

PEACEKEEPERS AT RISK: THE LETHALITY OF PEACE OPERATIONS

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Over the past two decades, personnel contributions from European and North American countries (the West) to United Nations peacekeeping operations and to missions in Africa have reduced significantly.¹ A lack of political will is often given as one of the explanations for this marked drop: politicians fear the high domestic political cost of images of body bags returning the corpses of personnel killed on peace operations.² Like in war, governments' behaviour tends to follow the hypothesis of John Mueller that they naturally want to avoid high casualty rates, particularly if their national interests are not at stake.³ Therefore, in combination with other factors (which include national interest), troop-contributing countries are wary about committing personnel to peace operations that are perceived to be dangerous, while those perceived to be safe are often oversubscribed.

¹ SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/pko/>>.

² E.g. interview with Iqbal Riza, in 'The triumph of evil', *Frontline*, PBS, <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/interviews/riza.html>>.

³ Mueller, J. E., *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (Wiley: New York, 1973).

In particular, Western governments and security establishments often assume that it is more dangerous to contribute to missions in Africa than other regions of the world. Moreover, because they often perceive the UN's command-and-control structures and security measures to be flawed, they consider it to be more risky to contribute to UN peacekeeping operations than to those conducted by ad hoc coalitions or regional organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

After first further explaining how the assumptions arose that peace operations deployed in Africa and UN peacekeeping operations are the most dangerous for personnel, this Policy Brief uses peace operation fatality rates to test them. Little systematic analysis of these assumptions has been carried out previously, although both are among the factors that play an important role in explaining why Western contributions to UN operations and missions deployed in Africa have continued to be low since the mid-1990s. This Policy Brief uses data on fatalities in the period 2000–10 from the SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database (see boxes 1

SUMMARY

● Over the past two decades, personnel contributions from European and North America countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations and to missions deployed in Africa have reduced significantly. This is partly explained by the common assumption in Western governments and security establishments that missions in Africa are more dangerous than missions in other regions of the world, and that contributing to UN peacekeeping operations is more risky than to those conducted by ad hoc coalitions or regional organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Data from the SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database for 2000–10 shows that Africa was not the most dangerous region to deploy peacekeepers. Similarly, UN peacekeeping operations were much safer than NATO and NATO-led operations or ad hoc coalitions.

It seems that other factors, such as a mission's character, context, and security and protection measures, better explain the lethality of a mission. The fear of peacekeeper casualties cannot be used to justify Western countries not contributing to missions in Africa or to UN peacekeeping operations. More openly acknowledging an absence of national interest would be a more legitimate explanation.

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**Box 1. The definition of peace operation**

According to the SIPRI definition, a peace operation must have one of the following stated intentions:

- serving as an instrument to facilitate the implementation of peace agreements already in place,
- supporting a peace process, or
- assisting conflict-prevention or peacebuilding efforts.

The SIPRI definition does not include good offices, fact-finding or electoral assistance missions; peace operations comprising non-resident individuals or teams of negotiators; or operations not sanctioned by the UN or a regional organization.

The definition covers

- operations conducted under the authority of the United Nations,
- operations conducted by regional organizations and alliances, and
- operations conducted by ad hoc (non-standing) coalitions of states that were sanctioned by the UN or authorized by a UN Security Council resolution.

UN operations include (a) observer and multidimensional peace operations run by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), including the joint African Union/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), and (b) special political and peacebuilding missions run by the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) that fulfil the SIPRI definition of a peace operation.

and 2) to map out where and under which conducting organization peacekeepers' lives are at greatest risk, and to assess the implications for policymaking in this area. The 11-year period 2000–10 was chosen as it gives the longest set of complete data. While full data is not yet available for the years 2011–13, the available data for this period suggests that, with one caveat (see box 3 below), the broader conclusions of this paper continued to hold.

ORIGINS OF THE ASSUMPTIONS

Peace operations in Africa are more dangerous

After the cold war, Western countries were initially active contributors to the increasing number of peace operations in Africa. The first post-cold war operation, the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in

Namibia, was hailed as a success. However, in 1993 the United States-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF), which was mandated to protect and assist the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), met armed resistance from Somali warlords. The US public was particularly shocked by television images of a US soldier's body being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. In response, US President Bill Clinton limited the circumstances under which the USA would commit troops to multilateral peace operations in the future, linking them in particular to US national interests.⁴ After the US withdrawal, other Western countries also left. A Norwegian official commented at the time that staying on is 'just too dangerous'.⁵ Other Western countries had similar experiences in Africa, resulting in similar 'body bag syndromes'. For example, in 1994, in the early days of the genocide in Rwanda, Belgium withdrew its contingent from the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) following the murder of 10 Belgian soldiers.

In addition to the domestic political impact in the troop-contributing countries, the experience from Somalia also influenced the actions of UN Security Council members (particularly the USA): it directly influenced the Security Council's decision not to intervene in the Rwandan genocide. The Security Council members perceived that the violence in Rwanda, like Somalia,

⁴ White House, 'US policy on reforming multilateral peace operations', US Presidential Decision Directive no. 25, 3 May 1994, <http://www.clintonlibrary.gov/_previous/textual-Presidential_Directives.htm>.

⁵ Press, R. M., 'Third-world peacekeepers face larger role as US quits Somalia', *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 Feb. 1994.



was a 'senseless civil war, a tribal conflict . . . in which old conflicts and bitter rivalries led to an almost primitive Savagery'.⁶ An often heard assumption was that the 'senseless and irrational chaos in Africa' presented 'insurmountable difficulties and considerable risk of casualties' and gave 'no grounds for intervention'.⁷

Although politicians rarely express their motivation for choosing not to intervene in Africa using phrases such as these, they illuminate one of the key underlying assumptions that continues to explain why Western countries are still generally hesitant to deploy forces to peace operations in Africa. For example, according to a US policymaker speaking in 2012, peacekeepers in Africa face an 'immense array of challenges' that include 'increasingly dangerous and complex conflict environments'.⁸

Under the rubric of 'African solutions to African problems', Western countries encouraged African countries to take on more responsibility for conducting operations in Africa, providing them with training, finances and logistics.⁹ When Western countries

⁶ Melvern, L. R., *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 2000), p. 4. See also Barnett, M., *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 2002).

⁷ Piiparinen, T., *The Transformation of UN Conflict Management: Producing Images of Genocide from Rwanda to Darfur and Beyond* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2010), p. 134.

⁸ Carson, J., Assistant Secretary, US Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, 'Assessing U.S. policy on peacekeeping operations in Africa', Testimony before the US House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights, 13 Sep. 2012, <<http://www.state.gov/p/af/rls/rm/2012/197773.htm>>.

⁹ Mays, T. M., 'African solutions for African problems: the changing face of African-

Box 2. The SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database

The SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database provides information on all peace operations conducted since 2000, including

- location,
- dates of deployment and operation,
- conducting organization,
- mandate,
- participating countries,
- number of personnel,
- costs and
- fatalities.

The database is online at <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/pko/>>.

contributed themselves, it was by sending low numbers of monitors and by deploying over-the-horizon reserve forces, short bridging operations or ships near the country in conflict, and largely outside the UN system, in EU operations.¹⁰ As Richard Gowan reflects, 'The flaws in the peacekeeping system resemble those in the financial system prior to 2008. Just as banks passed on risky loans to one another packaged as complex financial instruments, governments have pushed one another to take on risky countries'.¹¹

Western countries have largely continued to avoid operations in Africa

United Nations peacekeeping operations are more dangerous

The failures in Somalia and Rwanda were soon followed by another low point in UN peacekeeping activities.

mandated peace operations', *Journal of Conflict Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1 (spring 2003); and Møller, B., *The African Union as a Security Actor: African Solutions to African Problems* (London School of Economics, Crisis States Research Centre: London, Aug. 2009).

¹⁰ Williams, P. D., 'Peacekeeping in Africa after the cold war: trends and challenges', ed. J. J. Hentz, *Routledge Handbook of African Security* (Routledge: Abingdon, [2013]).

¹¹ Gowan, R., *The Future of Peacekeeping Operations: Fighting Political Fatigue and Overstretch* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Berlin, Feb. 2009), p. 3.



During 1994–95 UN peacekeepers were held hostage by Bosnian Serb forces and, in order to prevent reprisals against them during the attack on Srebrenica, air support operations against Bosnian Serb positions were called off.¹² Events in Bosnia and Herzegovina set in motion a wave of pessimism among European states and the USA regarding UN peacekeeping operations as a suitable outlet for deploying peacekeepers. According to the media and many policymakers, the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, unlike seemingly

Events in Bosnia set in motion a wave of pessimism regarding UN peacekeeping

incomprehensible conflicts in Africa, followed a logic, albeit evil. This seemed to imply that successful intervention to end the conflict should theoretically be possible. Yet, the recurring failures of the UN and its peacekeeping operations gradually led to it being seen as incapable and labelled as impotent, while NATO was seen as the solution.¹³

It is no coincidence that after the UN's failure in Bosnia and Herzegovina, two NATO operations—Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilization Force (SFOR)—took over, and did so with relative success. Since the mid-1990s Western security and defence establishments have remained convinced that the command-and-control structures of UN peacekeeping operations are

inadequate.¹⁴ Moreover, they often believe that the UN's evacuation and over-the-horizon capabilities and perceived inadequate medical facilities would leave troops contributed to UN mission less well protected than their counterparts on other operations such as those deployed by NATO and the EU.¹⁵ However, these concerns appear to be out-dated, ill-informed or a cover for a lack of confidence in the quality of personnel deployed by many countries that currently contribute troops to UN operations.¹⁶

Since the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the assumption that UN operations are more dangerous to contribute to than other outlets has been a factor underlying Western countries' preference for missions conducted by NATO or ad hoc coalitions (when broader Western interests are at stake and large military operations are deemed to be required) or EU missions (for smaller operations or operations that do not require US military support). When they have chosen to contribute to UN peace operations, force protection has received extra attention. For example, in 2006 Belgium sent a 130-strong unit outside the UN budget to strengthen the force protection of its contingent on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon

¹² Honig, J. W., 'Avoiding war, inviting defeat: the Srebrenica crisis, July 1995', *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, vol. 9, no. 4 (Dec. 2001).

¹³ Wall, M. A., 'A "pernicious new strain of the old Nazi virus" and an "orgy of tribal slaughter": a comparison of US news magazine coverage of the crises in Bosnia and Rwanda', *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 59, no. 6 (Dec. 1997).

¹⁴ See e.g. the profiles for the UK, Norway and the Netherlands in *Providing for Peacekeeping*, Sep. 2012, <<http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/profiles/europe/>>.

¹⁵ Stock, C. and Varwick, J., *No Second-class Partners: The Troop-contributing Countries of the United Nations Deserve Germany's Support* (United Nations Association of Germany (DGVN): Berlin, 2012), p. 2.

¹⁶ International Peace Institute (IPI), Pearson Centre and Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), *Enhancing European Military and Police Contributions to UN Peacekeeping* (IPI: New York, Feb. 2013).



(UNIFIL).¹⁷ Many of the other European countries that were willing to provide contributions to UNIFIL, such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain, preferred the relatively safety of its Maritime Task Force.¹⁸ Like Belgium, when considering troop contributions the Netherlands has required security guarantees; it has also required the participation of a large military ally.¹⁹ And when the situation becomes too risky, Western states sometimes withdraw, as happened with the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights in 2013.²⁰

THE LETHALITY OF PEACE OPERATIONS

By region

Contrary to the first assumption, the SIPRI data for 2000–10 show that Africa was not the most dangerous region for personnel contributed to peace operations.²¹ In fact, missions in Central and South Asia and the

¹⁷ Koops, J. and Drieskens, E., 'Contributor profile: Belgium', Providing for Peacekeeping, 2 Oct. 2012, <<http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/profiles/europe/>>, p. 2.

¹⁸ United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, 'UNIFIL Maritime Task Force', [2013], <<http://unifil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=11584>>.

¹⁹ Verhagen, M. J. M., Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, van Middelkoop, E. Dutch Minister of Defence, Koenders, A. G., Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, 'Toetsingskader 2009' [Assessment framework], Letter to Dutch Parliament, 1 June 2009, <<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2009/07/01/toetsingskader-2009.html>>.

²⁰ 'Austria begins withdrawal of Golan UN peacekeepers', BBC News, 11 June 2013.

²¹ It should be noted that, as regional trends in armed conflict and deployments of peace operations vary, the fatality rate by region will vary. Thus, the conclusions drawn from data for 2000–10 may not apply in other periods.

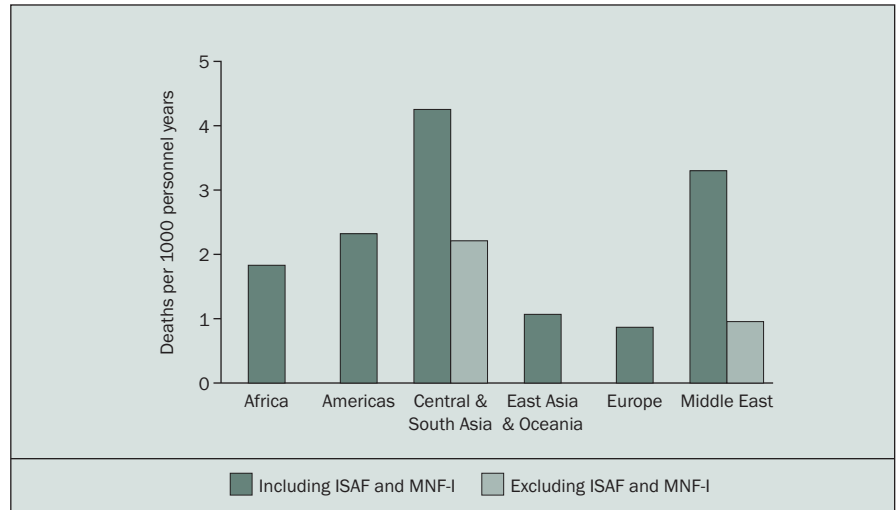


Figure 1. Fatalities on peace operations, by region, 2000–10

Notes: The personnel year figures (i.e. the sum of personnel deployed as of 31 Dec. in each of the 11 years 2000–10) for each region are: Africa, 644 439; the Americas, 69 793; Central and South Asia (including ISAF), 382 536; East Asia and Oceania, 68 376; Europe, 456 898; and the Middle East (including MNF-I), 639 356. The total for the Middle East excluding MNF-I was 123 595 personnel years and the total for Central and South Asia excluding ISAF was 11 761 personnel years. Note that MNF-I ceased to meet the definition of peace operation after 2005.

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/pko/>>.

Middle East were about twice as dangerous for personnel as missions in Africa, and three to four times more dangerous than East Asia and Oceania and Europe (see figure 1).

Since the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I) were more actively involved in combat and have such a large impact on the figures for Central and South Asia and the Middle East, respectively (and moreover since classifying them as peace operations is controversial), it is useful to look at data excluding these two operations.²² Doing so changes the picture (see figure 1). Including MNF-I, there were 3.3 deaths per 1000 personnel per year in the Middle East, whereas

²² The NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) is included in ISAF personnel figures as it is under ISAF command.

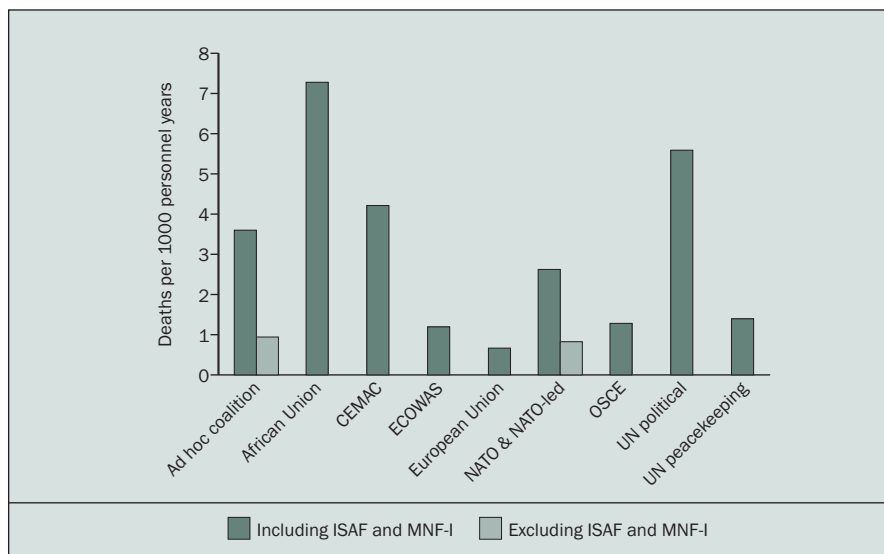


Figure 2. Fatalities on peace operations, by conducting organization, 2000–10

Notes: The personnel year figures (the sum of personnel deployed as of 31 Dec. in each of the 11 years 2000–10) for each organization are: ad hoc coalitions (including ISAF and MNF-I), 593 136; UN peacekeeping operations, 816 762; NATO and NATO-led missions (including ISAF), 677 332; the EU, 47 735; the AU, 47 670; the OSCE, 10 141; UN political and peacebuilding operations, 9661; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), 6700; and CEMAC, 1899. The total for ad hoc coalitions excluding ISAF and MNF-I was 68 979 personnel years and the total for NATO and NATO-led missions excluding ISAF was 314 953 personnel years. ISAF was established by an ad hoc coalition and became NATO-led in 2003.

Missions conducted by some other organizations are excluded due to the small numbers of personnel deployed or because the accuracy of fatality statistics is uncertain.

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/pko/>>.

the fatality rate excluding MNF-I falls to the comparatively low figure of 1 death per 1000 personnel per year. Similarly, excluding ISAF, the fatality rate for operations deployed in Central and South Asia falls from 4.3 to 2.2 deaths per 1000 personnel per year.

However, even when ISAF and MNF-I are excluded, Africa was still not the most dangerous region to deploy personnel. Fatality rates for missions in the Americas and Central and South Asia were higher than those in Africa.²³ Excluding

²³ The relative high fatality rate for the Americas is largely explained by the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, which killed almost 100 peacekeepers. In 2000–2009,

MNF-I, the Middle East was comparable to Europe and East Asia and Oceania. Unsurprisingly, since the end of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, Europe has consistently been the safest region to deploy peacekeepers, although by a small margin.

By conducting organization

Also in contrast to the assumption, SIPRI data for 2000–10 shows that contributing to UN peacekeeping operations was not particularly dangerous.²⁴ During this period, UN peacekeeping operations were markedly less lethal for contributors than operations conducted by the African Union (AU) and the Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l’Afrique Centrale (CEMAC), and political and peacebuilding missions deployed by the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) as well as ad hoc coalitions and NATO and NATO-led missions preferred by Western governments (see figure 2).²⁵ AU missions were more than five times more dangerous than UN peacekeeping operations, UN

61 peacekeepers died in the Americas. The fatality rate for 2000–10 was 2.3 per 1000 per year, while the rate for 2000–2009 was 1.

²⁴ The findings for the period 2000–10 may not apply in other periods, as organizations may learn from experience and become better at avoiding casualties. Equally, an organization with a low fatality rate in the period 2000–10 could deploy new missions in more dangerous circumstances, with a consequent rise in its fatality rate. See also box 3.

²⁵ In total 54 personnel on UN political and peacebuilding missions were killed in the period 2000–10: 16 in Afghanistan, 1 in Haiti, 26 in Iraq, 6 in Nepal and 5 in Sierra Leone. The deaths in Iraq include 15 casualties due to the bombing of mission’s headquarters in Baghdad in Aug. 2003. If this event is excluded, the fatality rate for DPA missions drops to 4.0 deaths per 1000 personnel per year, which is still relatively high.



political and peacebuilding missions four times as dangerous, and ad hoc and NATO operations about twice as dangerous.

As in the regional case, much of the lethality of ad hoc coalition and NATO and NATO-led missions can be explained by ISAF and MNF-I. Excluding these two operations, ad hoc coalition and NATO and NATO-led missions were less lethal ways to contribute to peace operations than UN peacekeeping, but AU and CEMAC operations and UN political and peacebuilding missions were still more dangerous. Thus, even excluding ISAF and MNF-I, UN peacekeeping operations were not among the most dangerous ways to deploy personnel to peace operations.

The lower lethality of missions conducted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the EU may be explained by the fact that these missions are generally deployed in conflicts that either have a low intensity or have already stabilized. Moreover, the mandates of these missions are often limited or more civilian in character. These two explanations seem to be contradicted by the high lethality rate of UN political and peacebuilding missions, as they are largely civilian missions that are generally, although not always, deployed in pre-conflict phases or stabilized conflicts. This may be explained by the relatively limited attention that these missions give to security measures, even though some are deployed in relatively insecure areas.

CONCLUSIONS

The data on fatality rates from the SIPRI Multilateral Peace

Box 3. AMISOM fatality rates

The main results presented here cover the 11 years 2000–10. Some data for more recent years is available, and estimates to cover the gaps suggest that the general trends have continued, with one possible exception caused by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Estimates for AMISOM for the period 2007–12 range from fewer than 500 fatalities (according to the AU) to 3000 (according to one UN source).^a Using the lower estimate, the fatality rate on AU missions and on operations in Africa in recent years would remain roughly the same as in 2000–10. Using the higher estimate, Africa would have been the most dangerous region in the period 2000–12, with a fatality rate of 4.7 deaths per 1000 personnel per year, and the rate for the AU would increase sharply, from 7.2 to 40.5.

However, AMISOM's character has changed since 2010 as it has become more involved in combat; with its 2012 peace enforcement mandate it has become comparable to the combat missions ISAF and MNF-I. Thus, just as a better understanding of the general trend can be gained by excluding the statistical outliers ISAF and MNF-I, excluding figures for AMISOM can also be justified. Excluding AMISOM, the fatality rate in 2000–12 for Africa would drop to 1.4 deaths per 1000 personnel per year; and the rate for the AU would fall to 1.3.

Although uncertain, this data confirms the conclusion made on the basis of the data for 2000–10 that it is not the region or the conducting organization that determines the fatality rate, but the mission character, its context, and its security and protective measures.

^a Eliasson, J., UN Deputy Secretary-General, Press conference transcript, 9 May 2013, <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/dsgsm668.doc.htm>>; and Moalim, A., 'AMISOM spokesman refutes casualty numbers, outlines long-term plans', Sabahi, 22 May 2013, <http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/05/22/feature-01>.

Operations Database shows that Africa was not the most dangerous region to deploy peacekeepers. In fact, deployment in the Middle East or Central and South Asia was significantly more dangerous, and in the Americas was slightly more dangerous. When the two operations that were more actively involved in combat—ISAF and MNF-I—are excluded, contributing to missions in Africa remained safer than missions in Central and South Asia and the Americas (see also box 3).

Similarly, UN peacekeeping operations were much safer than NATO and NATO-led operations or ad hoc coalitions. Even if ISAF and MNF-I are excluded, UN peacekeeping operations were still not the most dangerous.

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There are indications that factors other than the region of deployment or the conducting organization better explain the lethality of a mission. Such factors may include the following.

1. *The character of the mission.*

The most important factor in determining the peacekeeper fatality rate seems to be the required level of combat activity, since that is what distinguishes ISAF and MNF-I. In contrast, missions that implement a peace agreement or have the general support of the population and the conflicting parties seem to have lower fatality rates.

2. *Mission context.* Stable contexts or low conflict intensity may explain the lower lethality rates of OSCE and EU missions.

3. *Security and protection measures.* The less stringent security measures taken by UN political and peacebuilding missions is likely to explain why they were more dangerous than UN peacekeeping operations.

Policy implications

Six policy implications of the above findings can be identified.

1. The relative security for personnel of operations in Africa suggests that governments concerned about the security of their own nationals should not be deterred from deploying to Africa. Indeed, it is safer than the Middle East, the Americas, and Central and South Asia.

2. Similarly, the relative security for personnel on UN peacekeeping

operations suggests that governments should not be deterred from deploying to these operations.

3. The fear of peacekeeper casualties cannot be used to justify Western countries not contributing to missions in Africa or to UN peacekeeping operations. More openly acknowledging an absence of national interest in those missions would be a more legitimate explanation.

4. Governments that want to avoid casualties should consider the mission's context (e.g. the stability of the deployment area), mandate and character (e.g. the level of combat activity required of the operation), and protective measures, not the region or conducting organization.

5. UN political and peacebuilding missions conducted by the DPA, which are predominantly staffed by civilian personnel, seem to be more dangerous. Contrary to the perception that military operations are intrinsically more lethal, military operations that are not involved in combat may be safer than civilian missions with weak protective measures. If true, this highlights the need to improve field security measures, headquarters capacity to lead, and the capacity for backstopping of UN political and peacebuilding missions.

6. If the West is serious about 'African solutions to African problems', then the relative danger of operations deployed by the AU and CEMAC underlines the need to increase assistance to these organizations. If future fatality rates on these missions do not fall, African countries may no longer be willing to sacrifice their soldiers for international peace and security.