

“No Army in the World is Trained to Protect Civilians”

Interview with **Alain Le Roy**, former UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, on peacekeeping overstretch, the UN's zero-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct, the monumental challenge of the new task of protection of civilians in the DR Congo and the Sudan, the constant need for high-tech equipment, the initial results of the “New Horizon” process, and future challenges.

Question: Mr. Le Roy, you have served as Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from mid-2008 until September this year. During this time the number of peacekeeping personnel reached its all-time height of 120,000 persons (military, police, civilian) from an all-time low of 20,000 in 1998. The budget also rose to unprecedented heights with \$7.8 billion last year. Is this in your view an indication for success of UN peacekeeping or rather for the failure of the UN to prevent crises from becoming wars?

Le Roy: I would not call it a success. As head of the DPKO [Department of Peacekeeping Operations] it was not my task to increase the number of peacekeepers. My objective is to ensure that the peacekeeping tool remains valid and solid in case it is called upon. The fact that the number and the budget have increased is on the one hand an indication that the world has been more unstable and on the other that other actors were not able or willing to take their part. When no one is able or wants to go to a crisis then the UN remains the option of last resort.

What does that imply that UN is always the peacekeeper of last resort?

First, in some ways it is legitimate because the UN is the only truly global organization. My fear is that with the budget crisis, especially in Europe, that the defense budget will decrease and EU member states and other will be less and less inclined to send their troops abroad and to say one more time: There is a crisis, let's ask the UN. So, that is how it will function in the future. The UN will be more often asked because countries will have their own budget problems. And the UN, of course, is much cheaper and you can always find troops from other countries and other continents to serve in UN missions.

Aren't the majority of the UN peace operations doomed to fail because of either political considerations of member states or lack of resources or local hostility or low local capabilities?

Absolutely not. Yes, we are more and more operating in extremely difficult environments, for example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the Sudan. We have been in Ivory Coast and in other difficult places. But look at some of the achievements of the last years: let me start with East Timor. East Timor will close

operations successfully next year. In Liberia we have been extremely successful. Sudan, as well, regarding the referendum in South Sudan: Nobody believed that we would be able to assist the government to hold the referendum on time, peacefully and without much violence. That is a fantastic achievement, despite the fact that we know that the region remains extremely volatile. In Haiti, of course, there are problems. But we were able to overcome the political crisis last year with the presidential election because of our presence. We ensured a lot of stability before the earthquake. The five years before the earthquake in January 2010 rank among the best years for Haiti. And those people affected by violence and chaos know that very well. The president of Timor-Leste, for example, came to the Security Council saying that without the peacekeeping mission his country would be in total chaos today. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf from Liberia said the same. You may have heard Luis Moreno Ocampo, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, telling us: This operation together with the French forces in Ivory Coast has prevented a potential tragedy like in Rwanda in 1994. So, most of our operations could be qualified as successes and are recognized as such by the people on the ground.

But there are also failures?

Of course, there are weaknesses and failures. The UN is not able to protect everyone, like in the DR Congo or the Sudan. There are still rapes, there are still people being killed. But imagine if we were not there the number of people who are being raped and killed would be so much higher. Every day all of the UN's operations are protecting millions of people worldwide. We are not able to protect and interfere everywhere, we must improve. But we are not doomed to fail, at all.

What is the ratio in numbers between the peacekeepers and the people to protect for example in the Congo?

DR Congo is a huge territory, much bigger than France and Germany. There are currently 18,000 peacekeepers deployed, mainly in Eastern Congo to protect the most sensible provinces, North Kivu and South Kivu. Ten million people live just there and 18,000 peacekeepers are deployed. That makes 18 peacekeepers to protect 10,000 people. You cannot ensure with 18 peacekeepers that all 10,000 people are safe. In Kosovo in 1999, for example, the ratio was incomparable. NATO came into Kosovo with more than 45,000 troops, in a territory which is 200 times smaller than the Congo. And still there were people killed every day. So it is impossible to protect hundred percent of the civilians.

Would ten times more soldiers in the Congo help or is it the bad infrastructure that makes it difficult to protect the people?

In the case of the DR Congo it is not only a question of numbers. I am not asking for more soldiers, because it is not realistic. I know that the UN would not get more. But we need more and better equipment, for example, airlift, military transport

helicopters and military attack helicopters. That is badly needed. We have to be able to move quickly. The rebels are very agile and there are no real roads, no infrastructure. So this is what the UN needs the most in the Eastern Congo – airlift and military helicopters.

What is your measure of success? For example in the South Sudan, the mandate of the peacekeeping mission there contains about 40 tasks. Can any mission fulfill 40 tasks?

The mission with 40 tasks is in the DR Congo. Among the 40 tasks we consider that some are much more important than others. The protection of civilians is the most important, of course. Security sector reform to help to build a strong army in the Congo, to help us to have an exit strategy is a very important measure of success. In the case of the new mission in the South Sudan, it is very important that we help the state to build its institutions. Capacity-building is the most important task and again protection of civilians. There are still inter-ethnic clashes in the South Sudan and we have to be present as much as we can despite the fact that the Council has authorized only 7,000 troops to protect civilians in a country bigger than France.

I have the impression that it is always like that: That there is never enough equipment, never enough soldiers, civilian personnel and police ...

... and too high expectations.

Too high expectations, as well. Do you think that, one day, the UN can leave Congo?

Definitely yes, the situation in the DR Congo is much better than few years ago. Everyone recognizes that. We have clearly contributed to stabilize the country. There will be elections there soon. If the elections turn out to be peaceful, then maybe next year, the UN can start thinking of drawing down. But it is very important for the army, the police, the security forces in the Congo to be efficient, to be loyal to the government, to be well-disciplined, well-trained. And that is a long process.

Let us come back to the protection of civilians. Recent mandates include this task. How does the DPKO, your former office, prepare for it? Is there a different approach?

We have had this mandate in ten different missions. It is easy for the Security Council to put that one sentence in the mandate: The mission has to protect the civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. But by including that sentence the Council raises a lot of expectations in the population. How to do it, is another issue. The problem is that no army in the world is trained to protect civilians. They are usually trained to make war, but not to protect civilians.

So, it is a new concept and a complicated one. We have elaborated on it. We had many consultations, gathered a lot of experiences. We consider it is the task of the military, the police personnel but also of the civilian personnel to prevent local clashes. The head of a regional office has a very important role to play. He has to ensure that he is aware of what could happen in the area and in the region. We have drafted a mission-wide strategy, not only for the military. And we have elaborated a more general, not country-specific, strategic framework on how to deal with the protection of civilians. And we are very lucky that it has been endorsed by the member states through the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. That was a very important step to ensure that we all have the same understanding of what protection of civilians means and how to deal with it.

And you have these joint protection teams, right?

Yes, these are teams which are comprised of military, police and civilians, human rights people or child protection officers. Each time they feel the risk in a specific place, in a village, they go out jointly.

Just one person for each sector?

It could be one or several experts. It is a small group because it shall function as a warning system. They go into the villages and try to understand the situation. If they sense the situation is serious they call for more military, more police, more human rights experts.

That is one example. We have developed a lot of innovative approaches. For example, we have delivered cell phones to the heads of the villages to ensure that each time they feel a threat they can call us immediately. But there is no cell coverage everywhere and where we can, we also distribute satellite phones. We do that also with the head of the women community there. We have developed a lot of these kinds of innovative approaches. It is not enough but we are always trying to improve.

During the past decade more and more alleged cases of misconduct by peacekeepers were reported. The UN has adopted a zero-tolerance policy. What is this policy about and did it work?

This zero-tolerance policy is very important. It is a priority of the Secretary-General and of the head of the DPKO to reduce the misbehaviors. The figures are very clear: 350 cases of potential misconduct three years ago, 84 cases last year. The trend is very much decreasing: 84 for 120,000 peacekeepers – compared with others, remember Abu Ghraib. Every army has that problem. Of course, those cases always make the first page headline of the media, as it is even more unacceptable from a peacekeeper. But 99 per cent of the soldiers behave correctly. Less than one per cent is behaving badly. But for this one per cent we have really strict policies.

What policies exactly?

Each time we have such a case we repatriate the person immediately back to his/her country. And we put pressure on the country of origin to ensure that the person is prosecuted at home. We cannot prosecute them ourselves. Only the country of origin has the right to prosecute. There was recently a case in Haiti with someone from Uruguay. The president of Uruguay himself took care of the case and the person was sent to jail. Any misbehavior under the zero-tolerance policy must be handled absolutely strictly. All force commanders know that it is their top priority to ensure that all local commanders are aware that misbehavior will not be tolerated. It is a top priority for us.

Let us come to the troop contributing countries. There is a kind of trichotomy in peacekeeping: Some give the money, some give their blood and some make the decisions. These countries are not identical: The biggest donors are: USA, Japan, UK, and Germany. The biggest troop contributing countries are Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Nigeria and the ones which decide are the five permanent members of the Security Council. Is this a bad configuration that those who decide are not the ones who send the troops? How to overcome this trichotomy?

You can argue that this is a division of labor. Some have the finances and some have more troops available to go abroad, and their constituencies let them go abroad. That is the way we function. We see some tension on that – especially with the financial crisis. Those who finance are not interested to increase the reimbursement rate, for example. Those who are on the ground feel that this is unacceptable. We consider this triangle, this discrepancy between those who decide, those who fund and those who are on the ground, as not sustainable in the long run. We would very much like to have a greater overlap. At the same time, you have very important troop contributors such as India, Nigeria, and Pakistan (as of 2012) in the Security Council these days. Therefore they participate in all decisions concerning our mandates. That is very important.

Do the troop-contributing countries want to have more influence in the Security Council? Are they more involved in the decision-making and deliberations?

The DPKO tries to involve them at an earlier stage. When we send an assessment mission to a specific country we always try to consult the troop-contributing countries and the police-contributing countries before. When the mission comes back we ensure that we are exactly in the right approach with them. But the final decisions are with the Security Council and its 15 members. And it is the Council's role to consult them as much as possible because they are the ones doing the job on the ground.

Most peacekeeping operations suffer from lack of readily available troops and equipment. Are there plans to reestablish a stand-by force, like the SHIRBRIG used to be, or to use the EU Battlegroups?

Having a stand-by force has been the dream of every head of the DPKO since the beginning. But realistically that will not happen. But it is a very important issue. Each time it takes roughly six months to have a mission fully operational, because we do not have stand-by troops. We have to call the member states – the willing member states. And very often they have to buy the right equipment and have to be prepared. So, what can be done?

The solution could be to have regional stand-by forces, like the one of ECOWAS or the African Standby Force. But support from the European Union is also crucial. We have learned much from the past. What happened in the case of Chad? The EU deployed much more rapidly than the UN did. The EU said that they want to stay only one year and they stayed for one year. Afterwards we took over. That way we have had enough time to prepare, that went fine. We could imagine this kind of cooperation. With regard to the EU Battlegroups, or any other EU ad hoc coalition: They could be a solution in case of a specific crisis, when we need that kind of robust action, limited in time that the traditional peacekeepers cannot do. Being able to count on this kind of what we call 'over-the-horizon force' will be extremely useful for us.

Is the cooperation with regional organizations the solution for the future?

Yes, I wish, of course, cooperation with the AU, the EU and in some cases the NATO, or other organizations, definitely.

And have the experiences with such a kind of cooperation been good?

Yes, with the NATO the UN has been working well side-by-side in Kosovo; in Afghanistan we have a civil mission and a huge NATO operation; with the EU we have had Artemis in 2003 and EUFOR in 2006 in DR Congo; we have had the Chad operation, we have Atalanta (coast of Somalia) which is important also for us because it protects the ships that support the AU operation AMISOM. We have lot of joint operations with the EU. And we are very pleased with that. We have a lot of cooperation with the AU in different formats. We have the hybrid model in Darfur (UNAMID); we have the AMISOM model, where the AU is in the lead but the UN is supporting the AU logistically; or the model of ECOMOG¹ – they came and then we took over. It is very clear that EU, AU and NATO are important partners for us.

But the cooperation in Afghanistan, for example, does not seem to function very well between UNAMA and ISAF. They have different

¹ ECOMOG = Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group.

philosophies or views on what the final status for Afghanistan should look like and when to reach it by what means. The civil mission UNAMA strives to build up civil capabilities, which is a long-term process; and ISAF is looking at short-term successes in military terms.

I wouldn't say so because many are the same member states in UNAMA and in ISAF. Of course, the military has its 2014 scheme and looks for ways how to transfer the authority to the Afghan security forces. That is their task. But the aims of UNAMA and ISAF are not at all contradictory. They have different objectives but they are completely in line. The UN's aim is long-term civilian capacity-building, and NATO's aim is rapid capacity-building for the security forces. Sometimes we are accused of being too close to ISAF. I don't think we are. Everyone wants an Afghanistan which is autonomous, stable, and has sufficient capabilities – military, police and civilian – to be able to run itself.

After ISAF will be withdrawn in 2014, should UNAMA take up more tasks and be a bigger mission?

That has to be decided. I don't think at all that there will be a UN peacekeeping operation after the departure of ISAF. But maybe there will be a more important role for a civilian mission. We are discussing this already. We could imagine that capacity-building and state-building measures are still very much needed. The UN has a lot of experiences and could bring that into the country. But it must be done with the consent of the country.

How does the DPKO find qualified personnel for the very broad tasks the peacekeepers have to fulfill nowadays? Is there a standard procedure?

We have a database of names coming from other missions, and member states give us lots of names. There is a standard procedure. Everyone is selected by a panel and by the human resources division. But I am encouraging especially young Germans to have these experiences of being in the field of peacekeeping. I have been a peacekeeper myself in Kosovo and Bosnia. Everyone, I believe, can see how enriching it is to work on the ground with people from different nationalities or cultures. And everyone has quickly the feeling of being useful.

But they should not be deterred by eight months of waiting before getting an answer.

I fully agree with you. That is one of the main weaknesses of the UN system in general, not only of peacekeeping, how cumbersome the human resources recruiting process is. Personally, I see it as a top priority for the reform agenda to make the recruitment process more transparent, easier and quicker.

How does the UN want to increase the participation of women in UN peace missions? Currently only roughly 3.3 per cent of UN military personnel are female. In UN Police it is 8.7 per cent. Is there a strategy to attract more women?

Among the civilian peacekeeping personnel, women account for one third. We could increase that, but for women is not that always easy to work in the field, far away from home, especially for women with small children. It is more difficult for them to go. But we try to have as many women as possible.

For the military, the figure is around three per cent which is also in conformity with the percentage of women in the armies around the world. I would assume that in the German army there are not much more than three per cent women.

But for the police the figure is more than 8.7. I reckon we are now at 9.5 percent. We have a plan to increase this figure to 20 percent by 2014. We reckon that the police are the part of a mission which interacts most with the part of the population which has to be protected, often women and children, especially in the refugee camps. And it is obvious, like in Haiti or Darfur, that women are much better in dealing with other women and children than men. So, we have a clear timeline. We were at five percent a few years ago and we are now almost at ten percent. And we have a plan to reach 20 percent by 2014. I encourage again German women police officers to join us.

Let us come to strategy and doctrine. Last year there was the tenth anniversary of the Brahimi report on peacekeeping. What has been achieved since the publication of the report in 2000? What is still missing?

The Brahimi report² came after a terrible decade for UN peacekeeping, which was the 1990s when we had three big failures: Somalia Rwanda, and Srebrenica. A lot has been achieved thanks to the Brahimi report. And you can see that in the last ten years there was not such a tragedy.

We are facing sometimes extremely difficult situations, like in Haiti, Sudan and Ivory Coast, but we have always been able to overcome them so far. That is a big achievement. But a lot remains to be done. I have mentioned this new task of protection of civilians. How to improve every day? Again, we are not perfect, at all. There are still people being killed. How to improve that? It is clear also that we are going into the direction of more and more robust peacekeeping.

What does robust exactly mean?

² Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, UN Doc. A/55/305 - S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/

Robustness refers to one of the three guiding principles of peacekeeping: First, impartiality, second, necessary consent of the host country, and third use of force in self-defense and in defense of the mandate. And in defense of the mandate you have to be robust. That means, if a rebel group or any group, tries to attack the local population we must be able to react robustly, not being passive. Robustness means using our arms quite often. And we did that in Ivory Coast. The UN mission clearly used its attack helicopters against the heavy weapons which were targeting the population. But we used our attack helicopters also in the Congo, where again, the population was attacked. We have to use our weapons and being robust – much more than we were in the past.

And the “new horizon” report of 2009? Does it contain a new concept or is it just some kind of stock-taking?

When I arrived at the DPKO in 2008 I immediately read the Brahimi report which remains the best document on how to operate in peacekeeping. But it is dated from the year 2000. At that time there were about 30,000 peacekeepers deployed. We now have 120,000 peacekeepers. The numbers, the complexity of the tasks and the necessary robustness have drastically changed. The “new horizon”³ process is a new initiative which I launched upon my arrival and which is still ongoing, to adapt our tools to the new realities. And from that a lot is being done on the protection of civilians. We drafted the concept of what protection of civilians means. That part of the “new horizon” process was endorsed by member states, on robust peacekeeping, on the nexus between peacekeeping and peacebuilding, on the right standards for troops. And thanks to that transparent process, we have been able to reach consensus on many of these issues. It is not over, we continue. The DPKO will issue a new progress report on this New Horizon initiative. Quite a lot of achievements have been made through this new process.

So one of the new tasks is peacebuilding. How do you see the interaction with the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)?

In my view, there should be more interaction between the PBC and the Security Council. We consider that there is no sequencing between peacekeeping and peacebuilding. We consider that peacebuilding should start from day one. If you want to have sustainable peace in a country, the activities of peacebuilding, rule of law, security sector reform should start from the first day. And we consider that the peacekeepers are early peacebuilders. So, we have to work with all the other UN agencies which work in peacebuilding and the other actors. And in some cases, like in Liberia, there are both, the peacekeeping mission and the PBC. It works quite well but we can develop this relationship, definitely.

³ A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping, United Nations, July 2009, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/newhorizon.shtml>

Should the Department of Peacekeeping Operations be renamed in Department of Peacebuilding Efforts?

I don't think so. We are very much into peacebuilding but we are not the only ones. First, there are many actors involved in peacebuilding. Second, our core task remains keeping the peace when you have a peace accord which is very fragile, like in Sudan, Ivory Coast or Liberia.

So it is the SRSG in a mission or in a country who is taking the lead for coordinating the other UN agencies in peacebuilding?

Yes, we have more and more integrated missions in which the SRSG has the task to coordinate the work of all UN agencies and hopefully to coordinate with others. In the South Sudan today there are so many actors, you work with the World Bank and with the main stakeholders. Coordination is obviously key to success.

Where do you see future challenges for UN peacekeeping? What could the UN secretariat do better and what could the member states do better?

The main challenge is the continuing high demand for UN peacekeeping. The reasons for this are more and more instability on the one hand and the financial difficulties in many member states on the other. This has two implications: Member states would not do peacekeeping themselves anymore. So the demand on the UN troops will be higher. And at the same time it will be difficult for them to fund our budget. This means that we have to do more with less. That is the main challenge for the coming years.

What can the UN secretariat do better?

We must continue our reform and adaptation process. The "new horizon" process is very important. We also must continue to act on the misbehavior issue. That is obvious. Even 84 cases are too much. So we have to reduce that figure. We have to be better in the protection of civilians. And we have to be able to deploy more rapidly. That is very important.

What could the member states do better?

In my opinion, the most developed countries should help us more. They help us a lot in financing. The EU, for example, is financing around 40 percent of the peacekeeping budget. But they could bring more capacity, more helicopters, that kind of things that only the most developed countries have. They could also help other member states on the training. We can imagine some countries which don't have many troops on the ground having bilateral agreements with one troop contributing country and do the training, like Belgium did with Benin, for example, France with Togo or the US with Rwanda. We could also imagine that countries like Germany will send more civilians. Civilian judges, policemen, constitutional experts,

legal experts – those are badly needed if you want to build state capacity in a country which comes out of a violent conflict.

What would you expect from Germany to do in the next couple of years?

First, I would expect that Germany continues to be a very good supporter in peacekeeping. I am very pleased with the support Germany is giving us in the Security Council. When Germany is not in the Council it should continue to support the UN politically and financially. I could imagine that Germany, when the number of soldiers in Afghanistan will decrease, could send more peacekeepers in UN operations. And I do not mean especially big infantry battalions. The UN needs engineers, military doctors, helicopters – this kind of expertise which Germany clearly has. Not many countries have the same level of technology and of capacity. These capacities are badly needed in the UN.

The Interview took place on 8 November 2011 in Berlin in the context of the International Conference “Peacekeeping on the Ground: What Role for Major Troop Contributing Countries?” organized by the Research Council of the United Nations Association of Germany and partners. The questions were raised by Anja Papenfuss, Editor-in-Chief of VEREINTE NATIONEN – German Review on the United Nations. A German version of the Interview was published in VEREINTE NATIONEN, Vol. 59, No. 6, 2011, pp. 250–256.