

Policing the Peace: The Rise of United Nations Formed Police Units

Annika S. Hansen

In recent years (re-)establishing the rule of law has moved centre-stage. At the same time, there has been a growing focus on the work of international police officers in peace operations. In fact, the number of police deployed by the United Nations (UN) alone has risen eightfold since 1995 to an authorized strength of over 17,500 as of March 31, 2011. Naturally, the rapid growth has heightened the challenge of recruiting sufficient police officers, which in part has spurred the recruitment of Formed Police Units (FPUs).

The increased deployment of FPUs has made up a large part of the growth and has become a major feature of police peacekeeping in the last decade. Half of the police personnel in UN peace operations now consists of members of Formed Police Units. UN FPUs are defined as cohesive mobile police units, providing support to UN operations and ensuring the safety and security of UN personnel and missions, primarily in public order management. FPUs are a coherent part of the UN Police component and work in support of the establishment and maintenance of safe, democratic and human-rights-abiding communities by delivering professional, responsive and robust policing in accordance with the mandate.

History of Deployment

Even though Formed Police Units are often seen as a recent addition to police peacekeeping, the first formed police unit was in fact deployed as part of the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC) from 1960-64. A unit from Ghana was brought in to enforce the law and to train the Congolese police. This mission and type of capacity foreshadowed the developments that would take place 40 years later. In 1998, NATO's Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina established a Multinational Specialised Unit (MSU) to address policing challenges that had verged on the border of being a military threat, but that had not been easily handled with a military capacity and approach. This model was not very successful for

several reasons, one of which was the MSU being attached to the military SFOR rather than the UN's International Police Task Force (IPTF). In that way, the MSU was dislocated from the overall international effort to strengthen *policing* in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Having witnessed these limitations of the way the formed capacity was used in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the police component of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) included so-called Special Police Units (SPUs) from the outset. This meant that in 1999 the UN returned to a formed police response for the first time since ONUC. From those tentative beginnings just over a decade ago, the UN today deploys more than 50 FPUs in six missions around the world: Haiti



(MINUSTAH), Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Darfur/Sudan (UNAMID), Liberia (UNMIL), Timor-Leste (UNMIT), and Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).

Core Functions of Formed Police Units in UN Operations

In accordance with UN policy, Formed Police Units have three core functions. First, they are primarily a tool for managing public order. Their handling of the December 2010 post-election demonstrations in Haiti is a typical example of this function. In most cases, public order management will be in support of host-state police, but FPU can also be called upon to act independently in accordance with the mission mandate. The primary focus of public order management is in fact to assist citizens to exercise their fundamental rights without any disturbance or unjustified hindrance and to prevent assemblies from threatening or actually harming public safety. Throughout their deployment in UNMIK from 1999-2008, FPUs were frequently called upon to manage these types of tense public gatherings. Here and in other missions, FPUs were often hampered by inconsistencies in their operational readiness and differing national approaches to, for example, managing public order.

Second, they provide protection for UN staff and facilities. This is usually not a continuous task. Instead, should a situation arise, where UN staff need to be relocated or evacuated, the FPUs play a central role. Protection can also include the escorting of convoys. Examples of this core function include FPUs being deployed in Eastern Congo near key UN offices or protecting staff during the tense post-election stand-off in Côte d'Ivoire.

Third, FPUs can support police operations that may involve a higher risk – above the general capability of individual United Nations police officers. This can include high-visibility and joint patrols with individual United Nations police officers, the military peacekeepers, or host-state police. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, FPUs are patrolling both with the Congolese police and the UN military throughout the East of

the country. Here, as well as in Haiti and Darfur, they are also patrolling in and around Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps.

Deployment Challenges

In part, the dramatic growth in FPU deployments is due to their being seen as a panacea in conflict areas where there appears to be a “security gap” between police and military. While they undoubtedly have a role to play, this role must be clearly defined to make best use of their capabilities, equipment and tactics. A number of challenges arise when FPUs attempt to fill the security gap.

The challenge of enforcement: In almost all of its missions, UN Police supports the host-state police in their efforts to maintain law and order. Only in Timor-Leste the UN Police is responsible for enforcing the law based on a so-called executive mandate. This is true for FPUs as well. One of the attractions of deploying FPUs is the fact that they are armed and more heavily equipped, in contrast to individual UN police officers who are unarmed – except in Timor-Leste and Haiti. But, except in the context of an executive mission such as in Timor or Kosovo, FPUs do not have powers to arrest. Nor do they have the kind of enforcement mandate that would allow them to maintain law and order or – at the other end of the security gap – provide effective protection or defensive capacity along the lines of a military force. FPUs can effectively conduct high-visibility patrols in certain areas, can manage unruly crowds, and provide protection to UN staff and facilities. But they cannot challenge rebel groups, nor replace military forces by providing area security or taking part in military operations. They are, of course, capable of handling an escalating security situation, where, for example, a demonstration turns violent, but FPUs are not an extension of the military peacekeepers.

The challenge of deployability: FPUs are recruited and deployed as a component of 120-140 officers whereas single UN police officers are recruited individually. In the past there has been the tendency to view FPUs as a useful pool of reserve personnel, but given the differences in training,



Current UN Missions with FPUs

Mission	Number of FPUs	FPU officers	Total UN Police Component	FPU as % of UN Police Component
MINUSTAH (Haiti)	16	2,273	3,578	64%
MONUSCO (DRC)	7	889	1,259	71%
UNAMID (Darfur)	16	2,227	5,121	43%
UNMIL (Liberia)	7	846	1,309	65%
UNMIT (Timor)	4	489	1,364	36%
UNOCI (Ivory Coast)	6	952	1,296	73%

Source: DPKO, figures as per March 31, 2011

experience, qualifications, and manner of operating between a member of an FPU and an individual police officer, the two cannot be exchanged one-to-one. Instead, FPUs can only be deployed for operations in their entirety or in smaller subsections where the smallest deployable FPU team consists of ten to twelve members.

The challenge of reach: This is linked in part to the requirement of not breaking an FPU down below the smallest deployable unit. The value of an FPU lies in the fact that they are deployed as units, are trained together to act cohesively, are armed as well as protected and can therefore handle policing and public order challenges of a greater magnitude than individual UN Police officers. Moreover, in contrast to individual officers who generally rent their own private accommodation, FPUs stay in permanent camps similar to the military. For logistical reasons and in order to maintain their capacity for tasks beyond the capacity of individual UN Police, the FPU should and do largely stay assembled at their camp. In small mission areas, such as Kosovo used to be and Haiti is today, FPUs can reach volatile spots around the mission area from their fixed bases. In a vast territory, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Darfur, they can only ever have a limited geographical reach.

Review of Formed Police Units Deployed in 2008

In light of the rapid growth and some concern over the pace at which FPUs were being thrown at all kinds of challenges, the UN decided in 2008 to conduct a comprehensive review of actual activity and operational capacity of every one of the 38

FPUs deployed at that time. The process consisted of several tracks: assessment, doctrine development, remedial training, standard setting, and the development of a standardized pre-deployment curriculum for FPUs. Never before had the UN conducted such a comprehensive review of personnel deployed under its aegis. The process was unique in its comprehensiveness, transparency, and the wide participation by Member States who appointed experts to assist in every stage of the process.

The results of the evaluation revealed widely varying standards and approaches among the FPUs. There were serious operational and structural weaknesses with issues ranging from poor sanitary and living conditions, to inadequate and inappropriate equipment, to dysfunctional command arrangements, and to a lack of fire-arms proficiency and crowd control skills. They reflected one of the fundamental difficulties in taking Member States up on their offer to supply a formed unit, namely the national interpretations for example of what a formed police unit might be, where it may come from, whether it was affiliated with the military or the police in their home country, for how long the unit may have trained together, or whether it had any area of specialization.

The response of the UN was twofold: A Doctrine Development Group (DDG) for FPUs had already begun reviewing the doctrine for Formed Police Units that outlined their core tasks, composition, command and control and unit readiness standards – even while evaluations were ongoing. The fact that over 50 experts from Member States and international organizations contributed ensured

that the revised policy reflects the consensus among police professionals from many countries and all continents.

Top Police Contributing Countries		
Rank	UN Police Contributions	Formed Police Units Only
1	Bangladesh	Bangladesh
2	Jordan	Jordan
3	India	India
4	Pakistan	Pakistan
5	Nigeria	Senegal
6	Nepal	Nepal
7	Senegal	Nigeria
8	Rwanda	Burkina Faso, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Portugal, Rwanda, Togo (one FPU each)
9	Ghana	
10	Sierra Leone	

Source: DPKO

Member States also worked with the UN Police Division to assemble and train Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) that would be able to deploy back into the missions and provide immediate corrective training. They also jointly developed the *FPU Standardized Pre-deployment Curriculum* which made it possible to assess units prior to accepting them for international deployment and to ensure that those that would deploy met minimum standards for operational readiness. The Training-of-Trainers (ToTs) to harmonize the units' preparation training for UN operations in their home countries is scheduled for roll-out in 2011.

Outlook

The comprehensive review of FPUs was a unique and extremely important undertaking, due to the thoroughness of the initial evaluation but even more so due to the response that looked to address both short- and long-term needs. It also demonstrated how UN headquarters, Member States, and field components can and should work together to address a difficult situation and put in place sustainable solutions.

It has always been difficult to assess the usefulness and suitability of Gendarmerie-type forces for international police peacekeeping because they come in so many different shapes and sizes, which makes comparison and generalization difficult. Some are very close to military units – in appearance, command lines, equipment and tactics – while others operate as integral parts of police services, as a specialised capacity typically used for public order management, higher profile investigations, the fight against terrorism, border control and similar tasks. In order to ensure a somewhat consistent starting-point, UN policy stipulates readiness standards that call for a minimum of policing experience, as well as the necessity for the unit to have existed, worked and trained together for at least six months prior to deployment.

Formed Police Units can provide critical security support to the mission as well as the host nation of a peace support operation. They are not a panacea and the decision to deploy an FPU should be matched by an assessment of its added value given that it faces the same restrictions as the remainder of the mission in both mandate and host nation consent. FPUs remain above all a policing tool – an integral part of the UN Police component and bound by the same mandate

Annika S. Hansen is the Policy Officer in the Office of the Police Adviser, Police Division, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

