

The Verification and Monitoring of Peace Accords

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The verification and monitoring of peace accords is a subject that has received little attention.¹ Given the inextricable connection between the monitoring and verification of peace accords and their potential success or failure, as well as the explosion of verification and monitoring operations since the end of the Cold War, this is a surprising gap.

A recent conference at Wilton Park, co-sponsored by the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), sought to discuss and highlight the various issues associated with the verification and monitoring of peace accords and to raise questions for further study. Some of the issues discussed include the connections between the different verification and monitoring requirements such as human rights monitoring and civilian police monitoring, the effect of the political environment (e.g. high tension versus low tension) on the verification and monitoring situation, and the role and impact, if any, of new methodologies and technologies. This article will provide an overview of the issues associated with the verification and monitoring of peace accords, first by discussing the overall trends in the verification and monitoring of peace accords during and after the Cold War and then by dealing with specific issues and questions related to the current debate about peace accords.

The verification and monitoring of peace accords is primarily, though not exclusively, undertaken by the United Nations in the form of peacekeeping or peace enforcement operations.² This article focuses on UN operations but the issues discussed also apply to operations established to monitor and verify peace accords outside of UN auspices.

What is the distinction between the monitoring and verification functions? Monitoring is the process of gathering information about a particular activity. This can be done either by human beings or by technological means, depending on the situation. Technical means can include on-site methods, such as monitoring devices at a nuclear power plant, or remote methods, as in the case of satellite surveillance. Monitoring may be highly directed, that is specifically targeted at detecting a particular type of activity, while ignoring everything else, or it may be general, as in the case of the proverbial British Bobby on the beat.

Verification, on the other hand, is always directed. Verification is the use of information to make a judgement about the compliance of parties with the terms of an agreement. In the case of peace agreements, verification is the process by which compliance of the parties to the terms of such accords is judged. It encompasses the gathering of information, including by monitoring, as

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well as directly from the parties themselves, and the use of such information to make judgements about some or all of the aspects of the agreement's implementation. The concept of verification therefore includes those persons or bodies charged with making compliance judgements and the processes they use to make them. In the case of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) mission, for instance, such persons and bodies included: the Military Mixed Commission, which made judgements about the military aspects of compliance; the Human Rights Component, which made judgements about the parties' compliance with various human rights conventions and laws; the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Mr Akashi; the Secretary-General himself; and, ultimately, the UN Security Council.³

Cold War to post-Cold War trends

Since the end of the Cold War there has been a definite change in the scope and nature of missions established to monitor and verify peace accords. During the Cold War, operations were generally oriented towards cease-fires. Sometimes there were other measures associated with the cease-fire, such as buffer zones and demilitarization, but by and large the monitoring of a cease-fire was the central part of the mandate. Second, during the Cold War, there tended to be a relatively limited connection between the political processes associated with negotiating the peace accords and the implementation process. The UN might have a mandate to supervise a cease-fire, for example, while the negotiations on developing a formal agreement or more comprehensive peace agreement would go on under other, non-UN auspices.⁴

With the end of the Cold War, the nature of these operations changed in three basic ways. First, while monitoring a cease-fire remains a central part of the mission, the scope and complexity of missions associated with peace accords has expanded dramatically. These operations now involve overseeing the demobilization and disarmament of troops, often including guerrilla groups, and their re-integration into society or into newly formed armed forces. Recent operations have involved sanctions monitoring as well as monitoring of no-fly zones, additions that have brought naval and air forces, until recently infrequent participants in the peace accord monitoring business, into the equation. Beyond the military measures, missions associated with peace accords are now often tasked with election monitoring, monitoring and training of local police, and human rights monitoring.⁵ These tasks involve civilian, police and military observers. So not only has the scope of the operations expanded, this expansion has brought with it an increase in the number and types of actors involved in monitoring peace accords.

Second, the entire process, from negotiating a peace accord through to monitoring and verifying its provisions, has become much more integrated than was the case during the Cold War. The UN is now increasingly involved in the entire process, including the negotiation of an accord, its implementation, and the post-conflict peace-building phase.⁶

Third, the post-Cold War period has been marked by an increased willingness of the Security

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Council to authorize the use of force in peace operations, and has done so in situations where disarmament and demobilization tasks are being undertaken. The authorization of the use of force beyond self-defence complicates the verification and monitoring environment considerably.

In the midst of these changes, however, two characteristics of these operations have remained as they were during the Cold War. First, the role of the military observer remains central to verification

and monitoring tasks. The simple physical presence of a third party continues to have an important impact in these operations. The monitor acts as a symbol of the commitment and concern of the international community. In that way, the monitor's presence can deter actions and violations as well as give greater gravity to violations when they do occur.

Second, a basic package of multi-layered verification and monitoring mechanisms, from which given accords and operations draw on for specific missions, has also remained constant. Each mechanism serves its own purpose but also supports and reinforces other mechanisms. These mechanisms include, inter alia, observers, information provided by the parties (baseline information), inspections to confirm the accuracy of the information (baseline inspections), information provided by outside parties, ongoing inspections, ongoing patrols and observation to ensure the maintenance of cease-fires and/or agreed troop levels or positions, aerial surveillance, and the use of a joint commission process.

The role of technology

Technology has brought some improvements to verification and monitoring procedures. For example, advances in global positioning system (GPS) and mobile telephone technologies have improved communications abilities in the field, including making it possible to know the exact location of observers in remote locations and to ensure secure communication. The development and availability of mobile telephones in particular has been important for monitors in high-risk situations. Digital cameras have made it possible to record events or sites and download the images at a central data collection point within a short time frame, thus facilitating faster, more effective data collection and verification decision-making. And, public access to satellite imagery at reasonable prices is now an option for a wide variety of actors, including the UN and NGOs.

The improvements in speed and capabilities of information technology, in combination with developments in aerial and space surveillance technologies, may make it possible to develop more capable, less intrusive, means of mechanical (rather than human) monitoring in the near future. For example, technological developments may make it possible to supplement, and in some cases replace, the military observer role with highly capable twenty-four hour means of observation of cease-fire lines and buffer zones. Similarly, technological developments may make it possible to develop remote surveillance of weapons storage sites, production facilities and other military sites.

Because some of these technological developments are only just becoming available the potential impact of technology is an open question. One of the arguments in favour of new technologies is that they will help to decrease the level of intrusiveness of monitoring and verification procedures. Military observers, for example, though technically only present to observe and monitor defined areas or actions, are able to take in a lot of other information about activities in the area in which they are based, inadvertently or otherwise. Those in favour of technological monitoring argue that using technologies specifically designed to monitor certain activities, such as whether or not a buffer zone perimeter line is crossed, eliminates the possibility that other information is being gathered at the same time, thus decreasing the level of intrusiveness involved in the monitoring.

The argument works both ways, however. For those on the receiving end, technological monitoring can be seen to pose the same threat as human monitoring with respect to gathering information beyond the designated tasks. How are those on the receiving end to be certain that unmanned sensors, for example, do not include the capability to gather other information? This issue suggests that when technological options are being considered in monitoring and verification

situations there will need to be some provision for demonstrating to those being monitored that the technologies being used are only being used for the purposes specified.

Technological monitoring offers some other potential advantages. In particular, the idea of unmanned surveillance, either on the ground or by air, may act as a significant deterrent to violations because it adds a level of uncertainty as to when the monitoring will be occurring or because the monitoring is occurring on a continuous twenty-four hour basis.

At first glance, it seems possible that using technological monitoring methods that can take the place of human monitors will contribute to reducing the costs of missions. It is not evident, however, that this will be the case, at least in the short term, since the cost of developing these technologies and then purchasing and using them will be high. Technologies such as mobile phones and digital cameras, which are widely available and relatively inexpensive, supplement and augment the human monitoring aspects of the mission and as such they do not have a significant impact on the cost of the mission.

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Verification and the use of force

With the end of the Cold War, the United Nations Security Council became increasingly willing to authorize the use of force in UN operations and it has done so in situations that involve verification of tenuous cease-fires, disarmament of troops and demobilization.⁷ These are often referred to as peace enforcement operations. In these operations the Security Council has added a specific authorization of the use of force beyond self-defence to what is otherwise a peacekeeping operation. This means that the operation must retain its impartial nature but, at the same time, retain the option to use force against one or more of the parties in certain circumstances. This complicates the verification environment enormously. For those on the receiving end, it is difficult to separate the verification tasks from the enforcement aspect of the mission. The verifiers are placed in a position where their determination about compliance with the military aspects of the peace accord may have a direct effect on whether or not a decision to use force is made. In these conditions, the possibility that monitors may be attacked or otherwise retaliated against becomes significantly higher than in traditional peacekeeping missions.

The negative experiences in both the Somalia and Bosnia missions have contributed to a reassessment and debate about whether or not the use of observers is compatible with situations in which force might be used. The images, particularly in Bosnia, of peacekeepers being held hostage in retaliation against the use of force by the United Nations have long staying power and, quite rightly, have prompted questions about the impact a use of force authorization has on a peacekeeping mission. On the one hand, the willingness of states to place their forces in potentially dangerous situations sends a signal of seriousness about their commitment to ensuring the requirements of a peace accord are fulfilled. On the other hand, if the situation deteriorates and force must be used

and peacekeeping troops are retaliated against, it may ultimately undermine the mission since states contributing troops may decide to pull their forces out of the operation, thereby weakening the mission and the level of international commitment to the process.

In the wake of the experiences in Bosnia, Somalia and East Timor, some states have determined that they will not send their troops into similar situations unless they are heavily armed, or that they will simply not contribute their troops to these kinds of operations. This is to some degree a response to the casualties and risks incurred as part of these operations, but also a response to an increased unwillingness to accept situations where observers must stand by helplessly while violations of the peace accord and/or of human rights go on. If these trends hold, it may create a situation where unarmed or lightly armed observers are no longer used in situations where there is a possibility that force might be used.

Information management

The increased complexity of post-Cold War operations associated with peace accords, along with the increased use of technological collection methods such as digital cameras, generates a much more significant information flow than in Cold War operations. Consequently, the requirements for information control and processing are significantly greater. For example, the human rights monitoring aspects of the Kosovo Verification Mission created a tremendous amount of data that needed to be maintained in a searchable database. The mission had to create an information control system at the same time as the data was being collected. And, because of the nature of the information being collected the data had to be secure from those who might want to destroy or abuse the information.

The information control question is made more complicated by the presence of a number of actors in a given operation, especially in light of the recent trend involving increased participation by regional organizations. The fact that more actors are collecting information adds to the need for adequate information processing and analysis. Regional organizations are not the only new actors who have become a regular part of the verification context. Increasingly, NGOs are part of the context in which these missions occur. The increased availability of technology such as digital cameras, Internet technology and mobile telephones means that NGOs also have the ability to gather — and disseminate — good quality information about what is happening on the ground.⁸ As this trend develops it may create situations in which there are multiple visions of what is happening in the field being presented to the public and to decision-makers. This is a factor that those running the operation will have to deal with.

Because UN operations are all ad hoc and, therefore, start from scratch each time, information systems must be established anew each time an operation begins, and each operation starts without the benefit of information collection in advance of the operation's beginning. The efficiency of these operations could be improved if the UN was able to collect and analyze information about potential mission locations on an ongoing basis. This is an unlikely development, however, as Member States have an inherent resistance to allowing the United Nations to undertake anything that might be even remotely considered to be independent intelligence gathering. Nonetheless, once operations are up and running they often establish, out of necessity, their own intelligence gathering functions.

Resources

A consistent and significant problem for these operations is the lack of adequate personnel and equipment resources to fulfil the requirements of the mission. This is a problem that extends to all aspects of the operation, including civilian police monitoring, human rights monitoring as well as the monitoring and verification of the military aspects of peace accords. For example, of 9,000 civilian police positions currently mandated by the United Nations, only half have been filled. When the Kosovo Verification Mission was being established, 1,100 monitors were committed to be part of the operation but only 800 actually arrived.⁹ Indeed, this is a problem that seems endemic to UN operations. Aside from the obvious problems this raises for carrying out the mandate, this compounds the challenges associated with situations where there is a possibility that force might be used, making a difficult situation even more problematic if there are not sufficient personnel and equipment. This is not a problem that will be readily resolved as, by definition, these operations are dependent on voluntary contributions from Member States.

A verification centre

One of the consistent themes in this discussion is the implications of the ad hoc nature of these operations. In addition to the complications this presents, already discussed above, the ad hoc

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nature of the operations also means that there is no formal transfer of information, procedures or lessons learned from one operation to another. This gap is especially problematic given the complex and complicated nature of peace operations in the post-Cold War environment.

One way of dealing with this problem might be to establish a verification centre. Such a centre could be used to work on a variety of verification-related issues and to act as a clearinghouse of information. For example, a verification centre could develop standard verification protocols for use in peace accords and could undertake generic planning for basic kinds of operations. Such a centre could also provide support and information for training potential monitors and verifiers. In the case of the Kosovo Verification Mission, for example, a training programme was established in the field on short notice. If a verification centre was in place it could either provide the training required or provide personnel to go to the location and facilitate the training there.

A verification centre could also be used to help with the information flow associated with peace operations by providing established procedures and technologies for processing and analyzing the information. In theory, such a centre could also undertake research and analysis on an ongoing basis on potential operation locations and contexts in order to facilitate preparedness should an operation be authorized.¹⁰ This function, however, is likely to appear too close to intelligence gathering for the comfort level of UN Member States.

If nothing else, a verification centre could provide a valuable contribution by acting as a centre for the collection, analysis and dissemination of “lessons learned” from past and ongoing operations. This would, at least in part, provide a way in which the experience — good and bad — of operations could be built into planning and implementation of the disarmament and verification procedures of future operations. One way in which this could occur is for the verification centre to undertake debriefing of key personnel immediately after they leave an operation and then again some time (six to twelve months) later after they have had time to decompress and reflect on their experience in

the operation. The debriefings could occur at the verification centre or experts from the centre could travel to the new location of the personnel in question and interview them there. Lessons learned processes already occur in many militaries and in some regional organizations, as well as in the United Nations. The results of these could be shared with the verification centre, which could act as a kind of clearinghouse for states seeking information and assistance.

Summary

This overview suggests a number of issues for further study. First, the role of technology is an issue that should be explored further. Technological developments will continue to be made and a sustained in-depth examination of the potential impact this might have on the verification equation in the future is required. Is it possible, for example, that technological developments might yet change the nature of the verification framework, or is the role of the observer so critical as to be permanent? Second, the consequences that the use of force has and has had in these operations needs to be examined. The experiences of Somalia and Bosnia have had a clear impact on decision-makers in states that contribute to such operations. The extent of that impact and what it means for future operations needs to be elucidated as does the question as to whether and in what circumstances it makes sense to use unarmed or lightly armed observers in situations where force might be used.

The enduring nature of the basic framework of mechanisms used as the foundation for designing and implementing verification missions is indicative of the importance of verification to these operations. Compliance with the military aspects of peace accords and cease-fire agreements goes to the heart of the willingness of the parties to a conflict to move forward towards a peaceful resolution. Verification and monitoring of that compliance is, therefore, absolutely critical to a successful outcome. For that reason, it is vital that the existing gap in the research field be addressed.

Notes

- ¹ The Canadian government has consistently urged that the UN should deal more thoroughly and effectively with the issue of verification. The 1995 report of a UN group of experts noted that "it is only in recent years that verification per se has been recognized as a normal part of peace and security operations" and called for work on this issue. *Verification in All its Aspects, Including the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Verification*, Report of the Secretary-General, A/50/377, 22 September 1995.
- ² Some monitoring and verification of peace accords occurs outside the auspices of the United Nations. Examples include the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai, the Commonwealth Observation Force in Zimbabwe, the Military Observation Mission on the Ecuador-Peru border (MOMEP), the Peace Monitoring Group in Bougainville and the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET).
- ³ These definitions and examples come from Trevor Findlay, Executive Director of VERTIC, "Opening Address to Wilton Park Conference on the Monitoring and Verification of Peace Agreements," 24 March 2000.
- ⁴ Examples of this include the various Middle East peace processes. For example, the United Nations undertook the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) mission but the political negotiations relating to the resolution of the conflict often occurred under the auspices of the United States.
- ⁵ Early post-Cold War examples include the UN operations in Namibia (UNTAG) and in Cambodia (UNTAC).
- ⁶ For example, in Mozambique UN advisors played a role in the negotiation of the peace accord, providing advice on the nature and details of the verification provisions.
- ⁷ Examples include UNOSOM II in Somalia as well as operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina before and after the Dayton peace accord (UNPROFOR, UNTAES, IFOR, SFOR).
- ⁸ On the broader implications of this issue see, Andrew Rathmell, "The Information Revolution and Verification," *Trust & Verify*, no. 90, March 2000, pp. 5-6.

⁹ Figures from discussions at the Wilton Park conference.

¹⁰ In this role, a verification centre could usefully liaison with the Situation Centre at the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.