

PEACEKEEPING AFTER HAITI: LATIN AMERICA TO CONFRONT NEW GLOBAL CHALLENGES

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In October 2017, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) closed down. With MINUSTAH ended what is to date Latin America's most significant regional peacekeeping effort. Nine Latin American countries contributed troop and police contingents to the mission that began in 2004 and staffed most of its political and military leadership positions, turning it into the only UN mission to

If the region wants to remain relevant in international peacekeeping efforts, states need to confront the global demand for increasingly complex missions, especially in Africa where the UN's efforts are concentrated. These imply a number of political and practical challenges that cannot be found in Haiti.



United Nations Peacekeeping un.org/peacekeeping

date with Spanish as its official language. Cooperation for regional peace was not restricted to the framework of the UN and in some cases effectively preceded it. With Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay leading the Latin American presence in Haiti, the countries of the region acted through the Organization of American States (OAS), the Group of Friends of Haiti and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

On balance, MINUSTAH was seen as a success at various levels. The mission contributed to Haiti's stability, especially after two earthquakes took place and a political crisis unfolded in 2010 as well as Hurricane Matthew that struck the country in 2016. From the contributors' perspective, the mission was an exercise in regional cooperation that involved an unprecedented level of permanent contact and exchanges in peacekeeping activities.

Also individually, the Latin American participants found the mission beneficial for a variety of reasons, ranging from a perceived increase in international standing and prestige to the complementation of national budgets in some cases, and the improvement of military capabilities and interoperability in complex environments. With the end of MINUSTAH, what is the future for peacekeeping operations in Latin America?

At the regional level, Latin America's current aim is to keep supporting the UN mission in Colombia, where unarmed observers are monitoring and verifying the steps of the peace process. Unlike in Haiti, however, there is no regional coordination to assist Colombia's transition.

The international demand for multifaceted peacekeeping

Of the UN's currently 15 peacekeeping operations, seven are deployed in sub-Saharan Africa. With respect to Latin America, Uruguay stands out as the sixth largest troop contributor to MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with currently over 900 blue helmets deployed. In comparison to other regions, Sub-Saharan Africa has seen a high level of non-state armed violence and risk to civilians that confronts the international community with a "trilemma" in which states are forced to choose which of peacekeeping's fundamental imperatives to prioritize¹.

The imperatives of UN peacekeeping are: 1) mission success, 2) minimal risk for peacekeepers and 3) maximum efficiency, that is, keeping the costs minimal. There is considerable variation in how Latin American states view the importance of each of these imperatives relative to the others and most have yet to define a coherent, national position.

¹ Paul D. Williams, The Politics of Force and the United Nations' Peacekeeping Trilemma, IPI Global Observatory, 9 February 2018. Available at <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2018/02/cruz-report-peacekeeping-trilemma/> (Accessed 15/02/2018).

Mission success in Africa means fulfilling an expanded mandate that typically goes beyond the narrow task of observing peace agreements but includes the imposition of peace, protection of civilians and an increasing range of civilian and police tasks as part of the UN's 'integrated missions concept'. For Latin America, the difficulty of meeting the growing complexity of the expanded mandates is further complicated by logistics requirements at an unprecedented scale and the lack of language skills, especially French, which governments have been slow to address. Although advances have been made regarding the UN's 'Women, Peace and Security' agenda, also in this area Latin America still has a lot to catch up with as gender sensitivity has not yet been normalized.

The second imperative, the avoidance of peacekeeper casualties, was the subject of the UN's most recent report on peacekeeping (known as the Cruz Report)² and is a particularly sensitive issue in almost all Latin American states, given that except for Uruguay and Brazil, countries have so far operated based on a political directive of zero casualties. The number of deaths serving on a UN mission has more than doubled each year since 2015 and the increasing complexity in dangerous areas of sub-Saharan Africa's hot spots –the DRC, Darfur and South Sudan, Mali and the Central African Republic– is unlikely to allow for a quick reversal of this trend.

The failure of past missions to protect civilians and cases of abuse committed by UN troops have stirred anti-UN sentiments that render peacekeepers increasingly vulnerable. For the Latin American countries, this raises the question whether governments are ready to assume greater political responsibility or whether they will decide to stay out of the African sub-continent where the international community's peacekeeping commitment is most needed.

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Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers, 2017. Available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/improving_security_of_united_nations_peacekeepers_report.pdf (Accessed 15/02/2018).



Lastly, keeping financial costs low is an efficiency requirement relevant to all Latin American countries even though several of them are net beneficiaries of UN peacekeeping rather than contributors in monetary terms. In recent years, Latin America has largely defied the global upward trend in defense spending. Given the absence of any serious threat of interstate conflict in the region, investments in the defense sector are likely to remain modest at best. What is mainly needed for the UN peacekeeping missions, however, are not the personnel-intensive contingents provided by Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal, to name but a few, but highly professional, specialized units with formidable equipment. For future peacekeeping commitments, budgetary constraints can provide opportunities for cooperation between countries to deploy multi-national missions, such as it had been done in MINUSTAH and other missions given that these are backed by political will providing for the necessary financial means to work together. Multifaceted peacekeeping operations imply political and practical challenges. Politically, governments have to be answerable for the successes, failures and consequences of complex missions. At the operational level, the security forces have to deal with radically different threat scenarios as compared to the Latin American context. Thus, Latin America's contributor states will need to either adapt, improve, or even create entirely new capabilities.

Colombia: continued commitment to regional stability

Unlike the African context, where peace often needs to be imposed before it can be kept, Latin America's currently only peacekeeping mission has a traditional mandate of oversight and verification. The UN mission in Colombia is a political mission composed of unarmed international observers.



The first mission to Colombia was established in early 2016, with the mandate to monitor and verify the laying down of arms and the cessation of hostilities between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (FARC-EP)³. More than 400 observers from nineteen countries -twelve from Latin America- contributed to the mission. After the signing of the *Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace*, the UN Security Council created a second Verification Mission. Its tasks include verifying the reintegration of FARC-EP members into Colombia’s political, economic and social life, the implementation of protection measures for personal and collective security, and of comprehensive security and protection programs for communities and organizations⁴.

It is still too early to evaluate the results of the Verification Mission as it only began in September 2017. Nevertheless, two major trends can already be observed. Following the signing of the peace agreement, the FARC-EP as the main guerilla group has become a political party and accepted the institutional framework that foresees deep changes towards a more inclusive, democratic political future in Colombia. Secondly, however, there is still a considerable level of uncertainty that is reflected in an increase of public insecurity (for example, growth in the number of homicides) in areas affected by the conflict⁵.

This situation implies both opportunities and challenges for peacekeeping. At the global level, the favorable development of the Colombian peace process may provide a boost to international peacekeeping efforts at a time of uncertainty over destabilizing conflicts in the Middle East and a world power signaling its retreat from the multilateral order it created.

³ United Nations. Available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12218.doc.htm> (Accessed 05/02/2018).

⁴ United Nations, Department of Political Affairs. Available at <https://colombia.unmissions.org/en/mandate> (Accessed 05/02/2018).

⁵ United Nations, Department of Political Affairs. Available at https://colombia.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/en_-_n1745936.pdf (Accessed 05/02/2018)

⁶ Myriam Ortega, Colombia Boosts Peace Missions Participation, *Diálogo*, 12 February 2018. Available at <https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/colombia-boosts-peace-missions-participation> (Accessed 17/02/2018).

In the Latin American context, the participating countries’ engagement needs to be seen primarily as a contribution to regional stability and cooperation, although it is worth noting that in Colombia, unlike in Haiti, there is no regional concerted action to support the peace process.

If the mission succeeds in supporting the transition to peace, Colombia will be able to make good on its pledge to become a contributor to peacekeeping with up to 5,000 troops⁶. Given decades of experience in the guerrilla war and eventually in demobilization and conflict resolution, it will be an attractive partner for burden sharing in peacekeeping operations.

The future of peacekeeping in Latin America

MINUSTAH was Latin America’s most extensive peacekeeping engagement to date, both collectively and for most contributing states individually. As of early 2018, the region is still processing the lessons learned during thirteen years in Haiti and considering which steps to take next. Except for Venezuela, which will remain a non-contributor to UN peacekeeping as long as the current regime stays in place, governments across Latin America are generally favorable towards a continued and possibly even increased participation in peacekeeping.



At the collective level, it is likely that some cooperation will continue in the form of exchanges between the national peacekeeping training centers, such as the bi-annual meetings of the Association of Latin American Peacekeeping Training Centers (ALCOPAZ), or in the form of multilateral exercises like UNASUR’s yearly Joint Combined Regional Peacekeeping Exercise. Apart from possible bilaterally integrated units in UN peacekeeping operations, however, it is highly improbable that we will see a major cooperation initiative such as the one prompted by MINUSTAH. In fact, this has not happened in Colombia. Brazil has temporarily lost the leadership capacity that was crucial for Latin America’s visibility in Haiti. Argentina, after years of minimal resource provision in the defense sector, lacks the capacity for any substantive engagement. It is therefore even questionable, if the



Argentine-Chilean joint combined peacekeeping force Cruz del Sur will be deployed any time soon. Registered under the UN Stand-by Arrangements System, Cruz del Sur is operative since 2011, but has not yet been deployed due to the failure to find a mutually agreeable formula for the location, tasks and financing of deployment.

If Latin American states individual seek to play a role in international peace and security and benefit politically and in terms of capacity from peacekeeping, they will need to face the global demand arising from the complex situations present in the Central African Republic and other places mainly on the African continent. Confronting situations far away in which there is some probability of casualties and where civilian and police elements need to be better integrated with military mission components, Latin America's leaders need a clearer vision where they want to stand in international peacekeeping. In the southern countries, which have been the most important contributors, the consolidation of democracy has removed an initial justification for sending peacekeepers abroad where the military would be subjected to high standards in civilian control, human rights and human security.

Contributing to global peace and security and fostering regional cooperation are commendable goals, but they are insufficient to justify investing in capacities to meet global peacekeeping demands if its benefits are not clearly communicated to local populations.

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