Scholarly Debate on Evaluation Criteria of UN Peace Operations : @PKO Now! No.106

Yuki Yoshida
Program Advisor
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Since the first military observers were deployed to the Middle East to monitor ceasefires between the warring parties in 1948, the United Nations has deployed peace operations to many parts of the world. At the end of each operation, the UN conducts evaluation and finds out lessons learned, which are taken into account for subsequent operations. Likewise, a number of scholars have evaluated UN peace operations through their own methodologies and analytical frameworks and labeled the operations as “success” or “failure.” However, not all scholars evaluate the operations based on clear criteria. In this regard, Bratt points out, “In a strictly theoretical sense, it is wrong to classify operations as successes or failures without reference to some kind of objective standard.”[1] Scholarly views on evaluation criteria are very diverse, and debate continues to this day, as the modality of UN peace operations has also changed. This column summarizes parts of the scholarly debate and offers insight into how the evaluation criteria of UN peace operations should look like.

Evaluation Criteria by Diehl

One of the often-cited set of evaluation criteria of UN peace operations is the one developed by Diehl in 1993. He proposes two criteria. The first criterion is limitation of armed conflict.[2] He argues that as UN peace operations are supposed to deter and prevent hostile actions by the warring parties, the operations should be assessed based on their ability to do so. UN peace operations are expected to act as a buffer to separate the protagonists and limit accidental engagements, aiming to prevent escalation into all-out conflict.[3] Additionally,

patrolling by UN military observers can help the parties mitigate their fear of a surprise attack and make them less motivated to conduct preemptive attacks. He also suggests that the operations would be a "success," if the frequency of hostile actions and the number of battle-related deaths in the areas of deployment drop after the UN starts its operations.

The second criterion is conflict resolution.[4] According to Diehl, since UN peace operations are charged not only with creating a situation without war, but also supporting a process of reconciliation between the parties, operations' ability "to facilitate the resolution of the disagreements underlying the conflict" should be judged. He shows three indicators to measure the degree of conflict resolution. The first is the conclusion of a formal agreement, though such agreements do not always guarantee long-term conflict resolution.[5] The second consideration is the mission's duration. He suggests that operations lasting for years imply that negotiation might be floundering, the situation on the ground remains tense, and even a resumption of conflict is possible. Conversely, short-term missions imply that the UN successfully facilitated an agreement between the warring parties and the agreement would likely hold without a UN presence. Lastly, whether the chance of recurrence of conflict is low upon UN withdrawal is important. He argues that the operations would be "a colossal failure," if armed conflict relapses after the UN leaves the areas.

Critiques of Diehl's Criteria

As the situations surrounding UN peace operations have evolved over time, Diehl's criteria have been challenged by other scholars. Howard points out that Diehl's criteria might be suitable to assess the performance of traditional peacekeeping.[6] Yet, the criteria do not assume to measure the performance of multidimensional peacekeeping, which have increasingly been deployed to internal conflict and given such complex mandate as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), security sector reform (SSR), support to power-sharing measure and other statebuilding assistance.[7] Because most of the UN peace operations Diehl researched were monitoring-based traditional peacekeeping operations,[8] he simply developed the criteria to evaluate such operations and might not have predicted the subsequent mandate expansion as we have seen in recent UN peace operations.

Bratt argues that Diehl only considers the number of battle-related combatant deaths, but not the number of civilian (non-combatant) casualties,[9] which, Bratt believes, should also be considered. Bratt further underlines that the number of deaths by humanitarian crises (i.e., food insecurity and spread of infectious diseases) caused by conflict should also be taken into account. Bratt thus proposes a more comprehensive assessment, by adding humanitarian considerations. Recently, a UN peace operation with humanitarian assistance mandate is not rare. Yet, the operations which Diehl studied took place during the Cold War when humanitarian assistance was not a major task. That is probably why Diehl did not include the humanitarian component in his evaluation criteria.

Durch argues that Diehl's criteria are "useful and seemingly straightforward criteria."[10] Nevertheless, a "success" of UN peace operations does not mean the same thing for the host states, troop contributing countries (TCCs), member states of the UN Security Council and UN Secretariat. Durch further claims that even if the criteria are designed specifically for traditional peacekeeping, it might be difficult to apply to all such cases, as not every traditional peacekeeping operation is given the identical mandate.

Fulfillment of the Mandate as Evaluation Criterion

Besides Diehl's criteria, some scholars argue that fulfillment of the mandate should be considered as an evaluation criterion of UN peace operations. Howard discusses that assessing fulfillment of the mandate given by the Security Council is "the most relevant and equitable standard to which the UN can be held."[11] Bratt points out that looking at fulfillment of the mandate has thus far been an effective way to assess the operational success.[12] Durch also believes that most UN practitioners tend to think of success of peace operations as fulfillment of the mandate.[13]

This criterion, however, has also been a subject of critiques. Diehl claims that since mandate is often vague and the scope and detail of the operation's mission differ, fulfillment of the mandate would not be a legitimate evaluation criterion.[14] He also warns that excessive focus on fulfilling the mandate can underestimate a peace operation's real mission: to

restore peace and stability in the areas of deployment. One of the UN Secretariat officials whom Bratt interviewed revealed that due to the national interests of member states of the Security Council, a mandate sometimes becomes unrealistic and infeasible.[15] Thus, considering such criticism, fulfillment of the mandate as an evaluation criterion should be applied carefully, yet at the same time it has been an established and reasonable evaluation criterion among both scholars and practitioners.

Other Evaluation Criteria

Other scholars have proposed a bit more ambitious evaluation criteria. Pushkina argues that peace operations should achieve "reduction of human suffering," which can be measured by the reduction of cases of human rights abuses and the increase of resettlement of refugees.[16] From the post-conflict peacebuilding perspectives, Paris maintains that considering that the UN has been striving to achieve the so-called "self-sustaining peace," whether creating conditions for a stable and lasting peace based on democracy and market-oriented economy is the standard for judging peace (building) operations.[17] Doyle and Sambanis argue that establishment of participatory peace, which guarantees that disputes will be negotiated and resolved peacefully based on the agreed rules and procedures, symbolizes the beginning of a lasting and stable peace, which should be taken into consideration.[18] Furthermore, Howard argues that, although how much the UN should be responsible for the level of functionality of local institutions after withdrawing peace operations remains contested, capacity of local authority can be the result of UN involvement, so it can be worth exploring how UN statebuilding assistance had a long-term impact.[19]

Conclusion

This column starts by unpacking well-known evaluation criteria of UN peace operations developed by Diehl and observes scholarly debate on this topic. In today's academia, scholars have proposed diverse evaluation criteria, ranging from macrolevel goals such as peace and stability of the areas of deployment to microlevel goals such as fulfillment of the mandate. The debate will most likely continue, and existing criteria will be challenged and

new criteria will emerge in that process. In any case, it is important to be clear about the purposes of evaluation and select the appropriate set of criteria accordingly. It will be beneficial that such evaluation leads to producing policy recommendations to improve the quality of future operations.

End Notes

[1] Bratt, Duane. 1996. “Assessing the success of UN peacekeeping operations.” International Peacekeeping 3(4): 64-81, 65.

[2] Diehl, Paul F. 1993. International Peacekeeping. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 34.

[3] Ibid, 35.

[4] Ibid, 37.

[5] Ibid, 39.

[6] Traditional peacekeeping is often referred to as a monitoring-based operation with the three principles: consent of the main parties to conflict, impartiality and non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate.

[7] Howard, Lise M. 2008. UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars. New York: Cambridge University Press, 6. Most of the UN peace operations established after the Cold War are multidimensional types, and the mandate often include peacebuilding and statebuilding assistance.

[8] Diehl, International Peacekeeping, 43. Operations Diehl studied include UNEF I&II, ONUC, UNFICYP, UNIFIL, MNF, all of which, except ONUC were categorized into traditional peacekeeping.

[9] Bratt, “Assessing the success of UN peacekeeping operations,” 66.

[10] Durch, William J. 1996. “Keeping the Peace: Politics and Lessons of the 1990s.” in William J. Durch ed., UN Peacekeeping, American Policy, and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s. New York: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 17.

[11] Howard, UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars, 7.

[12] Bratt, “Assessing the success of UN peacekeeping operations,” 67.

[13] Druckman, Daniel, and Stern, Paul C. 1997. “Evaluating Peacekeeping Missions.” Mershon International Studies Review 41, 151-165, 159.

[14] Diehl, International Peacekeeping, 33.

[15] Bratt, “Assessing the success of UN peacekeeping operations,” 67.

[16] Pushkina, Darya. 2006. “A Recipe for Success? Ingredients of a Successful Peacekeeping Mission.” International Peacekeeping 13 (2): 133-149, 134.

[17] Paris, Roland. 2004. At War’s End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict. New York: Cambridge University Press, 55-56.

[18] Doyle, Michael W, and Sambanis, Nicholas. 2006. Making War and Building Peace: UN Peace Operations. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 19. According to Doyle and Sambanis, examples of the indicators for participatory peace include “a shared national identity, well-functioning state institutions, a wide middle class and a growing economy.”

[19] Howard, UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars, 8.