

# **The Overview of the United Nations Police (UNPOL) and its Roles in UN Peace Operations: @PKO Now! No.102**

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With respect to UN peace operations, more people would probably think of military personnel than police officers. The United Nations Police (UNPOL), through the Police Division of the Department of Peace Operations, has deployed police officers to UN peace operations, in which they play such crucial roles as protection of civilians and capacity building of local police. This column discusses the overview and roles of UNPOL, whose demands in peace operations have been increasing day by day, yet activities and contribution are not widely appreciated.

## **History of UNPOL**

In 1948, Trygve Halvdan Lie, the first UN Secretary-General, mentioned the establishment of UNPOL for the first time, and 30 Ghanaian police officers were deployed to the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC) in 1960.<sup>1</sup> In the early days, UNPOL was given relatively simple mandate, such as monitoring of local security apparatus. However, since the 1990's, a number of police officers were deployed to such post-conflict states as Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Haiti, Former Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Timor-Leste, and engaged in more complex mandate, including maintenance of local security, law enforcement, restructuring and capacity building of local police.<sup>2</sup> Today, roughly 10,000 police officers are deployed to 12 UN peace operations, including UNAMID (Darfur), MINUSCA (the Central African Republic), UNMISS (South Sudan), MINUSMA (Mali) and MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo).<sup>3</sup>

In 2000, a high-level panel of UN peace operations, set up by Secretary-General Kofi Anan, submitted the so-called "Brahimi report," which proposed further utilization of UNPOL to strengthen the rule of law institutions and promote protection of human rights.<sup>4</sup> In the same year, disconnecting from the military chain of command, the Police Division was established. In 2011, the first Secretary-General report on UN police (A/66/615) was issued. In 2014, the first Security Council Resolution (S/RES/2185) that recognizes the UNPOL's important roles in UN peace operations was adopted unanimously, and in 2017 an additional relevant resolution (S/RES/2382) was adopted by the Council. Thus, UNPOL's roles in both peacekeeping and peacebuilding have increasingly been recognized and expected further not only in the field, but also in the UN Headquarters.

## **UNPOL Types and Roles**

UNPOL mainly consists of police officers provided by the UN member states, and their types and roles vary. This section introduces the three different types and the roles, mandate and characteristics of each type.

### **(1) Formed Police Unit (FPU)**

Most of the police officers in recent UN peace operations belong to FPU. A unit consists of roughly 140 armed police officers who are mandated to maintain public order, protect UN staff and UN facilities and respond to incidents that require police capabilities.<sup>5</sup> Police officers in FPU carry weapons, such as tear gas grenade and automatic rifle that are needed to undertake above-mentioned mandate.<sup>6</sup> Because maintenance of public order is UNPOL's main mandate, UNPOL does not engage in an operation that requires military capabilities. Yet, they are sometimes mandated to protect civilians in high-risk areas.<sup>7</sup> FPUs were for the first time deployed to Kosovo and Timor-Leste in 1999 and tasked with interim law enforcement and response to threats to public order.

### **(2) Individual Police Officer (IPO)**

IPOs are either unarmed or lightly armed for self-defense and engage in various tasks including community policing, information collection and analysis, capacity building of local

police, transfer of knowledge to local security institutions about crime investigation and support to combat transnational crimes.<sup>8</sup> Depending on one's expertise, an IPO is assigned to work on either administration, capacity building and development, command or operations. Some of the minimum requirements to become an IPO include, but are not limited to the knowledge of criminal justice, five years of policing experience, one year of driving experience, language proficiency, knowledge of weapons usage and computer skills.<sup>9</sup>

### (3) Specialized Police Team (SPT)

SPT responds to the specific assistance needs on the ground by utilizing its expertise and capabilities. More specifically, police officers who have expertise in organized crimes, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), community policing, among others, tackle those challenges in the areas of deployment.<sup>10</sup> For instance, a team of experts of SGBV was deployed to Haiti and helped local police establish a section dedicated to protecting victims of SGBV. In Mali, SPT supported capacity building of local police in combating terrorist attacks and organized crimes. Thus, the ability to conduct a wide range of assistance that directly addresses context-specific needs and challenges is the advantage of SPT.

It is also important to mention about the Standing Police Capabilities (SPC).<sup>11</sup> In 2006, the establishment of SPC was endorsed in the UN General Assembly and moved its office from New York to Brindisi, Italy in 2010. There are currently about 40 staff standby for assisting the establishment of the police component in a newly created UN peace operation and providing the ongoing missions with technical advice. The Secretary-General report in 2011 recognized SPC's contribution, and the 2016 External Review that assessed functions and capacities of UNPOL called for expansion of SPC to better address local needs in a timely manner.<sup>12</sup>

### **Contribution by UN Member States**

As mentioned above, UNPOL consists of police officers provided by the UN member states. When the Security Council establishes a peace operation mission that has police-related mandate, the Police Division announces a call for police officers to the member states, which will then select candidates.<sup>13</sup> After the candidates go through various exams and interviews

according to the UN standards and are successfully qualified, they will be deployed to the field for one year for FPU and six month-two years for IPO and SPT.<sup>14</sup>

Major police contributing countries are developing countries, such as Senegal, Rwanda, Egypt, Bangladesh, Jordan and Nepal, which have provided a number of police officers to the forefront of peacekeeping and undertaken important tasks.<sup>15</sup> Many of the developed countries have maintained their power and positions in the UN through their financial contribution, whereas those developing countries have significantly increased their presence in the organization through human resource contribution to peace operations.

### **Challenges of UNPOL**

Although the demands of UNPOL have increased on the ground, UNPOL has been facing some operational challenges. The first challenge is the lack of police officers.<sup>16</sup> In many countries, the police are supposed to serve for maintaining domestic public order, and not many UN member states are afforded to spend extra police officers to serve for foreign countries, making it difficult to secure enough number of police officers. Also, on the ground, since many police officers are needed to protect UN staff and facilities, UNPOL sometimes cannot patrol the areas where local people or refugees live.

Second, there are gaps in knowledge and capabilities among police officers provided by the UN member states. This makes it difficult for UNPOL to implement mandate effectively and efficiently. Also, poor language skills of police officers often prevent smooth communication with local people, whom UNPOL is supposed to protect.

Third, UNPOL is rarely granted law enforcement authority. As law enforcement by UNPOL in the third countries was sometimes criticized as interference of state sovereignty, the Security Council has rarely authorized law enforcement mandate for recent operations.<sup>17</sup> Yet, police officers without law enforcement authority cannot arrest suspects or criminals, suggesting UNPOL's limitation in crime prevention and public order management.

Fourth, the division of responsibilities between police and military is often unclear.<sup>18</sup> A FPU

is mandated to undertake public safety management tasks, but once the scale and intensity of a turmoil exacerbates to the point that is beyond FPU mandate and capability, military units come and take over the situations. This is how things should work in theory. Under the rapidly changing circumstances, police and military closely coordinate to determine, for instance, the timing of shift between police and military or the conduct of a joint operation. Yet, lack of effective coordination between the two parties remains a challenge.

### **Japan's Contribution to Policing**

As part of the international peace cooperation, Japan deployed police officers to UN peace operations. In 1992, 75 police officers were deployed to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and engaged in monitoring of behavior of local police officers and providing them with technical advice in crime investigation.<sup>19</sup> While Japanese police officers contributed to maintaining local security, it was regrettable that Superintendent Haruyuki Takata (Assistant Inspector at that time) was shot and killed by armed groups.<sup>20</sup> Since that tragic event, three police officers were deployed to Timor-Leste to provide the Indonesian police with advice on police administration, and in 2007, four police officers were deployed to Timor-Leste again to support the Police Commissioner of the UN Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) through advising. Japan has not deployed any police officer to UN peace operations since UNMIT, yet the National Police Agency, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), has dispatched police officers to developing countries and contributed to capacity building of local police.<sup>21</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Looking at today's UN peace operations, the military component is far greater in number and capability than those of the police component, and the international community still pays more attention to military than police.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, UNPOL has so many strengths the military component does not have. By building capacity of local police and other security apparatus, UNPOL has contributed to strengthening the rule of law and stabilizing local security, which is the precondition for peacebuilding and development. To overcome the existing challenges and expand the scale of activities, UNPOL should actively reach out to

potential donors and relevant stakeholders to garner more support and share about their activities and contributions to international peace and security.

## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> United Nations. 2011. "Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations Police" (A/66/615). New York: UN General Assembly.
- <sup>2</sup> UN Police. 2013. "United Nations Police on Duty for Peace: 2008-2012." New York: UNPOL.
- <sup>3</sup> UN Police. 2019. Police Contributors (<https://police.un.org/en/police-contributors>). Accessed 3 Sep 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> United Nations. 2000. "Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations" (A/55/305-S/2000/809). New York: UN.
- <sup>5</sup> UN Police. 2019. Formed Police Units (FPUs) (<https://police.un.org/en/formed-police-units-fpus>). Accessed 3 Sep 2019.
- <sup>6</sup> Sebastian, Sofia. 2015. "The Role of Police in UN Peace Operations: Filling the Gap in the Protection of Civilians from Physical Violence." Stimson Center, 11.
- <sup>7</sup> Osland, Kari M. 2019. "UN Policing: The Security-Trust Challenge." In *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order*, ed. Cedric de Coning and Mateja Peter, 191-209. Palgrave Macmillan.
- <sup>8</sup> UN Police. 2019. Individual Police Officers (IPOs) (<https://police.un.org/en/individual-police-officers>). Accessed 3 Sep 2019.
- <sup>9</sup> Sebastian, 11.
- <sup>10</sup> UN Police. 2019. Specialized Police Teams (<https://police.un.org/en/specialized-police-teams>). Accessed 3 Sep 2019.
- <sup>11</sup> UN Police. 2019. Standing Police Capacity Timeline (<https://police.un.org/en/standing-police-capacity-timeline>). Accessed 3 Sep 2019.
- <sup>12</sup> United Nations. 2016. "External Review of the Functions, Structure and Capacity of the UN Police Division." New York: UN.
- <sup>13</sup> UN Police. 2019. UN Police Selection and Recruitment at a Glance (<https://police.un.org/en/un-police-selection-and-recruitment-glance>). Accessed 3 Sep 2019.
- <sup>14</sup> UN Police. 2013. "United Nations Police on Duty for Peace: 2008-2012."
- <sup>15</sup> UN Police. 2019. Police Contributors (<https://police.un.org/en/police-contributors>). Accessed 3 Sep 2019.
- <sup>16</sup> Sebastian, 14.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, 21. In the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), UNPOL can conduct interim law enforcement only under emergency situations upon the approval of host state.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Secretariat of International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. 2019. International Peace Cooperation Assignment in Cambodia  
([https://www.cao.go.jp/pko/pko\\_e/result/cambo/cambo02.html](https://www.cao.go.jp/pko/pko_e/result/cambo/cambo02.html))

<sup>20</sup> On May 4, 1993, while moving around Ampil district (Northwestern part of Cambodia) with the members of the Dutch Marine Corps, unknown armed groups suddenly started shooting the convoy, and four Japanese police officers got injured. and Assistant Inspector Haruyuki Takata, from Okayama Prefectural Police, lost his life. It was the first case for the Government of Japan to lose own national in a UN peace operation, and it was widely broadcasted in Japan at that time.

<sup>21</sup> The Metropolitan Police Department of Tokyo. 2019. Transfer of Knowledge and Skills: ODA Projects Collaborated with JICA  
([https://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.jp/smph/about\\_mpd/shokai/kokusai/oda.html](https://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.jp/smph/about_mpd/shokai/kokusai/oda.html)).

<sup>22</sup> Durch, William J. 2010. "United Nations Police Evolution, Present Capacity and Future Tasks." GRIPS Policy Research Center.