THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF PEACE OPERATIONS: A DIALOGUE WITH EMERGING POWERS

Middle East Regional Dialogue

XENIA AVEZOV*

On 17–19 March 2014 a regional dialogue meeting of the 'New Geopolitics of Peace Operations: A Dialogue with Emerging Powers' project took place in Amman, Jordan. The meeting, which was jointly organized by SIPRI and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), brought together a range of leading experts, government officials and representatives of international organizations to discuss the future challenges for peace operations and the roles that states from the Middle East can play in them.

A CHANGING WORLD ORDER: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

The opening session focused on the international security environment, with participants discussing regional and national threats, particularly in the context of the events of the Arab Spring, which began to unfold in December 2010. Participants were concerned about the situation in Syria, the proliferation of extremism and political Islam throughout the region, impeding civil wars, the Israel–Palestine conflict, and growing tensions between regional powers including Iran and Saudi Arabia. Of these concerns, civil wars—and especially internationalized civil wars—are seen as one of the main threats to stability and security, as they act as arenas for competition between major powers and as breeding grounds for terrorism. Many felt that states in the region lack sufficient institutional capacity or internal stability to address these threats and that failed states often proliferate violence and instability. Participants saw human security issues, including the status of refugees, migration flows and economic disparities, as global rather than localized concerns that require global responses. In this context, peace operations could become an important tool for restoring and maintaining stability in the region. Furthermore, due to the complexity of regional conflicts, peace operations will have to be multidimensional in nature. Several participants were concerned that the recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine might lead to further fragmentation within the United Nations Security Council and negatively affect international initiatives in the region. As one partici-

* This report summarizes the contents of each workshop session. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of SIPRI or of the majority of the participants.

Agenda

Day 1, 18 March 2014

Opening remarks

Keynote address

A changing world order: what implications for the future of peace operations?

Norms and concepts: a fragile consensus?

Day 1 wrap-up

Day 2, 19 March 2014

Engagement objectives: high politics and interests of stakeholders

Regional dynamics

A new peacekeeping landscape: peacekeeping 2.0?

Final reflections and closing remarks

pant from Lebanon noted, while the trend towards multipolarity is growing at the formal political level, the influence of informal global networks is also growing.

Although Iran and Turkey have recently been working towards improving their bilateral relationship, Turkey perceives Iran's regional ambitions and nuclear programme as threats. The potential spillover of violence from Syria and the state's capacity to absorb refugees are also major concerns. Tensions between Turkey and Iraq have declined as a result of the rapprochement over the status of the Kurdish-dominated region of northern Iraq, with which Turkey has increasingly strong economic ties. For member states of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC), and for Saudi Arabia in particular, Iran's nuclear programme as well as its growing influence in countries such as Bahrain are perceived as a major threat. While the GCC accepts Iran as a regional power, it would not accept Iran as a regional superpower. One participant from Lebanon noted that tense interactions between Iran and Saudi Arabia also constitute a regional threat and that improving this relationship is crucial to stability. Algeria is currently relatively stable because its government has made significant investments in the public and security sectors since the Arab Spring. However, this stability is fragile due to persistent social tensions and internal strife. A participant from Algeria was also concerned that instability throughout the broader Sahel region is likely to escalate, given the fragmentation of civilian populations and the inability of weak or failing states to address these issues.

Participants had varying views about whether the events of the Arab Spring are a positive or negative development for the region. An expert working closely with GCC states suggested that the potential for unrest in the wake of the Arab Spring is no longer a threat to the Arab states of the Gulf because the GCC has invested significantly in the public and security sectors in order to quell potential protests. At the same time, the Arab states of the Gulf have also begun to embrace some reforms, for example by allowing

increased civilian influence over governance. According to this participant, the conflicts in Egypt, Libya and Syria have also persuaded civilians in other Gulf states to choose stability over mass protest. One participant from Lebanon argued that, while the Arab Spring is currently in a violent stage, it may not yet have reached its endpoint and, therefore, should not be dismissed too quickly. The increase in crackdowns on civilians in Egypt and Palestine is also an important indicator that perceptions of stability are deceptive and that the concerns that prompted the Arab Spring uprisings are far from resolved. Reinforcing this point of view, a participant from Algeria noted that the status quo should not be conflated with stability, because a short-term maintenance of the status quo may come at the cost of long-term stability. While the Arab Spring created mass instability, it may have also set in motion the long-term process needed to create strong and modern states. One participant from Iraq noted that fragile democracies in the region are not equipped to deal with political, sectarian and tribal tensions, which can lead to aggression and extremism. He argued it is important to address the root economic, social and cultural causes of these issues rather than focusing on top-down political processes such as elections.

Participants were generally concerned about the humanitarian dimension of the conflict in Syria. One expert working closely with the GCC noted that GCC member states feel that it is unacceptable for the international community to stand by while a dictator is slaughtering people. The same participant also rejected the notion that the conflict in Syria is fuelled by sectarian tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and denied claims that Saudi Arabia is supporting rebels for this reason. In fact, he argued that GCC member states have attempted to prevent escalation in Syria in order to avoid the possibility of the conflict destabilizing the entire region. One participant from Turkey noted that the failure to intervene earlier in Syria had caused a profound escalation. The conflict has also created massive refugee flows throughout the region. In Turkey, Syrian refugees are seen as a security and economic problem. One participant from Syria argued that stability should not come at the expense of the protection of civilians.

Participants held different views on the Israel–Palestine conflict and the current round of peace talks. Some suggested that a two-state solution is no longer feasible, with one participant from Lebanon arguing that a one-state solution is the only way forward. In response, a Palestinian participant noted that a two-state solution is the only way forward, as any alternative would require a far more stable relationship with Israel, which is not feasible in the near future. Furthermore, a one-state solution would not be possible as the majority of Israeli citizens would never concede the Jewish character of Israel, and because no Palestinian leader would dare suggest that Palestinian citizens' right to self-determination should be given up. The League of Arab States (Arab League) still believes that normalization of relations with Israel, in return for 22 per cent of the original territories, might lead to a positive result. Furthermore, the suggestion by the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, on the creation of a peace operation to guard the border between Israel and Palestine, might provide a concrete guarantee for both parties. A participant from Egypt responded that Israel would never agree to a peace operation on its borders.

NORMS AND CONCEPTS

Some participants suggested that, generally speaking, both the public and governments in the region are unfamiliar with peace operations and their terminology, including norms and concepts. The public's perception is that neither the UN Security Council nor UN peace operations are very effective—particularly in the case of Syria. At the same time, participants believed that potential regional alternatives would only gain legitimacy if they had a Security Council mandate. Moreover, the conflict in Afghanistan illustrates the failure of experiments in state-building. However, it was also noted that, since the Arab Spring, some progress has been made in terms of regional perceptions of democracy. A number of participants saw democratization as an important tool for peace operations, with several arguing that a broader approach involving strengthening institutions in host countries and addressing the root social and economic causes of instability is crucial, particularly in intrastate conflicts. However, peacebuilding activities will only have a realistic chance of success once a formal ceasefire agreement has been reached.

The concept of the responsibility to protect (R2P) was also discussed at length, and it proved to be most controversial concept for participants. However, a participant from the Arab League noted that while R2P is rarely mentioned in Arab League meetings, the intention behind the concept is often discussed. In his view, the military intervention in Libya and the absence of action in Syria had tainted regional attitudes towards R2P. The concept itself has been applied using double standards and generally only in the interests of the intervening states. Consequently, R2P is often seen as a tool for regime change. Moreover, states are only likely to support the concept when it is applied in other states and would not risk their own sovereignty. Nevertheless, most participants seemed to agree that, when a regime commits mass violations of human rights, it loses its sovereignty. In such cases, the international community has the responsibility to intervene in order to protect civilians, at least in principle. Participants even discussed whether and how it would be feasible to enshrine R2P in the UN Charter and in the Charter of the Arab League. However, intervention should be temporary and sovereignty should be ultimately restored to the state. Moreover, intervention should be driven by the need to protect civilians rather than by the national interests of intervening states.

In this context, the question of how to address the Syrian conflict remains unanswered. Some participants argued that states in the region should intervene without the UN, while noting that states such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia preferred and expected the international community to intervene because a regional intervention might spur greater escalation. One participant from the Arab League stated that both the Arab League and the European Union (EU) believe a military solution in Syria would lead to greater bloodshed rather than stability. In addition, any intervening actor would need to take responsibility for the result—a risk that no single state is willing to take.

Several participants noted that, ultimately, regional capacities, consensus and structures are insufficient for the deployment of regional-led peace operations and that, for this reason, the region will continue to depend on

the UN and international actors, at least in the short term. At the same time, the inability of the UN to act on Syria, a perceived proliferation of realpolitik within the UN Security Council and double standards in terms of the implementation of norms are concerning trends that might lead to further de-legitimization of the international conflict-management architecture. If the Security Council does not live up to its responsibilities, geopolitics will determine the location and timing of interventions. This may lead to more responses by regional organizations, but it is also likely to mean that rich countries—including members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) the EU and the GCC—will have a greater say in where and when interventions take place.

While there is general consensus about the importance of the concept of the protection of civilians (POC), it was thought that its operationalization needs more attention. Given their commitment to the principle of sovereignty, states in the region are more likely to accept traditional peacekeeping operations than those with a POC mandate. In general, while participants accepted current international norms, Western states' double standards in the application of these norms remain a concern. While alternatives to such norms were not mentioned, some participants noted that international norms needed to be grounded in regional realities. However, the majority of participants still felt that international backing for regional action is crucial for any intervention's legitimacy.

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

While individual states' motivations for participation in peace operations vary across the region, there are also commonalities. Troop-contributing countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Turkey are focused on advancing their international and regional standing, whereas Yemen is probably more motivated by individual benefits. All four countries believe in the basic principles of the UN Charter and wish to contribute to global peace and security. Some, including Jordan, are also willing to contribute within the region in order to promote stability and economic growth. Economic incentives might be relevant for individuals, but military and police forces in regional troop-contributing countries also benefit from training opportunities and operational experience. With regard to other potential troop-contributing countries, Algeria is not likely to contribute in the short term as it will continue to adhere to its policy of non-intervention, and Saudi Arabia is also not likely to make any significant contribution. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are considering minor contributions but still lack training and capacity. The Palestinian Authority would also like to contribute to peacebuilding efforts, especially if the Palestinian people gain sovereignty. Other countries in the region are either reducing their contributions or have not initiated engagement due to internal instability.

Jordan

Jordan currently contributes 2764 military and police personnel to UN missions around the world, and it is one of the major police contributors. It has also established a training centre for police officers in cooperation

with the UN that aims to become a regional centre. Jordan sees its contributions to peace operations as a way to fulfil its international obligation to promote global peace and security. Contributing also creates visibility and advances its international standing by showcasing goodwill. For example, Jordan recently replaced Saudi Arabia as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council after Saudi Arabia declined its seat. Jordan also hopes to increase its contributions in the region in order to promote stability and economic growth. For individual police, there are several incentives for participation: they collect remittances in addition to their regular salary during their deployment, gain valuable training and career advancement opportunities, and receive benefits from exposure and interaction with other militaries and police forces.

Yemen

Yemen currently contributes 272 military and police personnel to UN peace operations. It views its participation as a way to contribute to global peace and security and believes in the general principles of the UN Charter. Yemen's contribution to the African Union (AU)/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) is relatively large due to its good bilateral relations with Sudan. Institutionally, the Yemeni military forces benefit from training opportunities, and individual troops and police personnel gain operational experience and financial remunerations.

Egypt

Egypt currently contributes 2658 military and police personnel to UN peace operations. It also plans to increase its civilian contributions and improve training for the North African Regional Capability (NARC) so that its skills are commensurate with other African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) standby forces. Egypt's contributions are partly motivated by a desire to maintain international peace and security. Following the cold war, Egypt saw increased participation as a way to promote its international standing and legitimacy, compete for a potential permanent seat on the UN Security Council (in the event that it expands), and gain training experience. For individual peacekeepers, participation provides career advancement opportunities and financial benefits. While instability following the events of the Arab Spring has reduced Egypt's level of participation, it intends to increase its contributions again in the future.

Turkey

Turkey currently contributes 265 military and police personnel to UN peace operations. It deploys primarily token contributions, but it views them as substantial in quality. It temporarily increased its contribution in 2006 when it joined the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) but then decreased its personnel numbers due to negative public opinion following the kidnapping of two Turkish pilots during the mission. Many of Turkey's security policy shifts can be explained by changes in civil–military relations, especially under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, with the military now firmly

out of power. The civilian government sees participation in peace operations as both a tool for foreign policy and an opportunity for the military to gain combat experience and training. For the military, NATO is of overriding importance and peace operations are much less relevant. Individual economic rationales are irrelevant for the military, but are somewhat more important to individual police officers.

After the cold war, Turkey contributed to peace operations as a way to maintain its geopolitical relevance. It participated primarily in EU and NATO operations in order to forge its alliances with Western states and join the EU. However, by the mid-2000s, Turkey's foreign policy objectives for participation had shifted from Westernization to promoting the country's prestige and standing in its neighbourhood and beyond. Aspirations for increased participation were replaced by diplomatic engagement and strategic participation in the conflicts in Bosnia–Herzegovina, Lebanon and Somalia. Such contributions were seen as complementing the policy pursued by Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) of zero problems with neighbours. Meanwhile, Turkey's token contributions in Africa were mainly driven by its secondary economic interest.

The events of the Arab Spring shifted views in Turkey once again, as the country became more involved in conflicts in the region. Turkey's status as an emerging power is currently an additional incentive for participation, as is its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the period 2015–16. However, with the AKP in power, the country is not likely to significantly change its mode of participation, particularly if the incentives are primarily political. Turkey is therefore likely to participate in missions that have a clear mandate, require a limited capacity and are directly relevant to its national interests.

REGIONAL DYNAMICS

During this session participants discussed the current and future role of regional organizations, including the Arab League, the GCC and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), in peace operations—particularly within the region.

The League of Arab States

Prior to 2011, when the Arab League deployed the Observer Mission to Syria, it had only deployed forces twice: in Kuwait (1963) and Lebanon (1976). There are two reasons for the long gap between these deployments and the deployment of the Observer Mission. First, the previous operations were seen as ineffective. Second, the motivations of contributor countries within the region were viewed with suspicion. On 26 December 2011 the Arab League once again became active in the field of peace operations, sending an Observer Mission to Syria with the approval of the Syrian Government. The observers were deployed swiftly, despite the fact that they lacked sufficient training. The mission lasted just 23 days and faced many challenges, including attacks in the media, security concerns and accusations that the Sudanese general leading the mission was involved in humanitarian crimes in Sudan. Violence spiked in Syria after the mission withdrew. Unlike the conflict in

Libya, which the Arab League believed required a military intervention in order to prevent a humanitarian disaster, a military solution in Syria was ultimately expected to lead to greater bloodshed rather than stability.

The events of the Arab Spring—particularly in Syria—have forced the Arab League to re-examine how it can be effective in dealing with regional conflicts. Its member states now widely accept the need for reforms such as potential reorganization along the lines of the AU model, the creation of an operational department for peace operations, the strengthening of the role of the Arab League Secretary-General, and limiting the voting rights of member states who do not fulfil their organizational obligations.

Several participants doubted the Arab League's viability as a regional organization, especially with regard to its role in deploying peace operations. One participant from Algeria noted several key weaknesses that limit the Arab League's ability to take action, including (*a*) its legal framework, which only allows action under a UN Security Council mandate or at the invitation of a host state; (*b*) the fact that most states in the Arab world are ruled by monarchs and dictators and therefore have little legitimacy to send troops themselves; and (*c*) the organization's limited capacity and power to act in the region. In many respects, the Arab League was set up to manage issues that have been taken up by other actors, including the EU, the UN and the USA. The same participant noted that if the Arab League remains united and sets new and clear objectives it might play a greater role as a regional organization, particularly if the Arab Spring leads to new and legitimate governments throughout the region.

Others viewed the Arab League as merely a symbolic organization, with some questioning the logic of investing in the organization given that many countries are now realigning themselves with the AU and the GCC. These participants argued that only Egypt and a few other countries still believe in the organization. One participant from the Arab League agreed that the organization has several key weaknesses that are detrimental to its role in the region. However, he argued that the organization embraces these challenges and hopes to reform and improve its performance.

Participants generally agreed that the Arab League is not ready to take on a substantial role in peace operations as it lacks the institutional framework and military mechanisms. Furthermore, GCC member states would not allow such a role.

The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf

The GCC was initially established to protect its member states from common threats such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq war. The primary goal of the organization has essentially remained the same to this day. The international community has asked the GCC to make financial and troop contributions to peace operations in the region and beyond. However, the GCC will probably not finance an operation that does not directly benefit its member states' national and security interests, especially if the goals and scope of the operation are not clearly defined. As for deploying troops, the GCC does not have spare capacity and its member states' troops lack appropriate training. In addition, five of its members are young states with inexperienced armed forces. Furthermore, GCC member states do not

always adopt the same positions with regard to conflicts in the region. The GCC is only likely to deploy forces in order to defend its member states from external or internal threats, as it did in 2011 when it deployed its Peninsula Shield Force to quell the uprising in Bahrain.

Other organizations

In addition to the Arab League and the GCC, participants discussed the possibility of setting up an Islamic Peacekeeping Force attached to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Such a force would have the benefit of integrating new troop contributors with experienced troop-contributing countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. An Islamic Peacekeeping Force would also benefit from the fact that its troops would share a common language, come from similar cultures and in some cases enjoy greater legitimacy. However, in reality the idea of forming an Islamic Peacekeeping Force has never gained leverage.

In conclusion, participants agreed that the GCC and the large troop-contributing countries view the UN as the organization which has the most capacity and legitimacy to deploy in the region.

PEACEKEEPING 2.0

Looking to the future of peace operations, participants continued to focus on the situation in the region. It was noted that, in general, there is a need to modify both the norms and structures of operations to better deal with modern challenges. Participation needs to be seen as a natural extension of national and regional interests in order to encourage contributions. In addition, increasing regional ownership is required in order to address fears about hegemonic interventions. Many participants complained about the lack of political will within the region, which impedes serious engagement. At the same time, lack of trust between states in the region discourages countries like Turkey and Saudi Arabia from increasing their engagement.

One expert working closely with GCC countries commented that while the GCC has become a significant political power bloc in the region—especially with the waning influence of Egypt, Iraq and the USA—it is premature to look at the organization as a military organization willing and able to take on regional peace operations. The GCC is not yet politically mature, and there is still no unified policy or even consensus among member states on how to respond to the conflicts in Egypt, Libya or Syria. The expert argued that, for the time being, the international community cannot expect the GCC countries to play a larger role. However, there might be potential for increasing financial contributions from the GCC countries. He argued that, with regard to military contributions by Arab states, the international community would need to continue to rely on the capacities and perceived neutrality of Jordan and Morocco.

In contrast, a Jordanian participant stated that while his country is ready and willing to deploy in the region, in order to do so it needs more consensus and support. At the moment, the contradictory interests of states in the region present significant obstacles to such support. An Algerian participant

argued that while his country could probably play a role in training and capacity building, intervention abroad was out of the question.

One participant from Palestine suggested that the lack of a formal structure for peace operations in the region, and in particular a standby force, is the most pressing challenge. Both Egypt and Jordan could lead efforts to create a regional structure for peace operations, as they are both seasoned troop-contributing countries. The Arab League lacks the structure and capacity to deploy without support. Ultimately, without an appropriate structure, decision making will continue to occur on an ad hoc, case-by-case basis.

Most participants did not expect states within the region to obtain the necessary capacity to address regional conflicts. At the same time, many felt that regional conflicts such as the conflict in Syria are international problems requiring international, rather than regional, responses. At this point in time, the region is not in a position to take on such complex and internationalized conflicts on its own. Participants believed that Arab and Western states should share ownership of and responsibility for regional interventions and, therefore, expressed strong concerns about the possibility of Western powers withdrawing from the region.

PROJECT PARTNERS