

# UN Peacekeeping and the Kindleberger Trap

In Analysis September 27, 2021 John Karlsrud



PROFILE

For or close to a decade, the UN has been under the double pressure of a high number of fatalities and pressure from member states to cut costs, particularly from the United States. Since 2013, the UN has not launched a new large peacekeeping mission, but large missions have been closed in Côte

d'Ivoire, Darfur, Haiti, Liberia and Sierra Leone. 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.

A notable trend over the last decade or so is the increasingly close collaboration between peacekeeping and "coalitions of the willing", particularly involving peace enforcement and counter-terrorism missions. Ad hoc coalitions have been included in the missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) and South Sudan (UNMISS). The Force Intervention Brigade is 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 east of the DRC.

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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). Similarly, The UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has been tasked to support the ongoing counter-terrorism operations of the Joint Force of the Group of Five Sahel (JF-G5S).

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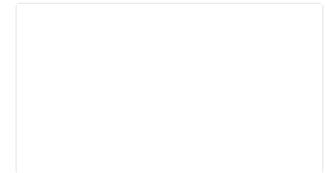
Partially as a consequence of this increasing collaboration, member states have now also given other UN peacekeeping missions new tasks beyond their usual mandate, such as fighting armed groups in the CAR and the DRC and supporting counter-terrorism operations in **Mali**. Further, UN peacekeeping and the counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism (CT/PVE) agenda have been on converging paths since the launch of the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in **2014**. Consequently, UN peacekeeping has increasingly been perceived as an active party in the conflicts to which they have been deployed.

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Scholars have identified the shared assumptions that underpin liberal interventionism and the dissonance between these liberal underpinnings and the decidedly illiberal outcomes of these interventions, as they descend into 'security traffic jams', 'characterized overall by a messy coexistence of diverse justifications, contradictory logics and competing **interveners**'. Others have pointed to the increasing pressure of militarized pragmatism under the headline of making the UN '**fit for purpose**'.

These developments can be read into larger tectonic shifts in the international system, with China's ascendancy as a global financial and military power. The US and its allies see UN peacekeeping as a tool of a wider toolbox. Member states of the UN is in a predicament – should they stick to the core principles

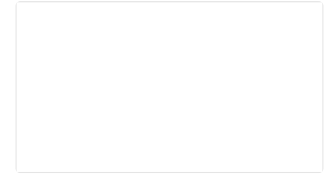
Rejoignez-nous le 7 oct à 12h pour entendre @jana\_puglierin et @RafaellLoss, présidé par Daniel Stockemer  
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of UN peacekeeping – impartiality, consent of the parties and non-use of force except in self-defense – and risk that the organization becomes 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 increasing its engagement in UN peacekeeping and other multilateral instruments. While this is a welcome development in many respects, China and other rising powers' increasing engagement in UN peacekeeping see resistance from France, the United Kingdom and the US on the Security Council.

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These developments can usefully be analysed as the double effects of the '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 provide global public goods 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 the "Kindleberger trap". 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. 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. What we are witnessing is thus a variation of the Kindleberger trap, where China is providing global public goods but stripped of the liberal values that have marked the unipolar period from the end of the Cold War until today.

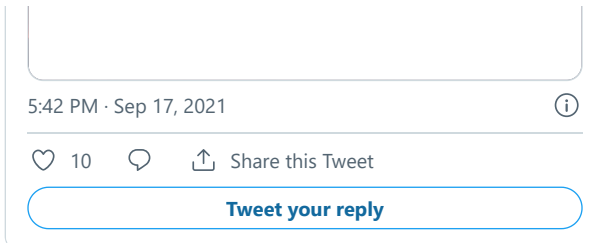
In reflecting on all of these linked trends and drawing from the recent developments concerning a possible UN support office to the JF-G5S, we may see a new type of UN peace operations develop over the next few years – UN Support Missions. UN Support Missions represent the answer to the convergence of factors described here. UNSMs would enable member states to draw upon and sustain the investment in the extremely well-developed UN peace operations support system and use this to support ad hoc coalitions in instances where counter-terror and counter-insurgency operations are needed. This would combine the interests of e.g. China, France and the USA, as well as host states – less focus on human rights, more multilateral 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 the UN's role as an impartial mediator of conflicts is likely to be detrimental.



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