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Abstract

This research paper analyzes the efforts of the past decade to turn the UN peace operations apparatus into a learning organization. It begins by examining a traditional organizational culture of peacekeeping, which is the subject of section 2 of this paper. The traditional culture emerged under the conditions of Cold War peacekeeping operations. It prized maximum political flexibility over professional management practices. After the shock of the UN's catastrophic failures in the face of genocide in Rwanda and Srebrenica, this traditional culture came to be challenged by a new generation of peace operations officials. This group of "reformers" promoted objectives such as critical reflection and organizational learning while the "traditionalists" sought to protect the organization from excessive bureaucratic standardization.

Section 3 details the structural and political constraints to learning that the reform agenda had to deal with in the beginning. The peace operations bureaucracy is a fragile, extremely decentralized and highly politicized organization – and none of these traits have served to promote its capacity to institutionalize learning. Perhaps most importantly, the fact that all but a few civilian staff can only ever receive short-term contracts and have had, in 2009, less than two years of experience in peace operations underscores the adverse career incentives and limited cause to identify strongly with the organization that individuals have.

Together with the cultural rift that had begun to emerge in the late 1990s, these structural and political constraints provided the backdrop for the reform efforts that began in 2000 with the so-called Brahimi report, driven by the new generation of managers who gradually came into influential headquarters jobs from the field. Their initial efforts are outlined in section 4, which draws on examples from several in-depth case studies on specific attempts at learning particular lessons in various subject areas of peace operations. After several years of focusing on the nuts and bolts of managing growth, the learning agenda took shape in 2005 as part of "Peace Operations 2010," Under-Secretary-General Jean-Marie Guéhenno's central professionalization initiative.

Section 5 depicts the "Peace Operations 2010" agenda that put learning at the center of reform efforts, again with illustrations from our in-depth case studies on the impact of those efforts (published in full detail elsewhere). Two of the key elements of Peace Operations 2010 were a top-down guidance development effort and a bottom-up knowledge sharing toolbox, the products of which could be used as a source of feedback to inform the formulation and improvement of guidance for as long as it would take to establish an effective evaluation capacity as well. Training and evaluation, however, did not receive the same level of attention and political/financial support from member states. As a result, even the lessons that were taken up by the organization, debated, refined and formally adopted often languished for lack of effective institutionalization in practice.

Zusammenfassung

Das Forschungspapier untersucht die Bemühungen der letzten 10 Jahre, den UN-Apparat für Friedenseinsätze in eine "lernende Organisation" zu verwandeln. Als Ausgangspunkt für diesen Prozess analysiert Kapitel 2 die traditionelle Organisationskultur der VN-Friedenseinsätze. Unter den Bedingungen der Friedenssicherung während des Kalten Krieges entstand eine Organisationskultur, die ein Maximum politischer Flexibilität auch auf Kosten der Professionalisierung von Führung und Verwaltung zu sichern suchte. Als eine Folge des katastrophalen Versagens der VN gegenüber dem Völkermord in Ruanda und Srebenica begann eine jüngere Generation von Mitarbeitern, diese traditionelle Kultur herauszufordern. Diese „Reformer" wollen Ziele wie Selbstkritik und Organisationslernen stärker verankern, während die „Traditionalisten" versuchten, die Organisation vor über-mäßiger bürokratischer Standardisierung zu schützen.

Kapitel 3 zeigt die strukturellen und politischen Grenzen auf, der die Reforminitiative im Hinblick auf die institutionelle Lernfähigkeit der VN-Friedenssicherungsbürokratie gegen-über stand. Die VN-Friedenssicherungsbürokratie ist eine fragile, extrem dezentralisierte und höchst politisierte Organisation – und keine dieser Eigenschaften war hilfreich bei der Entwicklung ihrer Lernfähigkeit. Die Tatsache dass zivile Mitarbeiter nur auf Kurzzeitbasis angestellt werden und z.B. 2009 im Schnitt weniger als zwei Jahre Erfahrung in Friedens-einsätzen hatten unterstreicht die problematischen Anreizstrukturen und die mangelnden Grundlagen zur dauerhaften Identifikation des Einzelnen mit der Organisation.

Der kulturelle Konflikt seit Ende der 1990er Jahre und diese strukturellen und politischen Hindernisse bildeten den Kontext für die Reforminitiative der 2000er Jahre. Diese begann mit dem sog. Brahimi-Bericht 2000 und wurde von hauptsächlich jüngeren Mitarbeitern vorangetrieben, die aus dem Feld in einflussreiche Positionen im Hauptquartier gelangten. Ihre ersten Schritte werden in Kapitel 4 skizziert, mit Beispielen aus einigen detaillierten Fallstudien über konkrete Lernprozesse. Für die ersten Jahre stand die Bewältigung des enormen Wachstums der Friedenseinsätze im Vordergrund. Erst 2005 begann die Lerna-genda als Teil von „Peace Operations 2010", der Professionalisierungsinitiative von Unter-generalsekretär Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Form anzunehmen.

Kapitel 5 beschreibt die Initiative „Peace Operations 2010", die das Thema Lernen in den Mittelpunkt stellte. Dazu dienen wieder Beispiele aus unseren Fallstudien (die in vollem Umfang an anderem Ort veröffentlicht wurden). Zwei der Kernelemente der Initiative waren die Einführung zentralisierter Doktrinentwicklung und dezentralisierten Wissensaustauschs durch eine Reihe von Instrumenten, deren Ergebnisse auch als Feedbackmechanismus für Doktrinentwicklung bis zur Entwicklung effektiver Evaluierungsprozesse dienen konnten. Ausbildung und Evaluierung gerieten dabei ins Hintertreffen, sowohl intern als auch von seiten der politischen und finanziellen Aufmerksamkeit der Mitgliedsstaaten. Daher wurden auch die Lehren, die die Organisation aufnahm, diskutierte, verbesserte und letztlich an-nahm, in der Praxis nicht umgesetzt.

1.   Introduction

Peace operations conducted by the United Nations have grown tremendously over the past decade. Fielding more than 120,000 soldiers, police officers and civilian officials in about 15 missions across the globe, peacekeepers and peacebuilders under the blue flag operate on a scale that is second only to the United States military in terms of worldwide deployment. The UN peace operations apparatus is also a fragile, decentralized and highly politicized bureaucracy, where fluid field operations are managed by comparatively small headquarters in New York. At the center of this "peace operations bureaucracy" are the twin Departments of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Field Support (DFS) in the UN Secretariat.[1] Unlike many bureaucracies, the peace operations apparatus has little control over the careers of most of its members, including the most senior managers of its far-flung operations in hotspots around the world. At the same time, the UN Secretariat is a bureaucracy that is regularly being criticized as excessively slow, inefficient and inflexible.

To examine organizational learning in this context may seem to hold very little promise except to provide ample evidence of bureaucratic obstacles and political sabotage. These expectations are only partially confirmed by our in-depth study of twelve organizational learning processes over the past decade.[2] In fact, we find that the institutional context that enables or constrains opportunities for organizational learning has evolved considerably. In 1999, when the UN first deployed its missions to Kosovo and East Timor with mandates to set up transitional administrations that were unprecedented in their scope and ambition, its staff had nowhere to turn for guidance. From Sergio Vieira de Mello, the first head of mission in Kosovo, to the junior officials tasked with setting up political institutions, running elections or reintegrating militia members into civilian life, thousands of often ad-hoc hires were faced with gargantuan tasks and given little in the way of doctrine to turn to. In contrast, today's UN peacebuilders have at least a small but growing library of fundamental doctrine, hands-on guidance and analytical summaries of previous experience. They are invited to exchange ideas in on-line communities of practice with their peers in other missions. Mid-level managers in the field have the opportunity to meet their peers at occasional workshops and provide feedback to doctrine and guidance developers at headquarters.

This is the result of the evolution the infrastructure for learning in the UN peace operations bureaucracy that this paper traces over the past decade. Following the failure to institutionalize learning support in the 1990s,[3] the Brahimi Report sparked a comprehensive reform effort within the Secretariat with the goal of building an effective learning infrastructure and, ultimately, transforming the peace operations apparatus into a learning organization. In March 2000, when Secretary-General Kofi Annan commissioned the former Algerian

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1   Before 2008, the peace operations bureaucracy was managed by DPKO. DPKO was then split into two departments, with the administrative and support part of the department being spun of as the new Department of Field Support (DFS). DFS remains in many ways integrated with DPKO's operations, however. The "peace operations bureaucracy" is a fragmented organization that consists of the field missions themselves as well as various departments and agencies involved in strategic and support roles. The core of the peace operations bureaucracy is the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in the UN Secretariat. The department assists the Secretary-General and the intergovernmental bodies such as the Security Council, the General Assembly and their various committees and working groups in their policy-making roles. DPKO is also the key bureaucratic actor (and some areas the only one) to plan, equip, deploy, supply and control each of the 15-18 peace operations deployed globally at any one time during this decade. At the same time, many of the tasks of modern peace operations require the collaboration with many other departments and agencies within the UN system and beyond, and the need to coordinate with these actors has been an increasingly critical task for DPKO.

2   We report the results of this larger study of organizational learning in the UN peace operations bureaucracy in Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011).

3   Howard (2008), Benner and Rotmann (2008).

foreign minister and long-time UN diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi to chair a panel on UN peace operations, he sought to address the huge challenges that the organization faced as it emerged from the major crises of the previous years. Three major trends defined the context for UN peace operations for which the organization was not adequately prepared. First, the renewed willingness of world powers to deploy blue helmets threatened to overwhelm the political leadership, management and support capacity of the Secretariat. Second, the organization began to react to the dilemmas posed by its traditional principle of "non-use of force except in self-defense" by reconsidering its doctrine and rules of engagement. Third, UN peace operations were increasingly tasked to build or rebuild institutions – a task much more fraught with political and practical pitfalls than the traditional military-diplomatic role that blue helmets had served over many decades.[4]

Taken together, the trends of rapid growth, changing notions on the use of force and the new task of institution-building defined the learning challenge for peace operations in the 21st century. Having to face all these challenges at the same time had a contradictory effect on the Secretariat. On the one hand, the three-fold pressures provided ample evidence of the need for building a professional organization with a strong learning infrastructure to match these challenges. On the other hand, they also brought many urgent operational priorities with them that laid claims on resources, time and attention to the detriment of longer-term institutional investments.

It was against this backdrop that Secretary-General Kofi Annan commissioned the Brahimi Report. Its analysis and the political reform process that it sparked aimed to professionalize peace operations in order to meet the new challenges. The panelists minced no words when calling the UN to task for their failure to effectively support learning: "lessons learned in Headquarters practice are not routinely captured, (…) comprehensive training programmes for new arrivals are non-existent and (…) user-friendly manuals and standard operating procedures remain half-complete."[5] While "all are agreed on the need to exploit cumulating field experience … not enough has been done to improve the system's ability to tap that experience or to feed it back into the development of operational doctrine, plans, procedures or mandates."[6]

These assessments, like many others throughout the report, were unusually candid by UN standards. Because the document had the backing of an eminent panel and chairman as well as the strong support of the Secretary-General himself and of key Security Council members, it provided a rare political opening for the Secretariat to push for far-reaching change. Reformers within the peace operations community, led by Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the incoming head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, gathered under the banner of the Brahimi Report and made its analysis and the spirit of its recommendations their guiding paradigm.

The daunting challenges borne out of the rapid growth of peace operations, their increasingly frequent deployment into complex civil wars and the growing need for peacebuilding had already cast their shadows in the various crises of 1999/2000, when the UN had struggled to man and equip four new missions on three continents, to reinforce the struggling operation in Sierra Leone against the repeated challenges from armed spoilers, and to provide political and practical guidance for the many new tasks that the Security Council had given to the new transitional administration missions in Kosovo and East Timor. The capacity of the system to withstand these pressures had again become overtaxed. As a result, the reformers were convinced that another disaster on the scale of Rwanda or Sre-

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4   For a more detailed explanation of these three defining trends, see Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011: 14-26).
5   United Nations (2000: 37).
6   United Nations (2000: 39).

brenica was only a matter of time if the UN would keep doing business as usual. The only way to avoid this fate was to finally undertake substantive reforms in terms of doctrine, funding, management and culture. The establishment of an effective learning infrastructure was at the heart of this reform agenda that grew out of the Brahimi Report, was championed by Guéhenno and driven by a cohort of younger managers whose formative experience of peacekeeping had been in the field during the existential crises of the 1990s. Their efforts faced significant obstacles in both the cultural and the structural DNA of the organization. Implementing reforms to promote learning was a fundamental political challenge – it meant going against and changing some of the core tenets of the entrenched organizational culture of the UN peace operations apparatus. Indeed, for the Brahimi Report and the decade-long effort that was launched under its name, overcoming these internal obstacles was a goal in its own right, in addition to rallying member states in support of an increased budget and more responsible Security Council mandates.[7]

This study is part of a broader research project on organizational learning in the UN peace operations bureaucracy in the decade after the Brahimi report. The present paper focuses on the "macro story" of institutional evolution, drawing only occasionally on the findings of our in-depth case studies of individual attempts to learn in field mission and on particular practical challenges. The full case studies are part of a recently published book.[8] Building on the literature surrounding international organizations, organizational learning and peace operations, our research makes a contribution to opening up the black box of international organizations as bureaucracies. The definition of organizational learning at the center of our study is based on the premises that (a) learning at the group level is possible as a social process distinct from (but dependent on) individual learning, and that (b) the analysis of learning does not require the analyst to make a normative judgment about the accuracy or value of each lesson. Drawing on the management literature and linking it back to some of the classics from Max Weber to the debate on bureaucracies in the 1960s, we take key insights on the nature of bureaucracies from the classical sociology of organizations (such as, for example, the salience of rules) with the seminal work of Ernst Haas on learning in international organizations (directing our attention to the importance of knowledge). Combining the emphasis on rules and knowledge, we define organizational learning as a knowledge-based process of questioning and changing organizational rules to change organizational practice. To analyze the process dimension of learning, we use the common heuristic of a policy cycle. We consider a learning process successful only if the full cycle of knowledge acquisition at the level of a small group proposing a lesson, advocacy toward the lesson's formal adoption by the organization and institutionalization not just into formal doctrine but into practice is completed.[9]

The starting point for understanding the evolution of the peace operations bureaucracy in terms of its institutional learning capacity lies in the traditional organizational culture of peacekeeping, which is the subject of section 2 of this paper. We identify a "traditional" interpretive frame that came in conflict with a "reformist" frame as a new cohort of peace operations officials began to put the Brahimi agenda into practice. Section 3 details the structural and political constraints to learning that the professionalization agenda had to deal with in the beginning (as outlined in section 4, which draws on examples from our in-depth case studies). Section 5 depicts the "Peace Operations 2010" agenda that put learning at the center of reform efforts, again with illustrations from the larger case studies on the impact of those efforts. Section 6 concludes the paper and offers policy recommendations.

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7   Ahmed, Keating and Solinas (2007), Durch (2004).
8   Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011).
9   For a detailed introduction to our theoretical and analytical approach, see Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011: 7-10, 51-65).

2. The traditional organizational culture of UN peace-keeping and the reformist challenge

The Brahimi reform agenda challenged the core of the entrenched organizational culture of peacekeeping that had developed over a half century of institutional history. It is based on a traditionalist interpretative frame that views UN peace operations as a feeble endeavor deprived of necessary resources and political support to implement its mandate with any degree of professionalism. As a result, peacekeepers saw themselves forced to operate in a climate of constant crisis in which they had "always been very good at taking experience and knowledge and expanding it into another field, learning to do things on the fly."[10] On the flip side of the same coin, critical introspection and any kind of standard operating procedures became to be seen as a threat rather than an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of their work. Maintaining whatever precious political room for maneuver had been left by member states was the highest priority, and self-criticism (which could be used as ammunition by outside detractors of the UN) and standard procedures (which may limit senior officials' leeway to take decisions as required) were a threat. Based on such a frame, the organization produced cultural norms that prized political flexibility or, in the words of one long-time senior official, "constructive ambiguity" and disregarded efforts to openly discuss previous failures in order to draw lessons or develop standardized doctrine to mainstream such lessons into future practice.[11]

The roots of the traditional culture of peacekeeping reach back to the early days of the United Nations. In May 1948, when the Security Council asked the Secretariat to set up the very first peacekeeping operation, the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) for Palestine, there was neither precedent nor experience on how to put the idea of a neutral UN presence in a war-torn area into practice. The task of planning its deployment, defining a doctrine, recruiting staff, finding accommodation and office space, establishing a radio network and a myriad of other vital issues fell on the American UN official Ralph Bunche, then the principal aide to the UN mediator for Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden. With a tiny staff of his own, Bunche put together the practical foundations of the mission while the actual observers, drawn from a carefully balanced mix of nations, were slowly arriving throughout the summer.[12]

Eight years later, when the UN fielded its first armed peacekeeping force in response to the Suez crisis, Bunche had become one of two Under-Secretaries-General for Special Political Affairs in the Secretary-General's office in New York. His special assistant at the time, Brian Urquhart, was the only staff member who had any military experience, and was therefore put in charge of the hastily assembled working group to set up the UN Emergency Force (UNEF). In his words, the ad-hoc culture of UN peacekeeping in the 1950s comes vividly to life:

> The process of setting up UNEF took place in Bunche's conference room on the thirty-eighth floor and proceeded more or less around the clock as the situation demanded. (…) Innumerable problems, great and small, had to be resolved urgently, mostly by improvisation. (…) The problem of uniforms and identification was quite literally vital, since some of the UN troops wore British-style uniforms [with Britain a party to the conflict]. What was needed was distinctive headgear for a distant sniper to recognize. A UN-blue beret seemed to be the answer, but it

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10 Interview with a long-standing senior DPKO official, 2009.
11 Interview with another long-standing senior DPKO official, 2009.
12 Urquhart (1998 [1993]: 161).

was impossible to procure enough berets in time. American plastic helmet-liners, however, were available in quantity in Europe, and were ready, spray-painted UN blue, in time for the first UNEF detachments to wear on their entry into Egypt. Identity cards in four languages had to be formulated (…). Tent stoves were another problem (…). The nights and days passed quickly in dealing with a hundred similar details.[13]

As UNEF settled down into a more orderly routine within a year and a half, UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld ordered an eight-months project, immense in light of the few resources available, to put together a "manual," in Hammarskjöld's words, to "provide fundamental guidance for any future plans or efforts relating to a United Nations force."[14] In the years to come, however, setting up each new operation would be the same political, operational, logistical, and force generation scramble all over again. Urquhart's description of ONUC, the vast and tragic operation in the Congo established in 1960, captures best the dilemma that came to define the organizational culture of peacekeeping for over half a century:

There were seldom any simple answers even to the smallest problems. Later on, some critics derided our efforts as amateurish or disorganized, but neither rules, nor precedents nor organization existed for a situation like the Congo in 1960. Under Bunche's leadership ONUC had, for the most part, to improvise as it went along. Bunche's insistence on personally controlling and checking all the activities of ONUC was also criticized later. To those of us on the spot this seemed the only sensible way of managing a vast emergency enterprise put together in a hurry, where many of the staff were new and untried, and where a single mistake could, and often did, have massive repercussions.[15]

The political and organizational pressures of the early years therefore created a culture of ad-hoc decision-making in a climate of constant crisis. Staff and resources were scarce, and the political wiggle room between the crushing might of the great powers was in most instances very small. As a result, the operating style of the "founding fathers" of peacekeeping exemplified and prized a reliance on personal relationships instead of formal, depersonalized reporting chains, case-by-case considerations instead of general templates and preserving "constructive ambiguity" whenever instructions, mandates or budgetary regulations were put on paper, in order to maximize whatever political room for maneuver remained available to the UN.

Over time, the frame of a crisis-driven mode of operation solidified and formed the core of the organizational culture of peacekeeping. At headquarters, the tiny staff in the Office of Special Political Affairs had its plate full with the whole peace and security portfolio, including preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. Other departments provided the necessary administrative and logistical support for field operations. Upon Bunche's death in 1971, Urquhart succeeded him in the post of Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs in charge of peace and security. When Urquhart retired in 1985, the British diplomat Marrack Goulding became the first peacekeeping chief who had not been among the founders of the UN Secretariat in 1945. Goulding inherited a political team of seven and an even smaller military staff – effectively, an office no different in size and structure

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13 Urquhart (1998 [1993]: 268-269).
14 Dag Hammarsköld, quoted in Urquhart (1998 [1993]: 289).
15 Urquhart (1998 [1993]: 319-320).

than the one with which Ralph Bunche and Brian Urquhart had set up the first peacekeeping operation 37 years before.[16]

With the end of the Cold War, UN peacekeeping saw a sudden surge in demand. Between 1989 and 1991, the Security Council mandated eight new peace operations, among them two large and unprecedentedly ambitious missions to oversee Namibia's transition to independence and to implement a settlement to the civil war in Cambodia. In February 1992, the new Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali established the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), initially with Goulding in charge. Hundreds of new temporary posts were created in various Secretariat departments to help carry the rapidly increased burden of supporting peace operations. To fill the few dozen additional political and leadership posts in the new department, the UN drew on a mixture of civilians (mostly diplomats) seconded by their governments, retired military officers and regular Secretariat staff. Some of these officials were just returning from field assignments in Namibia or Cambodia, while many others came straight from their capital or their most recent diplomatic assignment with little experience in peacekeeping. Many in this generation went on to play major roles in the UN throughout the 1990s and beyond, including Iqbal Riza, later to become Kofi Annan's Chief of Staff, Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information and a one-time contender to succeed Kofi Annan as UN Secretary-General, Hédi Annabi, the second-in-command at DPKO between 1997-2007 who was often called "DPKO's living institutional memory" and who tragically died in the earthquake on 12 January 2010 in Haiti, and Dmitry Titov, who defused many crises as director of the Africa division in Annabi's Office of Operations and took over the new rule of law office in 2007.

Thrown into the furious pace of the peace operations machinery, struggling to raise troops and staff to feed another fivefold increase in uniformed peacekeepers and the twofold increase in missions in a twelve-month period between 1992 and 1993, the newcomers easily absorbed and reproduced the organizational culture of constant improvisation that the "founding fathers" of peacekeeping had created so many years before. In fact, they had little choice in the matter: because of the persistent refusal of member states to fund a more robust headquarters capacity to direct and support the slowly growing list of peace operations, there were no resources to develop a more professional organization to undertake conflict analysis for the support of strategic planning and crisis decision-making.[17] As a result, the culture of improvisation, muddling-through and management of the moment was in many ways a logical consequence of the external constraints placed upon the peace operations bureaucracy. It was not perfect, however, even by the standards of its own proponents. Luiz Carlos da Costa, another long-time senior official who also died in the 2010 Haiti earthquake, argued in an interview in 2009 that in retrospect, DPKO's excessive cultural self-confidence made it also miss many opportunities to partner with other organizations before institutional rivalries could erupt. Nonetheless, the traditional culture of peacekeeping clearly worked in holding the place together through a series of crises throughout the Cold War, as long as the number and scope of missions were limited.

With the number and scope of operations rapidly increasing after the end of the Cold War, the drawbacks of this organizational culture that resisted building a professional and self-critical organization slowly became apparent. In March 1993, when Kofi Annan took over the peacekeeping department, DPKO "still operated in an atmosphere of chaos," as one of Annan's biographers observed.[18] About 50 staffers directed and supported operations comprising 80,000 blue helmets across the globe with the assistance of little more than a

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16   Goulding (2002: 27-28).
17   Kühne (1999), Malone and Thakur (2001).
18   Meisler (2007: 67).

hundred logisticians and administrators dealing with finance and personnel. In the first eighteen months of Annan's tenure, DPKO grew to about 400 staff including the merger with the unit that covered finance, personnel and logistics support as well as large numbers of temporary hires and loaned personnel from various governments. However, following the withdrawal of American troops from Somalia and the disillusionment with UN peacekeeping in the U.S. Congress, the sensible build-up of organizational capacity suddenly stopped. Despite the continuously rising operational demands placed on the organization by the Security Council, particularly in the Balkans, the financial masters of the UN failed to invest in its organizational capacity to deliver.

This left Annan little budgetary room for maneuver to implement his ambitious agenda. As a first step toward professionalizing the peace operations apparatus, he created a situation center to keep in touch around the clock with increasingly risky situations on the ground.[19] Beginning in 1993, the senior leadership of DPKO also began to establish the organization's first Lessons Learned Unit. Despite strong support from internal oversight bodies, troop-contributing countries and the General Assembly at large, it took Annan until April 1995 to create a unit of two: a head of unit and one research assistant.[20] Under the prevailing organizational culture at DPKO, the approach to learning and introspection remained fundamentally defensive. For senior officials, who prized political flexibility and ad-hoc improvisation above all and who were reflexively opposed to standard operating procedures on substantive matters of policy implementation, the absolute need to maintain internal coherence and "constructive ambiguity" for the future severely constrained the effectiveness of "learning lessons." Learning was confined to the level of individuals and small groups behind closed doors, where it became a luxury that often took second place after the demands of constant crisis management.

Like in many tight-knit social systems put under persistent pressure, the constant perception of urgency and crisis fostered defensiveness against outside "interference" and internal deviance or criticism, promoted groupthink and stymied open discussion and learning.[21] In one telling example, Jarat Chopra, a young participant to a series of conferences held in 1995 to review the earlier UN operations in Somalia recalls:

> Hard lessons cannot be learned politely, yet the same diplomatic approach that failed to respond to the social and political environment in Somalia failed to yield lessons at the meetings. (…) [Even] limited proposals were marginalized. If knowledge is power, in the U.N. knowledge is dangerous and officials [are] secretive, which is organizationally suicidal. By far the majority of 'lessons' were banal conclusions that have been known for decades, such as the need for clearer mandates and more resources. Despite calls for frank discussions, a diplomatic environment prevented cool analysis; what is acceptable to say may not be useful to know. Self-criticism in sessions was transformed formally into self-justification as a whole.[22]

Chopra's observations are just one illustration of the general reaction of the traditionalists when the majority of world opinion turned against the UN following its failure to mobilize and lead an effective response to the genocides in Rwanda in 1994 and in Srebrenica in 1995. Most of the more senior officials defended themselves and the institution by pointing to the responsibility of member state governments: "the responsibility lay with member

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19   Meisler (2007: 71).
20   We have explained the genesis and effective paralysis of DPKO's Lessons Learned Unit in the 1990s at greater length in Benner and Rotmann (2008: 45-46).
21   Hermann (1963), Janowitz (1959).
22   Chopra (1995).

states, but the blame fell on the Secretariat," as one former senior DPKO official argued in an interview in May 2009.

The consequences were drastic: the "lull" in peace operations between 1995 and 1998 resulted in huge financial pressure on DPKO, which lost 27% of its professional staff. But in the view of these senior officials, the UN as an organization had worked as well as could be expected under the circumstances. It was the member states that had created the circumstances, in particular those dominating the Security Council and holding the purse strings. They had deprived the organization of credibility and resources by withdrawing their blue helmets at the first sign of trouble in Rwanda and limiting their rules of engagement to fit an unrealistic fantasy of peacekeeping while organized, premeditated violence was unfolding. Ultimately, in this view, member states had failed the UN and their own lofty pronouncements of "humanitarian intervention" when they had sent lightly armed and defensively mandated peacekeepers into a war zone in the first place. In comparison to such grave political and ethical failings on the part of politicians in world capitals, whatever might have gone wrong within the UN bureaucracy was hardly more than a glitch.

The Reformist Challenge to Organizational Culture

In the mid-1990s, a new generation of civilian managers joined the peace operations community. Spending their formative years with the United Nations on the ground, mainly in the large missions in the Balkans, many of these younger officials experienced the traditional organizational culture of peace operations as dysfunctional and dangerous. Watching the crises of Rwanda and Srebrenica unfold, they took issue with the instinctively defensive response of their superiors in the field and the peacekeeping establishment in New York. From their perspective, as accurate and necessary as it was to criticize key member state governments, the UN as an organization should not be allowed to hide behind diplomats and policy-makers in Western capitals to avoid critical introspection. Aside from the failures of high politics and the personal responsibility of senior decision-makers, they found the organizational culture of peace operations at fault as well. In their view, the culture that had emerged from forty years of directing and supporting traditional peacekeeping during the Cold War was inadequate for the scale and scope of modern peace operations. In the different context of robust peacekeeping or peace enforcement in complex civil wars, these shortcomings of analysis, information-sharing, excessively cautious decision-making and anticipatory obedience to member states that were rooted in the traditional culture had contributed to the UN's share of failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica.

As a result of widespread internal dissent along these lines, a split emerged in the hitherto monolithic organizational culture of peacekeeping. A new, competing interpretative frame held the traditional culture partly responsible for the political and managerial shortcomings in responding to the situations in Rwanda and Srebrenica. From this perspective, a more professional culture based on open self-assessments, common standards and organizational learning would be required to avoid the repetition of these failures in the future.

This clash of interpretations first played out over the suggestion of an internal inquiry into the UN's actions during the crises. In 1996, the Jordanian diplomat Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid al-Hussein became the Deputy Permanent Representative of his country to the United Nations in New York. He had spent the preceding years as a Political Officer with the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia, where he had been deeply affected by the events in Srebrenica. When he floated the idea to conduct a thorough investigation to be conducted by the Secretariat itself, senior officials in DPKO reacted defensively. "The Secretariat had no wish to expose its dirty laundry," as a close observer of the UN in the Annan years

described it.[23] Using his newly acquired leverage on the diplomatic stage, Zeid rallied the ambassadors of Bosnia and Croatia to create public pressure on the Secretariat until the General Assembly commissioned "a comprehensive report, including an assessment" of the UN's reaction to the events in Bosnia.[24]

Annan agreed to conduct an unusually candid investigation that would not shy away from institutional self-criticism and asked his Chief of Staff, Iqbal Riza, to supervise the process. Riza delegated the research and writing of the report to two young political officers who had served in the Balkans, David Harland and Salman Ahmed. Riza, Harland and Ahmed all supported the need to expose the failures as a means to create pressure for organizational change. Therefore, Harland and Ahmed conducted a detailed investigation over six months and wrote a report that, while "unsparing on the member states who shaped the policy," was "no less harsh on the UN professionals who carried it out."[25] Cast in the voice of the Secretary-General himself, the report minced no words in its conclusion: "Through error, misjudgment and an inability to recognize the scope of evil confronting us, we failed to do our part to help save the people of Srebrenica from the Serb campaign of mass murder."[26] By not using military force to stop the impending violence against Bosnian Muslim civilians in Srebrenica, the report blamed "the management of UNPROFOR" for failing to "adapt mandates to the reality on the ground,"[27] a lapse that was, in Traub's words, "a matter less of shortsightedness than of institutional culture and entrenched principles."[28] Ultimately, "the report suggested that these failures had their origin in the culture and collective psychology of the Secretariat, which had come to see itself as a bulwark against the 'culture of death' – a phrase used by Boutros-Ghali – that it could not accept the imperative to use force."[29]

As a direct challenge to the prevailing organizational culture, Harland's and Ahmed's draft got a frosty reception with DPKO senior management. Many officials "objected, sometimes furiously, both to assertions of specific actions and to the report's broader moral claims about the failed doctrine of neutrality."[30] Amid "fierce line-by-line arguments" with senior DPKO officials, Riza and Assistant-Secretary-General John Ruggie had to protect the two authors "from the wrath of their seniors" to preserve the draft's candor (ibid.). In the words of another close UN observer, the report's "sheer thoroughness and (…) its readiness to present facts in an unvarnished form even though they might be disturbing and uncomfortable for the organization (…) rather forced the hand of the UN senior management with respect to the question of just how far to go in terms of airing the linens of self-criticism in public."[31]

The 1999 Srebrenica report marked a turning point in terms of self-criticism. A month later, it was followed by the report of an independent panel on the Rwandan genocide that Annan had commissioned as well.[32] Together with a third report on the failure of the UN sanctions regime against Angola and ultimately the Brahimi Report itself, otherwise critical observers now found the organization to be "less interested in ducking blame and covering itself from attack than it is in improving performance."[33]

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23 Traub (2006: 125).
24 UN General Assembly (1998).
25 Traub (2006: 54).
26 UN Secretary-General (1998: 108).
27 UN Secretary-General (1998: 108).
28 Traub (2006: 54).
29 Traub (2006: 126).
30 Traub (2006: 127).
31 Berdal (2001: 46).
32 UN Security Council (1999).
33 Malone and Thakur (2001: 11).

It was by no means assured that this would lead to a lasting and self-sustaining process of cultural transformation of the peace operations apparatus. For the time being, however, the series of self-critical reports, chiefly that of the Brahimi Panel, provided the new reformist generation with considerable momentum. Under the new leadership of Jean-Marie Guéhenno, they aimed for nothing less than a wholesale transformation of the organization's culture: only by acknowledging mistakes – at least internally – would the organization be able to learn, and only in a more professional bureaucratic culture based on doctrine derived from the best available knowledge and constantly evaluated in practice would it be able to meet the ambitious expectations for peace operations set in Security Council mandates.

However, this transformation toward a learning organization did not come easily and proved to be a constant struggle for most of the decade following the publication of the Brahimi Report. The gradual shift toward a more professional organizational culture was only one part of that struggle. Equally important and even more persistent were the structural and political constraints, most of them at least partly beyond the control of the Secretariat, that hampered peace operations generally and the evolution of its learning capacity in particular.

# 3. Structural and Political Constraints to Learning

The longstanding institutional deprivation of peacekeeping combined with the growing complexity of post-Cold War missions mandated to combine traditional and "robust" peace operations with humanitarian assistance and elements of development cooperation has given rise to a number of structural features that often have dysfunctional effects.

The peace operations bureaucracy is a fragile, extremely decentralized and highly politicized organization. It is fragile in part because of extreme turnover – on average, civilian staff stay for less than four years while military and police personnel are generally on 6-12 month deployments. Weak bonds between the individual and the organization further contribute to this fragility. Soldiers and police officers owe their primary allegiance to their home country and naturally view a stint with the United Nations as nothing more than a temporary assignment. Civilians, almost all of whom are kept on short-term contracts of a year or less, might be more willing to identify with peacekeeping but the insecurity of their jobs forces them to always keep looking for another position. As a result, outside a small group of career UN officials in New York, the lack of a career structure limits the positive incentives the organization can put into place while implicitly penalizing any contribution to the common stock of knowledge. After all, from the point of view of an individual, each piece of knowledge or experience, if kept private, could be the ticket to their next job. Even worse, and beyond the politicization of appointments, the extent of global economic inequality makes it impossible to balance material incentives sufficiently to ensure high competence across the board.

The peace operations bureaucracy is also highly decentralized, both geographically and among different agencies. 99% of its personnel are deployed in the field, and field missions enjoy a high degree of political autonomy while being stuck in a regulatory straightjacket in matters of administration and procurement. Beyond the sheer geographical distance and time difference between New York and most mission areas and the lack of resources at headquarters, the way Security Council mandates arise from often difficult diplomatic compromises often allows key elements of strategy to be defined only in the vaguest of terms. As an unintended consequence, senior officials are required by events to fill the gaps in strategic guidance by taking decisions with strategic implications in a piecemeal fashion without being authorized and resourced to articulate a strategic plan. As a result, the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG) heading each mission enjoy wide leeway in the most consequential political decisions, as long as they do not violate the boundaries set by the great powers. Personal inclinations and personalities often make a huge difference in what priorities are pursued, at what pace, and in what kind of relationship to local politicians or other UN agencies. This level of space for individual leadership and experimentation creates both opportunities for learning and obstacles for the implementation of guidance and best practices.

Internally, however, the senior mission management team has direct authority only over the military contingents, police units and civilians assigned to the peace operation as such – and in case of military units, only to the extent that the troop contributing countries allow their forces to follow UN orders. In addition, member states have found ways to control what many diplomats view as an unaccountable bureaucracy by tightening the administrative screws through the budget. Responding to their pressure, the organization set up detailed standard operating procedures regulating equipment purchases, leases on building space, hiring and promotions. Taking both effects together, senior officials end up in the perverse position of enjoying ample freedom to decide key political questions of strategic importance, but very little choice in many of the mundane issues of every-day management.

Figure 1: Overstretch: mission demands and headquarters capacity, 1996-2010
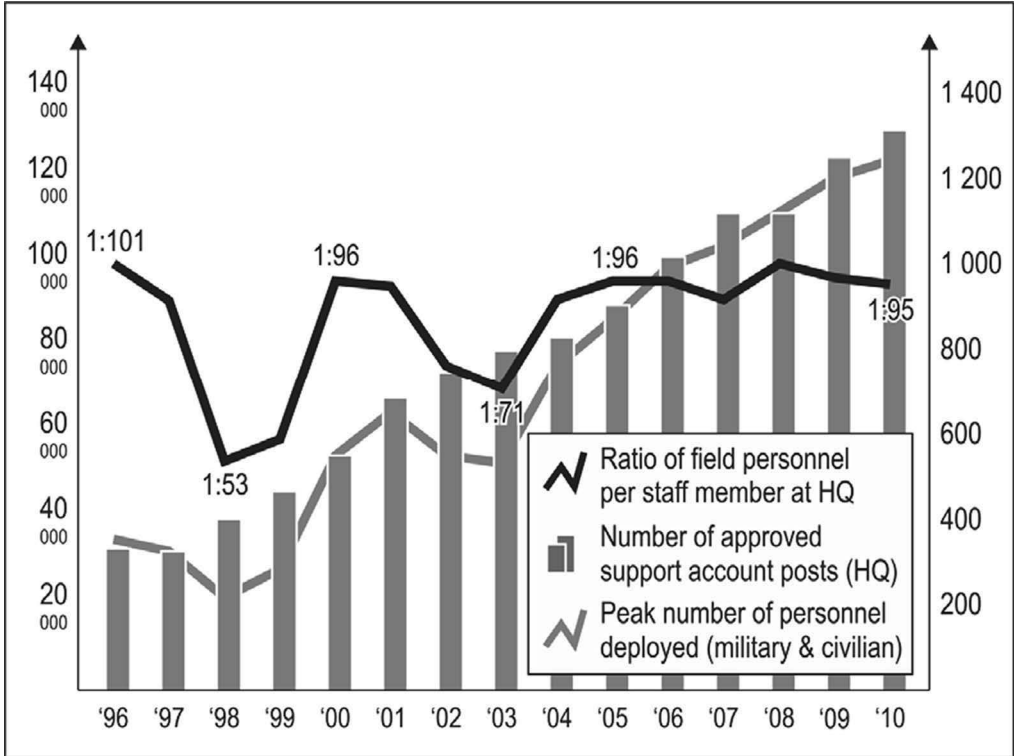
Source: own figure, based on official UN data (UN Department of Public Information, Peacekeeping Background Sheets and Contributions Sheets).

Beyond the peacekeeping mission itself, DPKO and the SRSG as the top UN representative on the ground have no effective authority at all over other UN agencies such as UNHCR, WFP, UNDP or the World Bank and their field offices (see Figure 2), despite the fact that a modern peace operation cannot implement its mandate without their support. Despite many solemn declarations in favor of "coordination" and "integration," each agency is primarily responsible to its own governing and funding body, where a particular political setup among member states drives its strategic priorities. To identify and make use of the significant overlap among those priorities requires constant inter-agency coordination both at headquarters level and in the field. This has particular relevance to day-to-day management as well as organizational learning with regard to the peacebuilding challenge, where almost every UN task or function has to be performed in concert with agencies other than DPKO or a peace operation itself. Rarely are peacekeepers the ones with the most experience within the UN system on these issues, and in many cases such as the reintegration of former combatants into society, DPKO does not even have the status of a "lead agency" and is just one of the players at the table – and certainly not the one with the deepest pockets, as soon as the immediate deployment phase is over and development agencies and the World Bank have adjusted their programs.

More recently, an upside has emerged to this fragmentation of responsibilities among the UN system as more and more departments and agencies began to develop their own learning infrastructures, as well. Among the first were UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (even slightly before DPKO), the Secretariat's Peacebuilding Support Office and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). After some initial competition in cases of

overlap such as a big study on integrated missions that the humanitarian office had commissioned without DPKO involvement in 2005, the waves have calmed and collaborative learning and guidance development became possible when certain conditions were met.[34]

Figure 2: The Peace Operations Bureaucracy in Context: intergovernmental bodies and key organizations at headquarters and field level
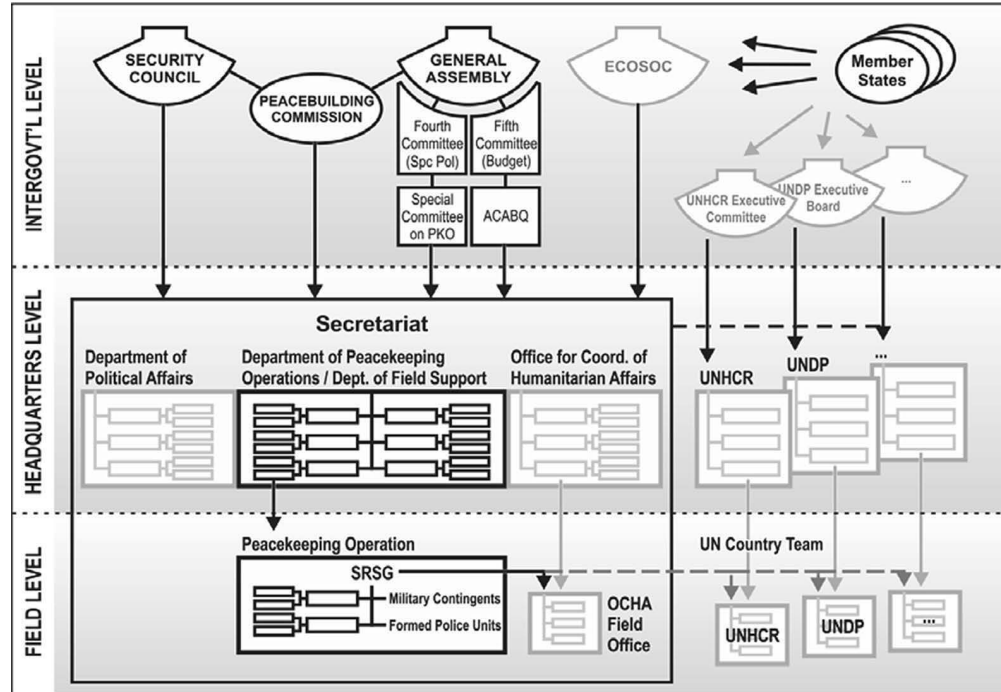
Source: own figure, based on several official UN organizational charts.

Finally, the peace operations bureaucracy is heavily politicized. Member states, particularly the powerful permanent members of the Security Council, tend to navigate the bureaucratic maze of UN agencies, Secretariat departments and field missions by politicizing senior appointments and using their budgetary levers to micromanage managerial decisions. In the 1990s, when the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of peace operations as a whole became a partisan political issue in the United States and a political wedge in North-South politics at the UN as a whole, political micromanagement began to extend far beyond the major political questions of each agency or mission and deeply into the operational details of implementation. As a result, member state diplomats in New York are now spending their time each year critically evaluating every single job paid for through the peacekeeping budget, every major equipment purchase, travel expense or consultant fee. In effect, some of the permanent members of the Security Council are using these line-by-line budget negotiations to exert political control over a bureaucracy they regard as insufficiently accountable and unresponsive to their legitimate demands, while nonmembers are wielding the red pen to compensate for their lack of influence on the Security Council. The result are staggering costs in terms of time and attention on both sides, and a tragic loss of flexibility on the part of managers that constrains their ability to enact internal organizational reforms, build up an effective learning infrastructure and implement any lessons that require institutional changes.

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34   For detailed case studies of organizational learning, see Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011).

4.   The Beginnings of Professionalization

Together with the emerging cultural rift of the late 1990s, these structural and political con-
straints provided the backdrop for the reform efforts that began in 2000, driven by the new
generation of managers who gradually came into influential headquarters jobs from the
field.[35] This cohort assembled around the new Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping
Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno. In October 2000, the French scholar-diplomat whose
career spanned analytical and managerial assignments across the foreign affairs and de-
fense communities was given the daunting task of leading more than a dozen peace oper-
ations around the world while fundamentally rebuilding his headquarters at the same time.
Guéhenno inherited a department all but overwhelmed with the operational requirements
of five start-up operations in desperate need of staff, equipment and guidance, one of
which (UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone, in May 2000) had just suffered an almost fatal crisis.

Fresh from a series of field visits throughout the summer that had taken him to Sierra Leo-
ne, Bosnia and Kosovo, Guéhenno arrived in New York determined not to leave the long-
er-term challenge of institution-building by the wayside. He was convinced that the chal-
lenges borne out of the rapid growth of peace operations, their increasingly frequent de-
ployment into complex civil wars and the growing need for peacebuilding urgently required
developing a professional organization for peace operations, even if the incentive structure
in the Secretariat – being much closer to the diplomatic circuit than to the field – would
make it hard to remake DPKO into a "good support system" for field operations. The stakes
were simply too high to repeat the mistake of the mid-1990s, when the failure of Annan's
internal reforms had contributed to the catastrophic failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica. At
the post-Cold War scale of tens of thousands of troops, police and civilians in the field and
hundreds of staff at headquarters in New York, it was not realistic to hang on to the ways
of the past. Rather than relying on the genius of a few exceptionally talented pioneers to
hold things together against the weight of a dysfunctional bureaucracy, the organization
had to become sufficiently professional to allow the average qualified staff member to do a
decent job within the system.

In Guéhenno's analysis, peacekeeping also provided better opportunities for reform than
any other part of the UN system. The structure of the peace operations system as a whole
provided for a potentially large supporting coalition of financial contributors (who want their
money to be used efficiently and effectively), troop and police contributors (who want their
people to be safe and making a positive difference that reflects well on themselves) and
the recipient countries, mostly in Africa (the largest regional voting bloc, whose members
want the increased stability peacekeeping can bring). Rather than "implementing the low-
est common denominator," it should be the ambition of the international civil service to use
these opportunities and strive "to increase the scope of agreement among states in the
service of the greater good."[36]

Guéhenno joined peacekeeping at an opportune time, with the "Brahimi Bonanza" in full
swing as his deputy, Hédi Annabi, put it later. The Brahimi Report, strongly supported by
the Security Council and accepted by the General Assembly, provided positive momentum
both on the internal, cultural front – were everybody understood the huge political and
budgetary opportunity in front of them – and on the external front of member states. The
report made a formidable set of demands to member states and the bureaucracy alike.

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35   This section is based on extensive interviews with and some written accounts by most of the protagonists, conducted
       or collected between 2006 and 2009.
36   Interview with Jean-Marie Guéhenno, April 2009.

Governments were asked to choose carefully when and where to employ a peacekeeping operation and to provide support commensurate with its mandate. At the same time, the Secretariat had to become more effective in managing the missions – among other things, by establishing an effective learning infrastructure. The key parts of this infrastructure, as sketched out in the Brahimi Report, would be a "revitalized" Lessons Learned Unit, new knowledge management systems and the promotion of a learning culture within the organization.

Other than tossing out these crucial elements of a future learning infrastructure, however, the report did not provide a strategy for actually building it. The hard task of formulating and implementing such a strategy lay still ahead, and proceeded only slowly. There were three closely related reasons for this delay. First, the myriad demands of day-to-day mission management necessarily took precedence over Guéhenno's time and the resources of his overextended department. Second, the same logic of precedence applied to organizational capacity-building and reform. The units providing direct operational control and support were the first recipients of managerial attention, increased funding and new talent, while the "rear" parts of the organization had to wait their turn. Finally, the staffing needs of field operations, drawn-out budget negotiations and the cumbersome recruitment system of the UN Secretariat greatly slowed down the speed at which Guéhenno could hire more of the young managers with field experience who supported his reform agenda. One of the first of these was Salman Ahmed, the co-author of both the Srebrenica and Brahimi reports, who became Guéhenno's Special Assistant and a key figure in the implementation of reform.

As a result, it took more than two years until the reformers got around to a thorough analysis of the department's existing learning infrastructure. When they did turn their attention to this problem, they began with asking what was hindering the existing Policy Analysis and Lessons Learned Unit from acting as an effective driver gathering lessons from the field to feed into doctrine development, training and implementation on the ground, with a swift feedback mechanism to enable the constant improvement of doctrine and training. They found that most of the modest growth in the unit's capacity since 1995 had been absorbed by servicing the intergovernmental committees, such as the General Assembly's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. In as much as it had been able to work on its actual mandate, the unit had followed a reactive approach. Based on available capacity, members conducted or commissioned "lessons-learned studies" of mostly closing missions in order to capture best practices. However, the intended recipients – senior managers and mission planners in the Office of Operations – rarely found the resulting reports sufficiently timely and relevant to be useful for their work. With a maximum output of two lessons learned studies or Secretary-General's reports per year between 1997 and 2000, the Lessons Learned Unit was largely unable to make itself relevant with regard to the key challenges faced by operational managers at the time. In the words of an official report issued much later, its output in terms of useful guidance materials had been "limited, their quality uneven and their status often ambiguous, especially with regard to expectations of compliance."[37]

At this point, officials in the field rarely saw the fruit of these efforts on the parts of their headquarters in New York. To some extent, learning happened in individual missions, but if a lesson was ever transferred from one mission to another, or taken from a "sister mission" run by another international organization, it was largely by accident. The division of authority between constabulary police and military forces is a crucial case in point. In response to an incident of civil unrest on October 1, 1998 on a major overland road near Capljina in

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37   UN Secretary-General (2007: 3), Benner and Rotmann (2008).

Bosnia, the senior NATO officer on site ordered an Italian carabinieri unit against the objections of its commander to forcibly remove a group of protesters. While the military officer acted in accordance with the chain of command, the resulting escalation of violence caused a number of casualties among civilians and police officers alike and damaged both the effectiveness and legitimacy of NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR) (Perito 2004: 162–4). Subsequently, SFOR command developed the so-called Blue Box doctrine that specified command and control arrangements in joint military and police operations. In case of civil unrest, an Area of Responsibility (AoR) for police action would be established in a particular territory and for a defined period of time. Within this 'blue box,' the senior constabulary police officer would have authority not only over his own units but also over all military forces present, allowing the police to employ their nonviolent tactics to greater effectiveness. On the outside, the military would retain command and control. For NATO forces in Bosnia, the new doctrine worked well in a series of further incidents.

In Kosovo, the parallel setup of constabulary units within the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) Police and NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) with different and overlapping mandates led to a series of clashes over respective authority and roles, as well. The lack of a doctrine on joint operations was felt at various points, including the mishandling of the 2000 Mitrovica riots and the subsequent reluctance of military commanders to use the largely non-Western UN constabulary units for mistrust of their attention to human rights when required to use force against civilians. As a reaction to these experiences with civil unrest in 2000, UNMIK and KFOR quickly developed a local command and control doctrine that included setting up a Joint Operations Center and Regional Operations Centers to coordinate the respective day-to-day activities as well as flexible command arrangements based on the level of tension in each area.[38] Still, it took the persistent leadership of two successive police commissioners over three years until the agreed principles of pragmatic cooperation were put into practice in a regular manner.[39]

None of these local learning processes in the field were even so much as formally recognized at headquarters during that time. In New York, reformers were still busy putting the groundwork into place. As a first step toward a more comprehensive strategy, Guéhenno secured significant extra funding for the learning unit and put a staunch proponent of organizational reform in charge: David Harland, Ahmed's co-author in the Srebrenica investigation. Harland was able to hire almost his entire team from scratch, a rare event in the UN bureaucracy that brought another wave of young, reform-oriented analysts to headquarters. Most of the additional funds came from individual governments who wanted to support Secretariat capacity in this field, particularly the United Kingdom, Canada and Norway while a number of other European countries would pitch in on later occasions, including Germany.

With a new, expanded team, the number and analytical depth of the unit's reports increased significantly, and external consultants were hired to look into cross-cutting challenges such as coordination and mission integration. The long-running endeavor to create a Handbook on Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations was completed in 2003, and a new Knowledge Management Project was started to assemble an on-line Resource Center facilitating access to studies, reports and documents on peace operations by the UN and external sources. Harland's willingness to open up to external expertise particularly in the scholarly community was part of a larger initiative driven from Secretary-General Annan's office who successively retained high-profile academics such as Andrew Mack (1998-2001) and Michael Doyle (2001-03) as Research Directors in his Executive Office. Over

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38 Blume (2004: 97), Perito (2004: 187–234).
39 Personal communication, former senior UN police official, September 2010.

the following years, the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section (PBPS), once again re-named, issued studies and reports at a record quality and pace, in addition to its internal duties toward the intergovernmental bodies.[40]

Nonetheless, these improvements in New York still had little impact on practice and the field beyond individual missions. Again, the example of police-military cooperation and the wider question of how constabulary police units (or "formed police units," FPUs, in UN jargon) were to be utilized and behave is instructive. What little guidance existed for the use of FPUs was mostly written by entrepreneurial officers in one particular field mission for its own use. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was the first in which headquarters even defined the role of constabulary police in terms of actual tasks in its official mission plan, dated September 11, 2003: 'law and order' support to the local, UN-installed interim police force, dealing with civil disturbance in major population centers, capacity building for a future Liberian constabulary police force, and generally supporting the protection of civilians and property.[41] UNMIL's subsequent concept of operations, dated January 2004, for the first time included a comprehensive plan for the police component. Drafted between the newly reinforced Civilian Police Division in New York and the very active UNMIL Police Commissioner Mark Kroeker in Monrovia, it was the first such concept that devotes several pages to the roles and capabilities of FPUs and their function within the overall mission. While hardly very specific, those few pages already pointed to a number of doctrinal challenges: when and what kind of force to use against violent protesters; internal discipline and respect for human rights in order to make a positive contribution to the population's sense of safety and security; and how to work together with the military, to name just a few.

Seven months later, in August 2004, the concept of operations for the new United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) came out with an all but identical section on constabulary police forces.[42] While these planning documents marked significant conceptual improvements over earlier ones, the substance of guidance for FPU contributors and mission leaders on the ground remained very limited. Beyond the envisaged roles and basic requirements for constabulary police units, almost no details were provided on the internal organization of FPUs, their rules of engagement, and their relationships to UN military forces. Senior leaders on the ground were once again left to their own devices to figure out how to use constabulary police effectively, and headquarters had no formal standard to hold police-contributing countries accountable to specific levels of quality. In the field, the results varied widely and changed often abruptly with changes in senior police positions. What little improvements were made for the Liberia and Haiti missions were the result of individual initiative and an improved policy development capacity in the Police Division, not a learning process of the peace operations apparatus as a whole.

At the central level, however, Harland soon recognized that the Best Practices unit remained stuck in an ineffectual paradigm. Much as the authors of his lessons learned studies or some external consultant might learn about previous failures or best practices, writing a study provided no institutional learning benefit as long as planners in the Office of Operations and decision-makers in senior management saw no point in reading it or acting on its recommendations. Focusing the bulk of available resources on studying closing missions was particularly ineffective because it almost never produced results that were seen as applicable to current challenges, for two reasons. First, almost every contextual aspect of a closing mission would be different from the current ones, both externally (in terms of different political situations in the Security Council and in the mission area) and internally

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40   Benner and Rotmann (2008: 53), Durch et al. (2003: 41).
41   UN Secretary-General (2003: para. 68).
42   UN Secretary-General (2004b: para. 93).

(in terms of organizational changes within DPKO). Second, the single-case approach to writing those studies, without a guiding analytical framework and covering the whole range of possibly interesting questions about the mission, all but ensured that the product followed perceived political priorities rather than providing candid analysis and drawing useful generalizations for application in different situations. As a result, there was no institutional follow-up on "lessons learned," nor was there a standard operating procedure to collect the observations of serving officials in the field.

After a year spent on hiring staff, managing external consultants and building up the Best Practices Section, Harland's team began to reinvent the unit as a hub to support a complete learning cycle. The problem was, however, that none of the other parts of that cycle – policy development, training, and evaluation – existed in DPKO. Apart from Security Council mandates for individual missions and general administrative regulations, there were no policies to help peacekeepers implement their mandates, and there was effectively no training provided by the UN. The existing training unit was part of the Military Adviser's office and already hard pressed to deliver orientation sessions and introductory seminars on cross-cutting topics such as human rights, gender equality and civil-military coordination at military academies and training centers around the world, given that almost 200,000 troops rotated through UN peace operations every year. Only recently had the first four missions in the field created training centers to deliver a limited induction program to new staff, a high-level induction course for senior mission managers had been developed and the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) had begun to build a program to systematically debrief SRSGs, funded by grants from member states and charitable foundations. Evaluations were conducted on a case-by-case basis, mostly by former senior military officers or senior mission leaders who would travel to a mission, conduct a few interviews and deliver a report. While often useful to assess the specific situation of the mission in question, these evaluations were not designed to ensure compliance with any kind of general policies or procedures, or to investigate the effectiveness of such doctrine. Clearly, the reformers concluded, a strategy was needed that went beyond the narrow confines of tweaking the inner workings of the Best Practices Unit. The peace operations bureaucracy needed full-scale transformation.

5.   Peace Operations 2010: Putting Learning at the Center of Institutional Reform

In the summer of 2005, an opportunity presented itself to get the ball rolling on the broader reform agenda. Guéhenno asked Harland to take over the job of Director of Change Management on an interim basis, while the previous incumbent went to serve in a senior management position in the field for a year. Harland quickly seized the opportunity to develop a broader reform agenda for DPKO based on what he called the "unfinished business" of the Brahimi Report, focusing on five core priorities: personnel (recruitment, training, rapid deployment), doctrine (need for standards and guidance on key tasks, as well as a process for the constant adaptation of such guidance), organization (clear division of roles and responsibilities), resources (improving efficiency and harnessing more funds) and partnerships (with other UN and non-UN agencies). In each of these fields, he identified "weaknesses [that were] within the power of the Secretariat to change," and drafted a five-year plan to do so. Guéhenno adopted this agenda for the department as a whole and presented it to the diplomatic community in October 2005. Given a catchy title ("Peace Operations 2010"), the program was further developed and distributed to peace operations personnel globally in November.[43]

Within the Peace Operations 2010 agenda, the work of establishing an effective infrastructure to support a full organizational learning cycle touched on almost every priority area, but was primarily associated with the priority of doctrine. This choice of language sparked instant opposition because many at the UN misunderstood the concept of doctrine as an exclusively military or militaristic term. It hardly helped that the term is often not consistently defined and employed outside military organizations, and until 2005, there was only an official UN definition for "military doctrine" as the "fundamental principles, practices and procedures that guide the military component of UN peacekeeping missions in support of mandated UN objectives."[44] However, doctrine in this sense as a set of principles and standard operating procedures to guide the actions of individuals on behalf of an organization is no stranger to civilian bureaucracies as well. As Guéhenno explained in his letter to DPKO personnel, the aim was "to define and clearly articulate (…) what it is that UN peacekeeping can do and how, (…) followed by the development of effective guidance on how to achieve these standards. (…) We need uniform practices and procedures that … will be the basis for guiding you in carrying out your job. It will be a living doctrine that adapts to ongoing experiences and conditions."[45]

In defining its strategy, Harland's team conducted extensive research both internally and toward potential examples in other organizations. In 2004, the Best Practices Section had conducted a survey among field staff that revealed the extent to which people on the ground felt left alone by headquarters in New York. 50% of the almost 600 respondents complained that the lack of guidance and documentation required them to reinvent the wheel "very often" or "all the time." 46% said they had received no guidance materials or orderly handover from a predecessor at the start of their current job, and only 28% had received "any kind of written instructions in the form of policies, manuals, best practices or otherwise."[46] The reformers concluded that they had a "knowledge-thirsty workforce," but "weak institutional support" in terms of an easily accessible repository of doctrine and

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43   Quotes are from interviews with David Harland, 2007; the official presentation of the Peace Operations 2010 agenda can be found in Guéhenno (2005a, 2005b).
44   UN DPKO (2001, emphasis added).
45   Guéhenno (2005a: para. 11).
46   UN Secretary-General (2007: 2).

guidance as well as effective knowledge management tools to support horizontal communication among different missions in the field.[47] In trying to find the most effective ways to implement these ideas in an organization that was as fragile and decentralized as the peace operations bureaucracy, Harland's team drew on a wide range of outside experiences in some 20 other organizations, from international oil companies and the World Bank to the U.S. and Indian armies.

Based on their findings, Harland's team set up three parallel efforts to build the groundwork of a full learning cycle "that links the identification and sharing of best practices to the development of policies, guidelines and procedures that reflect those lessons [in] an institutional doctrine that can then be disseminated through training programmes":[48] (1) a Guidance Project to establish a doctrine development process and some of the most needed guidance materials, (2) a "knowledge sharing toolbox" to enable better informal communication and feedback from the field, and (3) a revitalization of DPKO's training efforts.

While the Guidance Project was bound to be a top-down exercise to establish officially codified policies and procedures, the knowledge management team was tasked to develop ways of informal bottom-up and horizontal knowledge sharing, the products of which could be used as a source of feedback to inform the formulation and improvement of guidance for as long as it would take to establish an effective evaluation capacity as well.

Figure 3: A UN reformers' "ideal learning cycle"
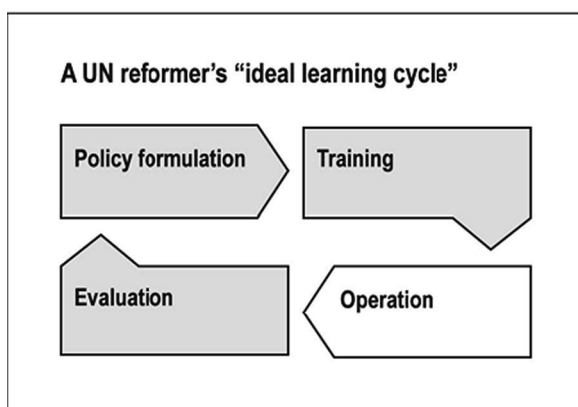
Source: own figure, based on information from an interview with David Harland, 2007.

Harland's guidance team developed a hierarchical architecture to organize the various pieces of doctrine at different levels of abstraction, to be filled by policy directives, standard operating procedures (SOPs), manuals and guidelines for the various functional areas of peace operations. At the top of the pyramid, the so-called Capstone Doctrine would "define the nature, scope and core business of contemporary UN peacekeeping operations (…). It identifies the comparative advantages and limitations of United Nations peacekeeping operations as a conflict management tool, and explains the basic principles that should guide their planning and conduct."[49] All the progressively more fine-grained and technical elements of doctrine in each of the functional areas of peace operations link these abstract principles to the mission-specific planning and implementation in the field. At the beginning, the guidance team would do all the legwork in terms of drafting policies and shepherding them through the approval process itself. As other units became willing to set

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47   UN DPKO (2006b: 7).
48   UN Secretary-General (2007: 4).
49   UN DPKO/DFS (2008: 8).

aside their own resources or obtain additional ones to take responsibility for policy development in their subject area, the Best Practices Section would limit itself to the role of a "learning hub" supporting the various doctrine development and knowledge management processes and helping management to prioritize among them. To put each individual unit in charge of their own policies was seen as the only way to ensure their full participation in the process, and the only way to achieve a substantial level of output without putting unrealistic demands on the Best Practices Section alone.

The knowledge sharing toolbox followed a much less predetermined approach. The idea was to provide a set of tools that would be equally useful for horizontal communication among field staff and for knowledge collection efforts at headquarters.[50] The team urged senior officials to write End-of-Assignment Reports and conduct After Action Reviews to be shared on a new intranet platform, while officials at all levels were encouraged to write formal Handover Notes. Best Practices established on-line "communities of practice" for practitioners to discuss their challenges and solutions among each other, and offered to conduct "surveys of practice" on frequently asked questions among practitioners in the field, again sharing the results informally across the organization without prior review or approval by DPKO. All of these tools, no matter how well supported by the small team in New York, would impose additional work on often overworked and skeptical staffers in the field. Therefore, one "Best Practice Officer" would be deployed to every mission to support the adoption of these tools in practice. As the flow of information from the field would grow, it would also become increasingly useful as a source for prioritizing and informing guidance development at headquarters.

In terms of training, DPKO's scattered military and civilian training units were merged into a new Integrated Training Service (ITS). Previously being overstretched and ineffective by flying around the world to deliver lectures and seminars at the request of member states, the new ITS first sought to limit its own training activities to a select number of courses for senior mission leaders and civilian newcomers to peace operations, and otherwise focus on producing training materials for national and regional peacekeeping training centers. In a second step, following a change of leadership in October 2007, ITS went even further, primarily focusing on strategy, standard-setting and quality assurance, as well as conducting a very limited range of crosscutting training programs such as the civilian induction course and the senior leadership seminars.

By way of example, it may be instructive to briefly examine two cases in which the newly improved systems for learning fared quite differently in that period. One of these examples is the integration of gender concerns into disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs in peace operations.[51] In a pioneering interagency process that started in early 2004, formally established as the Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR (IAWG), DPKO and UNDP steered the entire UN system to jointly develop high-level policy guidance based on the experience of all the involved UN actors. The resulting 700-page strong Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) represent one of the most ambitious and far-reaching guidance development processes within the entire UN peace operations system.[52] A group of young, entrepreneurial UNIFEM officials saw an opportunity in this mammoth process to finally turn what they had found to be a series of ineffectual policy pronouncements on gender issues in peace operations into official guidance, and therefore hopefully into practice. Drawing on a growing number of ex-

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50   Many of the ideas that evolved into the knowledge sharing toolbox had their roots in the Brahimi Report itself, which featured a somewhat technology-focused but well crafted set of recommendations to improve knowledge management in peace operations. See United Nations (2000: paras. 252-258).

51   The following is a very brief summary of a more comprehensive case study that can be found in full in Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011: 163-170).

52   United Nations (2006).

pert studies and a growing chorus of advocacy, they saw the coincidental timing of the IDDRS initiative as a "window of opportunity to replace *ad hoc* measures and one-off projects with routine consideration of the different needs and capacities of women and men."[53]

DPKO was very open to this UNIFEM initiative, which initially took the shape of a groundbreaking report on women and DDR with specific reviews of best practice from the field. Under heavy pressure from women's groups and select member states to take gender issues more seriously, DPKO was actually "craving expertise on these issues and turning to UNIFEM for advice." The UNIFEM report thus recommended that the Secretary General issue high-level policy guidance in order to "provide SRSGs and DPKO with optimal sample language for the negotiation of gender issues into DDR packages and processes."[54] In the field, practice in peace operations continued to lag behind. In late 2004, for example, experts argued that in Sierra Leone women and girls were sometimes the leaders of protests among ex-combatants against the delays that occurred in disbursing their reintegration benefits, protests that often erupted into violence and civil disorder. "Without support or care from their former 'parents' or 'husbands' [in the rebel group], their own families, the community, or the state, many of the young women – particularly those with children born as a result of their captivity – resorted to civil unrest as a means of accessing basic goods for the survival of their children. For these young women and girls, the stakes are, in effect, greater than for some of the men and boys."[55]

In parallel to the working-level efforts between UNIFEM and DPKO, in October 2004 European member states initiated a Presidential Statement in the Security Council that requested the Secretary-General to submit an action plan on the implementation of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, passed on October 31, 2000, with negligible effect on actual DDR programs in the field. In doing so, the European Security Council members effectively created a mechanism for accountability at the highest level. In response, an Inter-Agency Task Force on Women, Peace and Security prepared an encompassing Secretary-General's report that was released in October 2005. This report acknowledged that information on gender aspects in progress reports on UN peace operations was sparse and did not allow for effective monitoring and evaluation of the UN's gender-related benchmarks and targets. In order to improve the UN's performance in this field, the Secretary-General's report announced that the broader IDDRS process would include a module on women and gender as well as for DPKO to create guidance on gender-responsive DDR programming.[56] The IDDRS working group on gender, driven by the same UNIFEM officials, then endorsed the provisions set out in their own earlier report, codifying the best practices put forward by UNIFEM and including them in this large-scale interagency guidance document.[57] Reinforcing these specific provisions, only three months after the publication of the IDDRS, DPKO also issued a policy directive on gender equality in UN peace operations that also stressed the need to integrate gender perspectives in DDR programs.[58]

Despite the crucial relevance of political pressure on the part of the European states, the diplomatic level could not operationalize specific lessons into concrete guidance for use in the field. For this step, UNIFEM as the only actor within the UN system with a claim to substantive expertise was critical. Given the strong support by key member states, the wider gender movement had created such strong momentum in the Secretariat that other players in the IDDRS process did not oppose UNIFEM's suggestions. The challenge of implemen-

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53   UNIFEM (2004: 3).
54   UNIFEM (2004).
55   Mazurana and Carlson (2004: 26).
56   UN Secretary-General (2005).
57   United Nations (2006: section 5.10).
58   UN DPKO (2006a).

tation awaited, however: Officials involved in the guidance development process argue that with the IDDRS they had set out an extremely ambitious agenda that is "beautiful on paper, but extremely hard to implement at the field level."[59] In this case, however, there is evidence that cautious optimism may be warranted. In Haiti, an official argued that even with the codification process still under way, "officials looked at gender aspects very carefully in program planning and conceived of dedicated projects for women associated with armed groups."[60] In Sudan, the existence of embedded gender officers was seen as "a critical success factor not only in terms of having the right expertise on hand but also in terms of ensuring there is accountability on gender mainstreaming within the unit."[61]

Another instructive example with less encouraging results is the case of building justice institutions, a mandated task in a number of state-building missions from Kosovo and Timor-Leste to African countries and beyond. Practitioners in UN peace operations and outside critics increasingly identified an "exclusively technical focus on assistance and training as well as a largely apolitical approach to building institutions" as a key challenge for sustainable peacebuilding in various countries.[62] After years of ineffectual advocacy for lessons from the field, the resource base for judicial reform policy in DPKO was temporarily increased in 2005, when the United Kingdom agreed to fund a comprehensive lessons learned study. Released in early 2006, the study advanced the argument in favor of taking institution-building serious as a political rather than a technical challenge, and going beyond training to operationalize it.[63] As a result of the study, DPKO released a "primer" for judicial field personnel that echoed the new focus on the political dimension: "Rule of law work is often more political than it is technical. Thus, the importance of incorporating rule of law concerns into the analysis of the conflict, political strategy development and political dialogue cannot be overstated. (...) If rule of law issues are not on the table of the international and national policy-makers, technical programmes and interventions will likely have minimal effect."[64]

Officials in charge of planning and supporting judicial programs in the field were conscious of the fact that issuing nonbinding guidance documents for field personnel would not be sufficient to change the organization's practice and to assure the required leadership support. With UN-wide action on judicial issues still inefficient and mired in turf fights, they convinced the Secretary-General to propose the creation of a high-level coordination mechanism on the rule of law within the UN family of organizations to lobby and press for more concerted action across the board.[65] The first priority of its secretariat was to clarify the organization's strategic approach in an authoritative way by developing an overarching guidance note on rule of law assistance, to be issued by the Secretary-General. After being cleared by the senior management in early 2008, the new approach officially made 'the political context' one of the primary guiding principles for UN rule of law action. In particular, the note reinforced that "rule of law assistance has often overemphasized technical questions and paid less attention to political and strategic considerations (…). Senior UN representatives in the field need to understand the political nature of strengthening the rule of law, and dedicate attention to supporting both the political and institutional aspects of rule of law development. In cooperation with Headquarters and in partnership with the national political leadership and other stakeholders, UN leadership at the field level is responsible for fostering political space for reform and insulating the rule of law from inap-

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59   Interview, UNMIS official, November 2009.
60   Interview, MINUSTAH official, November 2009.
61   Interview, UNMIS official, November 2009.
62   Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011: 128). The following is a very brief summary of a more comprehensive case study which can be found in full in Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011: 126-135).
63   Carlson (2006).
64   UN DPKO (2006a: 9).
65   UN Secretary-General (2006).

propriate political influence or abuse."[66] In essence, the guidance note unambiguously acknowledged that the UN's assistance to often inherently flawed rule of law institutions in post-conflict countries will be ineffective if it is not underpinned by a concerted political engagement and strategy.

Promulgating policy guidelines, however, is not enough to complete the learning cycle. The new guidelines need to be implemented and, for a piece of doctrine at very high level of abstraction such as this note, complemented by concrete practical guidance to assist operational work in the field. The implementation also needs to be tracked and evaluated. In this case, it is precisely the implementation of the newly adopted policy that has proven the toughest challenge to learning. On the one hand, this is linked to the weakness of formal structures to support the full chain of the learning cycle. The learning infrastructure remains insufficiently developed: enough for guidance development, but not for the full chain of the learning cycle including training and evaluation. The limited resources and institutional capacity of the Judicial Unit at DPKO slowed down its capacity to actually translate these new polices into effective training programs. On the other hand, this example also points to the fact that leadership is often a critical element for ensuring the full implementation of significant policy shifts. As key UN officials acknowledge, regardless of the guidance development process, some political actors in the Security Council as well as senior leaders on the ground continue to "see judicial reform as purely technical or readily buy arguments of [national] sovereignty" (being violated by political "meddling" in justice systems). In some cases, the mission leadership might have clear reasons for not exerting too much pressure on different factions of the host government on judicial reform. They might need the government's cooperation on other fronts and might not want to jeopardize political capital by focusing on judicial reform. At the very least, however, they would need to justify their choice of priorities to headquarters and the Security Council, which is currently not required of them. Because it is often a difficult and frustrating undertaking in the field to press the host government on judicial matters, without unambiguous leadership from headquarters or even the Security Council in support of the political approach to justice reform little progress could be expected toward the effective implementation of the adopted policy.

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66   UN Secretary-General (2008: 3).

6.   Conclusion: The Challenges of Implementation

Despite Guéhenno's personal endorsement and support, the reinvigorated reform program quickly encountered resistance within the department. The most skeptical officials were to be found in the higher echelons of DPKO and in its core element, the Office of Operations. Organized in regional divisions and desks for each field operation, the Office of Operations coordinates the political planning, deployment and ongoing management of peace operations, drawing on the services and expertise of the rest of the department as required. As a result, the office enjoys enormous informal authority and regards itself as the best and most hard-working part of the organization. Justifiably proud of having held together many a mission in crisis with little more than their bare hands and starved for resources for a long time, Operations managers were the main carriers of the department's traditional culture of ad-hoc improvisation.[67] At the same time, mutually destructive stereotypes poisoned the atmosphere among the different parts of DPKO, and the Operations crowd found themselves widely accused of arrogance and aloofness in dealing with the nuts-and-bolts parts of their own department.

When it came to organizational learning, many Operations officials had seen scores of "lessons learned reports" that they ultimately found irrelevant for their day-to-day business. Given their rapidly rising workload throughout 2005 and 2006, it was hardly surprising that many found themselves not only unable to contribute to knowledge management systems or doctrine development, but that some went as far as to question the wisdom of spending scarce resources on another exercise that was asking for their time and attention now while promising a payoff much later, if at all. More to the point, some officials feared that the drive toward professionalization and standard operating procedures would result in a technocratic, "cookie-cutter" approach to peace operations that would level contextual differences and marginalize local knowledge even further. In making this argument, they echoed well-founded warnings in part of the academic literature. As Michael Barnett argues, "[it] is [the] lack of knowledge [on the part of peace operations staff] about how to engineer a successful postconflict operation that poses the real problem. At present, many peacebuilders escape their uncertainty by relying on general models that frequently are developed from their most recent experiences in the field." Like development economists in the 1970s, the danger is that peace operations professionals would be "falling in love with their models and assuming that these countries were so simple that those models told them all they needed to know." Instead of universal templates, Barnett argues that successful peace operations "require judgment informed by a deep knowledge of local circumstances and views."[68]

While undoubtedly well founded and in most cases brought forward without ulterior motives, it is somewhat ironic that allegations of bureaucratic universalism were raised in response to the efforts of "a new generation of UN staff [who] (…) are self-critical and skeptical of cookie-cutter approaches" themselves.[69] Unavoidably, some of these issues were also fueled by the underlying cultural rift between this younger generation of reformers and the longer-serving, generally older generation of traditionalists. In the evolution of organizational culture, the balance began to tip in about 2005. The new posts that the Brahimi reforms had yielded for DPKO had been filled mainly with reform-minded officials from the

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67   Since the establishment of DPKO in 1992, there are many cases in which budget increases benefited other units to a greater extent than the Office of Operations, sometimes because specific issues were more popular with member states, sometimes because other managers were more effective advocates for their needs.

68   Barnett (2006: 109-110).

69   NYU-CIC (2004).

field for whom the Brahimi Report embodied the guiding paradigm. In addition, Guéhenno's professionalization efforts bore fruit. A 2004 management review conducted by the UN's internal auditors recognized "a number of worthy initiatives in that area [management culture] that were focused on change from crisis-driven decision-making to tackling longer-term systemic issues and from being reactive to becoming more responsive to the needs of the field."[70]

Building on this sense of movement on the cultural level, the proponents of the learning agenda managed to convince a sufficiently strong coalition of supporters at all levels of the necessity and the merits of the proposed changes. Over a period of several months and with "top cover" from Guéhenno, they set up a working group to drive the reform process and established a formal doctrine development procedure both of which were sufficiently inclusive to draw on the substantial expertise of supporters and skeptics alike, and to allow the latter a significant say, often effectively a veto, on policy decisions.[71]

When Jean-Marie Guéhenno left office in the summer of 2008, the internal political and cultural support for his reforms had become itself a part of the organization's identity. While each of the building blocs for an effective infrastructure of learning – and ultimately, to make the peace operations bureaucracy a "learning organization"[72] – remained unfinished business, there was no backlash from within the bureaucracy after his departure: despite the odds, the reformers had achieved Guéhenno's initial goal to "build an institution" and even long-time skeptics among DPKO's senior management praised him for "transforming Best Practices into something really useful."[73]

In his final months in office, Guéhenno implemented the new Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's plan to divide the core of the peace operations bureaucracy into a policy and management department (which retained the name DPKO) and a new Department of Field Support (DFS) to cover administration and logistics. On the coattails of that separation and a substantial if insufficient budget increase, the Secretariat convinced member states to fund a number of policy development positions in various parts of DPKO, create a stronger Policy, Evaluation and Training Division, and combine the Police Division, a small judicial section, the disarmament team and a small new team on security sector reform into a new high-level Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (Figure 4).
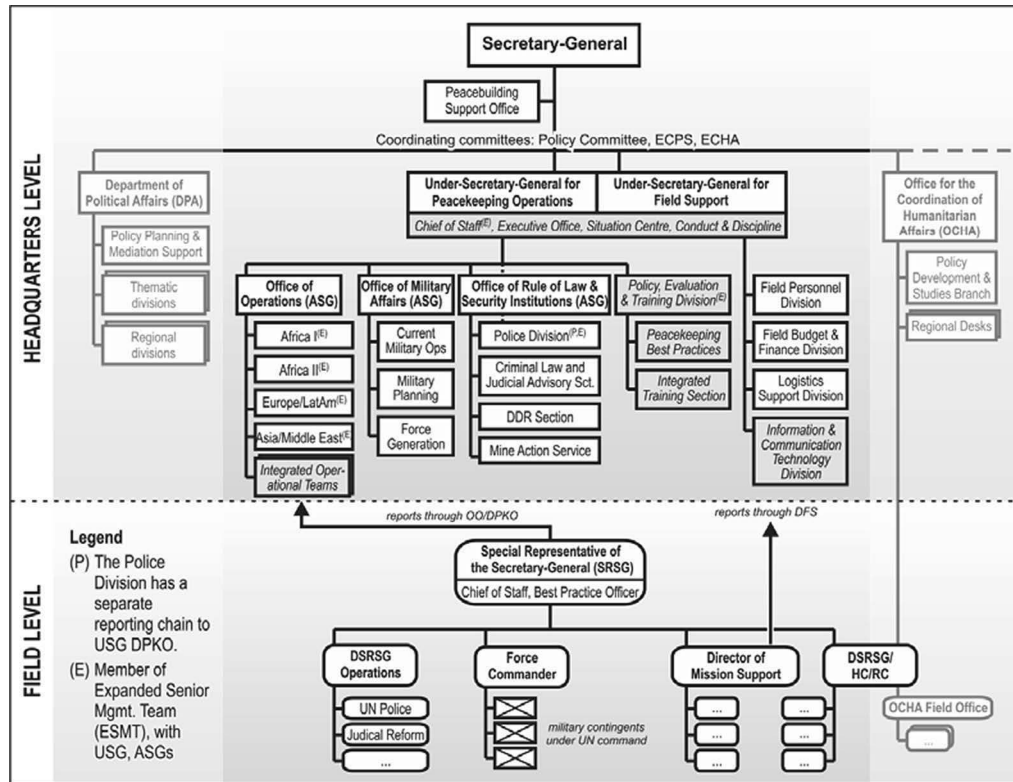
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70   UN Secretary-General (2004a: 17).
71   The doctrine development process is formally defined in an SOP dated July 2005, see UN DPKO (2005).
72   UN Secretary-General (2007: 4).
73   Interview, long-standing senior DPKO official, 2009.

Figure 4: Inside the Peace Operations Bureaucracy

Source: own figure, based on several official UN organizational charts.

Eight years after the Brahimi Report and six decades after the first peacekeeping mission, it was the first time that the peace operations bureaucracy possessed a learning infrastructure sufficiently well resourced and integrated into decision-making processes to support a basic hum of modestly ambitious activity to take place. Until that time, most learning processes had been more of a fight against bureaucracy than a process supported by it.

A preliminary assessment by the Secretariat after the first two years (2005-2007) lists the general outputs of the new learning infrastructure. Over that time period, the knowledge sharing toolbox generated "78 After Action Reviews, 129 End of Assignment Reports and eight Surveys of Practice" while the policy development system resulted in "24 policy directives, eight guidelines, 14 standard operating procedures and four manuals … on a wide range of operational tasks."[74] Best Practice Officers were deployed to most multidimensional missions. Use of the new intranet platform and participation in horizontal exchanges through Communities of Practice has grown rapidly, with ten communities with a total of almost 1,500 contributors active and more requests for the establishment of new ones than the small knowledge sharing team could handle (ibid.). In addition, the new *Principles and Guidelines* document issued in February 2008 is the first high-level statement of peace operations doctrine in more than a decade.[75]

Beyond these rather superficial output counts, we need a more thorough understanding of the outcomes and impact of the attempted transformation toward a learning organization. The twelve case studies of learning reviewed in our recently published book are a first cut

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74   UN Secretary-General (2007: 9).
75   UN DPKO/DFS (2008).

at getting a more nuanced understanding of the interplay of political and institutional factors in concrete learning processes.[76]

One of the findings is that while political factors trump institutional factors in terms of influencing learning, only institutional factors are scalable through the kind of reform efforts detailed in this paper. Another is that support of key member states is important as is the leadership provided by key players inside the bureaucracy for these reform efforts to have a chance to succeed. These two robust findings point to our twin policy conclusions at the most general level:

1. Financially, member states and senior UN officials need to recognize and promote learning, doctrine development, training and evaluation as "force multipliers" for the effectiveness of peace operations and support smart investments in these areas. In many cases, it has been much easier to get huge numbers of posts funded for police and civilian experts when a new field mission has been established while even a handful of positions with a strategic benefit to the effectiveness of the entire organization have had to rely on external donor funding. As a result, new posts in missions go unfilled for months on end, and in an environment of overstretch many are ultimately filled with newly hired staff with little experience for whom the systems of training and guidance are not in place, because those resources are not funded to a sufficient extent. This dysfunctional dynamic must change: missions can be planned with more realistic numbers of actual experts for key civilian functions, reducing the budgetary as well as the administrative burden on UN human resources systems.

2. Politically, member states need to continue to invest the attention and political capital in New York to champion or even spark worthwhile initiatives at the strategic and operational level, without succumbing to the occasional temptation to micromanage the Secretariat. Several of the case studies in our book have shown that positive political influence can be a critical success factor for learning if an effective organizational infrastructure is in place.

In pursuing both of these recommendations in parallel, member states, in particular, are most likely to be successful in supporting progress on the issues that are most important to them. In the past five years, the UN peace operations apparatus has been "learning to learn" as directed by the "Peace Operations 2010" reform agenda, with the doctrine development and knowledge management elements being largely implemented while the training and evaluation parts remain underdeveloped. What is needed now is an overall evaluation of how the "learning infrastructure" fared in practice and what adjustments are needed (also in terms of the interplay with similar efforts in other parts of the UN system). A changing of the guard at the working level has taken place and a new generation has taken the institutional development agenda forward, as shown by recent initiatives such as Under-Secretary-General Alain Le Roy's New Horizons process and the Civilian Capacity Review.[77] At the same time, progress toward further professionalization and short-term effectiveness must not be allowed to stand alone; there remains a need to invest in the critical and sometimes politically painful aspects of learning (such as self-critical evaluation mechanisms) while maintaining an acute awareness of the potential and limits of the business of peace operations.

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76   Benner, Mergenthaler and Rotmann (2011).
77   UN DPKO (2009), UN Secretary-General (2011).

Annex: Interviews

The research at the core of this study draws on a wealth of often confidential documents from inside the United Nations, including draft and released versions of guidance materials such as handbooks and standard operating procedures. Even more important were the interviews conducted personally and via telephone between 2006 and 2010 with key protagonists in the case studies and the broader evolution of the learning capacity in the UN peace operations bureaucracy. Overall, we had more than 250 interviews with mostly current and former UN officials but also experts on peace operations and officials interacting with the UN or its peace operations at headquarters and in the field, including diplomats, aid workers, development specialists, academics and journalists. Most of these interlocutors were very candid and outspoken, and many asked to remain anonymous. The following provides a breakdown by function and seniority that may illustrate the distribution of sources (to some of whom we spoke repeatedly over the years):

- 46 serving DPKO officials at headquarters, covering all parts of the department and all ranks.

- 26 serving officials of all ranks at other headquarters departments, agencies and programs (Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Dept. of Political Affairs, UNDP and DGO/DOCO, Peacebuilding Support Office, OCHA)

- 65 serving officials in field missions, mainly UNMIL (Liberia), UNMIT (Timor-Leste) and MINUSTAH (Haiti), including from other UN departments and agencies.

- 27 serving officials in other governmental or international organizations, including embassies of Canada, China, Germany, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, the U.K, and the U.S., and development agencies, working with UN peace operations in New York or in the field.

- 31 experts at universities, think tanks and similar institutions working on learning, on the UN or the particular case studies and field operations we worked on.

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