inevitable limits placed on resources for UN peacekeeping operations mean that peacekeepers are usually clustered in a relatively small number of locales in the war zone in question (see Pouligny, 2006, esp. pp. 27–30). The common tendency is thus for desperate civilians to gravitate towards these locales seeking security and for peacekeeping missions to accept such population movements. Politically, PoC is supposed to take place with the consent of the host state authorities (DPKO/DFS, 2008, pp. 31–33; 2010, paras 7–8). Operationally, the civilian protection tasks are limited to those commensurate with the peacekeepers' capabilities.

As of February 2012, eight (out of a total of 14) UN blue helmet missions had some form of explicit civilian protection mandate: UNOCI (under resolution 2000), MONUSCO (under resolution 1925), MINUSTAH (under resolution 1542), UNIFIL (under resolution 1701),

Table 1: Caveats in UN civilian protection mandates

Mission	Country	Dates	'Protect civilians under imminent threat of violence'	'Without prejudice to responsibility of host nation'	'Within capabilities and areas of deployment'	'All means necessary'
UNIFIL	Lebanon	19 March 1978–present	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
UNAMSIL	Sierra Leone	22 Oct. 1999–31 Dec. 2005	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
MONUC then MONUSCO	DR Congo	30 Nov. 1999–present	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
UNMIL	Liberia	19 Sept. 2003–present	Yes	Yes	Yes (partial)	No
UNOCI	Côte d'Ivoire	4 Apr. 2004–present	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
MINUSTAH	Haiti	30 April 2004–present	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
ONUB	Burundi	22 May 2004–1 Jan. 2007	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UNMIS	Sudan	24 Mar. 2004–8 July 2011	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UNAMID	Sudan	31 July 2007–present	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
MINURCAT	Chad and Central African Republic	25 Sept. 2007–31 Dec. 2010	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
UNMISS	South Sudan	8 July 2011–present	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
UNISFA	Abyei Area (Sudan and South Sudan)	27 June 2011–present	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Percentage of mandates with component			100%	67%	100%	58%

Source: Adapted from Holt and Taylor, with Kelly, 2009, p. 45.

UNMIL (under resolution 1509), UNMISS (under resolution 1996), UNAMID (under resolution 1769) and UNISFA (under resolution 1990). Not surprisingly, the issue appears regularly on the Security Council's agenda.³

The UN's approach to PoC has evolved through years of internal consultation between actors within the UN system and its Member States. In recent years the debate has shifted from defining the concept of PoC to a more operational focus on the tools needed to implement protection mandates effectively in the field. For example, although the 2008 UN DPKO and DFS *Principles and Guidelines* document identified civilian protection as a core task of UN peacekeeping it did not elaborate on what protection entailed or how UN peacekeepers might achieve it in practice (DPKO/DFS, 2008). The document noted only that civilian protection required the promotion of international humanitarian law and co-ordination among disparate actors (i.e. the military, police and civilian components of the peacekeeping operation as well as UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs) (DPKO/DFS, 2008, p. 24). The breakthrough came in 2009 when a detailed study commissioned by DPKO and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) highlighted how much work was still required to clarify the PoC agenda (see Holt and Taylor, with Kelly, 2009). In response, in early 2010 DPKO/DFS drafted an operational concept on the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping operations which utilized a three-tier approach. Tier 1 entailed protection by promoting a political process of conflict resolution to end the armed conflict that was a major source of threats to civilians. Indeed, DPKO/DFS concluded that the 'maintenance of peace through an effective peace process is perhaps the single largest contribution a mission can make to protecting civilians' (DPKO/DFS, 2010, para. 18). Tier 2 entailed providing protection from physical violence. This was to take place in four broad phases: assurance and prevention, pre-emption, response and consolidation. Tier 3 entailed establishing a protective environment that enhances the safety and supports the rights of civilians. This was conceptualized as involving the promotion of legal protection (especially international humanitarian law but also relevant human rights and refugee law), the facilitation of humanitarian assistance and advocacy, and support for national institutions (DPKO/DFS, 2010, para. 20). The three tiers were said to be 'mutually accommodating and should be taken forward simultaneously, in accordance with mission mandates and in light of the circumstances on the ground' (DPKO/DFS, 2010, para. 15). The interrelationship of these tiers should be emphasized, not least because research from populations suffering from armed conflict has consistently shown that locals rarely see the utility of separating out what they see as intimately connected issues (see, for example, Baines and Paddon, 2011; Corbett, 2011).

One important area that has not received much critical scrutiny in these UN documents is the extent to which the foundational concept of a 'civilian' is rarely clear-cut. In most contemporary war zones where UN peacekeepers have PoC mandates the lines between 'combatants' and 'non-combatants' are often blurry. Thus while it makes sense in the abstract to base policy on a clear civilian/combatant distinction, life in the field is often much messier. This is why the UN has called for individual missions to conduct empirical assessments in their theatres of operations to determine with more context-specific detail who counts as a 'civilian' for the purposes of the PoC mandate.

In the field missions, therefore, the DPKO/DFS framework is used as a guide to develop 'mission-wide protection strategies' which identify the respective threats to civilians in each peacekeeping theatre and set out the roles and responsibilities of the different components of the peacekeeping operation as well as their interaction with relevant external actors. The UN

Secretariat completed a framework for drafting such mission-wide strategies in early 2011 and, by mid-2012, MONUSCO, UNAMID, UNOCI and UNMISS had developed mission-wide civilian protection strategies as requested in Security Council resolution 1894 (11 November 2009). In 2011, the UN Secretariat also completed a series of protection of civilians training modules and in 2012 it finished the resource and capabilities matrix for implementation of protection mandates in UN peacekeeping operations, a mechanism to help missions match available resources and capabilities with the protection tasks they intend to undertake. A new position of 'Protection of Civilians Coordination Officer' was also created within DPKO (UN Security Council, 2012, p. 14).

At the operational level, PoC mandates have inspired peacekeepers to take on a wide range of military, policing, political and humanitarian tasks and stimulated various conceptual and practical innovations (see for details, Kelly, with Giffen, 2011; Raymond, 2013; Sewall, Raymond and Chin, 2010; Weir, 2010). This involves defining the threat agendas facing local civilians (including how these agendas differ depending on the sex, age, location, livelihood and socio-economic status of individuals), ascertaining which threats can be alleviated by peacekeepers, and then preparing for and conducting the relevant tasks to address those threats (see Giffen, 2010). Gathering accurate and timely information is thus crucial to the effective implementation of PoC mandates (see Williams, 2010, pp. 28–37). Moreover, peacekeeping forces that pay attention to local sources of knowledge consistently develop better relationships with local populations and are often more effective in executing their tasks as a result. In Sudan, for example, a major epicenter of anti-civilian violence in recent years, the approximately 75 monitors comprising the Joint Military Commission (2002–2005) earned the respect and co-operation of many locals in the Nuba Mountains precisely because of their willingness to take the time to get to know local actors and dynamics. The UNMIS peacekeeping mission (2005–2011), on the other hand, developed a poor reputation with the locals in large part because they felt it was 'deeply uninformed about local realities' (Corbett, 2011, pp. 30–31, see also pp. 55–56).

At the tactical level, the rules of engagement for PoC missions have, of course, emphasized that UN personnel must uphold international humanitarian law by requiring them, among other things, not to target civilians intentionally, not to take unnecessary actions that might harm civilians, not to abuse civilians, protect civilians from the effects of combat where possible and provide support to wounded civilians. But it is less clear whether PoC mandates generate more proactive legal obligations for peacekeepers (see Wills, 2009).

In summary, PoC has become increasingly important for UN peacekeepers and has stimulated new thinking and practical innovations in the field. But it has not always produced very successful results. The key policy challenge is to improve on this record. Analysts can play a useful role in illustrating where better analysis can support that goal, which is the focus of the rest of this article.

Resilience and community self-protection

The concept of 'resilience' – the central focus of this special issue – offers a useful way of thinking about how to reduce violence against civilians in contemporary war zones. Specifically, it emphasizes the activities of local communities and the importance of community self-protection mechanisms rather than the actions of foreign peacekeepers. Enhancing the resilience of vulnerable local communities is crucial for two main reasons: first, because empirically most physical protection activities are carried out by local, not foreign, actors and,

second, external policies must chime with local systems of knowledge and networks if they are to be sustainable over the medium and long term.

The first insight is that civilian populations in danger usually take (often quite effective) measures to protect themselves, not least because external peacekeepers are seldom present in large numbers in the eye of an emergency when most of the killing and forced displacement are actually under way (Bonwick, 2006). Typically, international assistance arrives after the peak of the violence. At the beginning of the Darfur emergency in 2003, for example, very few external agencies were present in either Darfur or neighboring Chad and there were no peacekeepers or military observers. It was not until May 2004 – approximately 18 months after the killing and displacement began – that international agencies began arriving in the region in significant numbers and there were no substantial peacekeeping forces until the end of 2004 (Keen, 2008, p. 146). Similarly, a recent study of the Nuba conflict in Sudan concluded that ‘much of the de facto responsibility for providing protection will always remain with the vulnerable civilians themselves’ (Corbett, 2011, p. 9). Another recent study of civilians in Jonglei, South Sudan reached the same conclusion (Harragin, 2011). In the inevitable gap between a crisis erupting and outside help arriving (if it does at all), civilians have to make provision for their own protection by escaping violence, protecting their property and reducing threats.

Modes of local self-protection can be grouped into three broad types: *in situ* self-protection; flight from danger; and armed resistance (Bellamy and Williams, 2009, pp. 20–22). Recent research of local community protection patterns in northern Uganda identified three types of *in situ* strategies, all of which relied on local knowledge systems and networks rather than external assistance: (a) attempts to remain neutral; (b) avoidance; and (c) accommodation of armed actors (Baines and Paddon, 2011). This led Erin Baines and Emily Paddon (2011, p. 232) to conclude that ‘civilian self-protection strategies should be the starting point for all attempts to design protection strategies on the ground’. This is quite right and puts considerable emphasis on how to enhance the resilience of local communities along with their knowledge networks. Naturally, not all attempts at self-protection work, particularly if local communities find themselves on terrain considered strategically important by armed groups. But the practical limitations of local resilience are not a reason to abandon the project.

In contemporary academic and policy literature, resilience is used to denote the capacity of systems, structures or organizations to resist being affected by shocks or disasters and to recover quickly from such events. But resilience also encompasses pre-emptive efforts to anticipate crises and thereby change the nature of risks before they can do real damage (see Coaffee, 2006; 2010). In this vein, Filippa Lentzos and Nikolas Rose have usefully summarized the logic of resilience in the following manner:

A logic of resilience, then, is not merely an attitude of preparedness; to be resilient is not quite to be under protection nor merely to have systems in place to deal with contingencies. Resilience implies a systematic, widespread, organizational, structural and personal strengthening of subjective and material arrangements so as to be better able to anticipate and tolerate disturbances in complex worlds without collapse, to withstand shocks, and to rebuild as necessary. Perhaps the opposite of a Big Brother State, a logic of resilience would aspire to create a subjective and systematic state to enable each and all to live freely and with confidence in a world of potential risks (Lentzos and Rose, 2009, p. 243).

The emphasis on anticipation is crucial when thinking about the risks posed to civilian populations by armed conflict and other forms of organized violence.

But this logic also reveals how, as discussed below, the concept of resilience quickly bleeds into the broader context of national governance, specifically the political context within which local communities find themselves. It also quickly bleeds into issues of international governance and raises interesting questions about the interaction between local communities and external actors, both of whom apparently want to become more resilient. Indeed, as part of his work examining the ways in which the international development industry has adapted its practices to try and keep the problems of the underdeveloped world *in* the underdeveloped world, Mark Duffield has illustrated how Western aid agencies increasingly refer to the notion of 'resilience training' to justify their own policies whereby personnel spend less time living among the local people and acquiring local expertise and more time in securitized bunker installations (see, for example, Duffield, 2007; 2012). Duffield thus sees the attempt to 'sell' the need for resilience to local communities in the developing world as just another dimension of the neoliberal project of global governance designed to control what goes on outside the West.

Rather than trying to uncover the real motives behind the growing calls for resilience, I take seriously the idea that local civilians are amenable to external projects that try and reduce the harm they suffer during war while simultaneously respecting local concerns. To that end, I draw upon three recent and detailed empirical studies of civilian populations caught up in war and one-sided violence in Sudan and northern Uganda which take a more benign view of resilience than Duffield (Baines and Paddon, 2011; Corbett, 2011; Harragin, 2011). Specifically, I draw out three dimensions of policies that can enhance the resilience of vulnerable local communities: supporting local information flows, supporting local preparedness and maintaining communal cohesion.

The first conclusion is that, in war zones, accurate and timely information can often make the difference between life and death. It is therefore crucial for insiders and outsiders alike to disseminate knowledge of the local portfolio of self-protection strategies and awareness of how these strategies are shaped by familial, friendship, community and other networks. Local early warning systems should also be strengthened by increasing opportunities for information exchange, perhaps supplemented by the distribution of alert devices and mobile phones (Baines and Paddon, 2011, p. 242; Corbett, 2011, pp. 25, 27–28; Harragin, 2011, p. 7). The UN peacekeeping operations in both the DR Congo and the Republic of South Sudan have attempted to develop exactly these kinds of mechanisms (MONUC, 2009; UNMISS, 2012).

Preparedness is a second key theme of self-protection, hence preparing communities for violent assault must be part of building resilience. As noted above, part of the agenda will involve thinking about how peacekeepers and other external actors can help restore the functioning of local services and livelihoods (Harragin, 2011, pp. 92–93). This is crucial because in many armed conflicts more civilian fatalities occur because of problems related to malnutrition and disease brought on by the breakdown of services and livelihoods than are caused by direct violence. Investments in local livelihoods also increase the chance that subsequent protection policies will be effective, especially for many locals who often think about protection principally in terms of protecting their livelihoods. But preparedness also involves bracing community livelihoods and services for violence. This can be done through numerous forms of 'planned displacement' tactics, including preparing a flight strategy, keeping ID documents to hand, burying possessions and/or prepositioning important survival

items in areas where they can be retrieved later, and even sleeping with your clothes and shoes on to enable a quick getaway (Baines and Paddon, 2011, pp. 231–232; Corbett, 2011, pp. 24–27, 57–59). Of course, as perpetrators become wise to these tactics, local civilians will have to adapt to keep on circumventing their predators.

Maintaining the cohesion of local networks and systems of authority/decision-making during armed conflict is a third important theme of recent research on self-protection. As one Nuba father of four put it, ‘We survived [from government attacks] because of three things: the mountains, the forests and the unity of the people’ (in Corbett, 2011, p. 22). Justin Corbett’s research on Sudan reinforces the point that communal unity was important not just for the provision of physical needs ‘but also for equally important mental needs relating to sociability, information, belongingness, courage, hope, culture, fun, spirit, dignity, humanity and the will to persevere’ (Corbett, 2011, p. 22).

Thus, unlike the PoC agenda which stresses the important roles that external peacekeepers can play in alleviating civilian suffering in war zones, the fact that external rescue will come late in the day if at all suggests that enhancing indigenous resilience and preparing local communities to adapt and develop tools to recover quickly after a crisis are the best ways to safeguard civilian populations. Key to the entire enterprise is preserving local networks of knowledge and information and sustaining local livelihoods, ideally even if planned displacement becomes necessary. Although most resilience-building must be done before the outbreak of armed conflict (or in its early stages) and hence will occur before the arrival of most UN peacekeepers, once deployed, these insights suggest that UN peacekeepers should work hard to keep civilian populations *in situ* rather than encouraging them to congregate around camps and other operational bases/compounds. In addition, peacekeeping operations must work effectively with actors that can sustain the political economy of the local livelihoods in question. In UN terminology, this will mean integrating such concerns into the so-called ‘early peace-building’ tasks designated to peacekeepers (see DPKO/DFS, 2011).

Empowerment and governance reform

Even resilient communities have their limits. Examining violence against civilians through the lens of empowerment emphasizes the point that communities in territory governed by a strong authoritarian and/or predatory regime are likely to have those limits tested fairly frequently. The concept of empowerment suggests that attempting solely to provide physical protection or build resilient local communities is too conservative because neither approach tackles one of the core structural factors that increases the risk of violence against civilians, namely, autocratic national governance structures (on the strong relationship between democratic governance and the reduced risk of mass atrocities see Harff, 2003). Ultimately, therefore, the best way to prevent violence against civilians over the longer term is to empower civilians and support participatory governance (for example, Gizelis, 2009).

Calls to empower civilians in war zones emerged from two different but related concerns. One perspective sees empowerment as crucial because the key to stopping civilian suffering is to end the war, which can only be achieved with an empowered citizenry that can become active stakeholders in a peace process and hence make peace sustainable. As Vanessa Kent and Angela McIntyre put it with respect to the war in the DR Congo, ‘To achieve this, civilian protection must evolve into *civilian empowerment*. ... the UN must be provided with resources sufficient to undertake a dual approach – protection AND empowerment – that will ensure that peace processes are accountable to the people and not only to violent actors’ (Kent and

McIntyre, 2004, pp. 11–12, emphasis in original). In sum, PoC efforts should go hand in hand with attempts to resolve conflicts and build sustainable peace. Other analysts have rightly concluded that elite bargains (often in foreign hotels) are no substitute for empowered civilian populations and sustained efforts to demilitarize society and its institutions of war (see De Waal, 2002; Lyons, 2005). Women's empowerment is also a crucial part of the process (see Kuehnast, de Jonge Oudraat and Hernes, 2011). In many respects, this agenda converges with those advocating local resilience. Corbett's study of the Nuba in Sudan, for instance, concluded that good governance strengthens self-help and resilience of local communities (Corbett, 2011, p. 45). Consequently, 'The more distant and unaccountable the authorities, the less likely they are to respond to local protection needs' (Corbett, 2011, p. 51).

A second rationale for stressing empowerment stems from a concern about the UN's inability to live up to the lofty goals in PoC mandates, especially when conducted in autocratic states. As the former head of DPKO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, put it:

Tactically, protection of civilians can become a dangerous recommendation if it just puts the mission in a reactive mode, waiting for civilians to come under imminent danger and then taking action. It can set the mission up for failure if it is understood as just the physical protection of civilians, because the mission will never have adequate numbers. Personally, I prefer talking about 'the empowerment of civilians' rather than the protection of civilians, because I think, at the end of the day, if you turn the protection of civilians from an immediate recommendation to a more strategic concept, it is really about the empowerment of civilians (cited in International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations, 2010, p. 105, see also p. 107).

Thus while an emphasis on resilience focuses on building 'strategic national infrastructures' to adapt and prepare for crises, in the context of contemporary war zones such as Sudan and DR Congo, simply building the capacity of existing state institutions risks empowering predatory regimes and elite factions that have captured the state. In several UN peacekeeping theatres, state structures have been a big part of the problem. The local resilience agenda is therefore problematic because it focuses on certain non-state communities without tackling the underlying problem that in some authoritarian states such communities need to be made resilient precisely to defend themselves *from the institutions of their own state*.

This is a governance challenge because no matter how resilient certain local communities are, few of them will be able to withstand a determined onslaught from the violent machinery of functioning state institutions. As Corbett's study of civilians in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan demonstrates, despite their 'remarkable resilience ... without adequate external protection enormous suffering in the face of war is inevitable. Community self protection is not enough and neither are the potential inputs of the humanitarian agencies willing to intervene' (Corbett, 2011, p. 60). In this sense, neither PoC mandates nor community resilience programs will always be sufficient to stop civilian suffering in contemporary war zones – hence the ongoing debate about the pros and cons of conducting humanitarian military interventions (see Williams and Bellamy, 2012).

Ultimately, the political empowerment of civilian populations is the surest route to reduce the occurrence of mass atrocities, including during war. But for the UN, any encroachment upon state sovereignty is a hugely sensitive topic. Moreover, even if governance reforms are integrated into UN peacekeeping mandates this is likely to encourage greater pushback from host regimes worried about losing power and about international interference in their domes-

tic concerns. In extreme cases host regimes might withdraw their consent for the presence of UN peacekeepers, as has recently happened in Chad and Sudan and was threatened in the DR Congo (see Johnstone, 2011). It might also make potential host regimes less willing to grant their consent for future UN peacekeeping operations. This would be counterproductive because for all their limitations, on balance, UN peacekeeping operations generally reduce rather than increase the level of violence against civilians in war-torn states (Kathman, Hultman and Shannon, forthcoming). Ultimately, the governance agenda and civilian empowerment is a job for diplomats and peacemakers who should operate in parallel with peacekeepers. Perhaps the best contribution that peacekeeping operations can make is for their mandates to include benchmarks for exit that help empower local populations within their national governance structures.

Conclusions

The preceding analysis suggests there are different approaches to alleviating violence against civilians in war zones. They focus on the physical protection of civilians, community resilience and citizen empowerment. Each approach poses daunting challenges for UN peacekeepers.

If the declared objective of external actors is to help physically protect civilians in war-torn states, it is not surprising that the solution is thought to lie with the deployment of sufficient numbers of well-trained, well-prepared and committed soldiers/police to defend civilians in peril and/or coerce the perpetrators of anti-civilian violence to cease such activities. If external actors are less optimistic that outsiders can rescue imperiled civilians – and the empirical record of recent wars suggests that most protection is local protection – then it is sensible to focus on building resilient local communities which can adapt to head off crises and recover quickly after they occur. This often means keeping community livelihoods sustainable during war and keeping local civilians *in situ* or, if this is not possible, using planned displacement techniques to maintain their usual livelihoods. These issues should be taken into account when defining PoC mandates and should form a core part of the ‘early peace-building’ agenda for relevant peace operations.

Finally, the concept of empowerment emphasizes that even fairly resilient local communities situated inside states with autocratic regimes (i.e. in a governance context where they are denied a meaningful voice in key political decisions) will not provide a sustainable solution to the problems of violence against civilians. Indeed, even for populations with strong coping mechanisms, life in the peripheral zones of Sudan or the DR Congo can resemble dealing with an almost perpetual crisis. Rather, civilian populations are most likely to avoid wartime violence if they are empowered to participate in the key governance choices that affect them because this will either reduce the number of major crises or give the locals access to more resources should they occur. This raises a host of controversial issues about how UN peacekeeping mandates should relate to politically charged issues about governance, state-building, peace-building and democratization, and how far peacekeepers should be involved in rule of law, security sector and governance reform programs. The policy dilemma is that efforts by peacekeeping operations to ensure regime compliance with certain governance standards may well result in similar regimes withdrawing/refusing consent for the deployment of peacekeepers. In most cases, this empowerment agenda is largely beyond the means of peacekeepers and should be conducted primarily by peacemakers and diplomats.

As currently configured, UN peacekeeping operations are, at best, equipped to deal with only the tip of the iceberg of civilian suffering in war zones. But the tip is not unimportant:

well-trained, well-equipped and committed UN peacekeepers who co-ordinate effectively with other relevant actors and whose PoC mandates are sensitive to local efforts to build community resilience can play important roles in reducing violence against civilians during war. How far benchmarks that genuinely empower local populations can be built into peacekeeping mandates should only be decided in light of context-specific expertise. But UN peacekeeping operations that are not tied to a parallel process of conflict resolution which involves governance reforms will be left in the impossible position of working to protect civilians at the operational level without addressing some of the key structural conditions that give rise to civilian suffering and vulnerability.

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Notes

- 1 I do not address cases of humanitarian military intervention, that is, the use of military force without the consent of the host regime for ostensibly human protection purposes, for example Operation Allied Force over Serbia/Kosovo (1999) and Operation Unified Protector over Libya (2011) (see Seybolt, 2007).
- 2 The missions are: MINURCAT; MINUSTAH; MONUC/MONUSCO; ONUB; UNAMID; UNAMSIL; UNIFIL; UNIFSA; UNMIL; UNMIS; UMISS; and UNOCI.
- 3 By mid-2012 the Council had released nine presidential statements on PoC and the Secretary-General had produced nine reports. The Council's informal expert group on PoC convened 32 times between January 2009 and May 2012, although interestingly, Russia attended only occasionally and China not at all (UN Security Council, 2012, pp. 3, 6). See UN Secretary-General (2012) for discussion of the five core outstanding PoC challenges.

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