TAXONOMIES OF INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING: AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE

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The taxonomies of "peacekeeping" utilized within academic and policy discourse provide a framework for comparison across (usually United Nations-conducted) peace operations. One point of distinction often made between different operations is the level of complexity. Whether operations are "basic" or "complex," "simple" or "multifunctional" is usually determined according to size, scope of mandate, and the presence or absence of a civilian component in addition to a military component. Many commentators adopt "generational" language to denote these different levels of complexity. In this short article, I consider the particular narrative device of peacekeeping "generations" in the light of the long history of one particular type of international peace operation: granting administrative prerogatives over territory to international organizations, what I term "international territorial administration." I argue that the generational taxonomy is unhelpful in its own terms, and problematic on a normative level.

The dichotomy between simple and complex peace operations is often described in terms of old versus new or first generation versus second

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1. Another basis for classification is, of course, the relationship of the operation to the pursuit of peace: "peace keeping" "peace building" etc.

2. Ralph Wilde, From Danzig to East Timor and Beyond: the Role of International Territorial Administration, 95 AM J. INT'L L. 583, 584 (2001).

generation, suggesting that changes in the complexity of peace missions have occurred in a linear fashion, with missions becoming progressively more complex. Such a suggestion is no accident. For many commentators, there was a sea change in the nature of peacekeeping from the late 1980s onwards; a “turning point,” in the words of Jarat Chopra. With the backdrop of the supposed post-cold war internationalist revival, and the emergence of “new” types of conflict that were both international and internal in character, there was a dramatic growth in complex United Nations peace operations starting with UNTAG in Namibia in 1989. Accordingly, there was a paradigm shift from “first generation” to “second generation,” from “old” to “new” peacekeeping. With the Kosovo and East Timor administration projects—Kosovo has been administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) since 1999, and East Timor was administered by the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) from the end of 1999 until May 2002—it has been suggested that complexity has reached such a level that we can now talk about a further “generation” of peacekeeping. Christine Gray remarks that these two projects could be described as “third generation” peacekeeping. Boris Kondoch, citing W. Kühn, considers “peace enforcement” missions such as UNOSOM II in Somalia “third generation” peacekeeping and UNTAET and UNMIK, because of their complexity, examples of “fourth generation” peacekeeping. Thus, the language of “generations” and the


5. Chopra, supra note 4, at 280.

6. On the supposed change in the nature of conflict since 1988, see, for example, Mary Kaldor, NEW & OLD WARS (1999) On UN peace operations since 1988, and the increase in them, see, for example, THE EVOLUTION OF UN PEACEKEEPING, supra note 3, at 9-12; Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, supra note 3 at xi-xix. Many scholars assert a causal relationship between the post-1988 upsurge in peacekeeping and the end of the cold war. See, for example, Ratner, supra note 3 at 14-16. For a critique of this thesis, see, for example, ALAN JAMES, PEACEKEEPING IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS, 362 – 66 (1990).

7. In a complementary development in academic discourse, Mary Kaldor describes a paradigmatic shift in the nature of armed conflict, from “old wars” to “new wars.” Kaldor, supra note 6.


9. Kondoch, supra note 4. Most scholars consider “peace enforcement” missions as a special type
"old/new" dichotomy presents the history of international peace operations as a progressive evolution through successive generations of ever-increasing complexity. How does this presentation stand up to scrutiny?

In the first place, the history of international territorial administration suggests that describing the relative complexity of peace operations so as to denote a progressive increase in complexity over time as between individual missions is in its own terms mistaken. Elsewhere, I have described this history in the following terms:

International organizations first exercised territorial administration in the Free City of Danzig, where the League of Nations enjoyed certain governmental prerogatives from 1920 to 1939. In addition, the League administered the German Saar Basin (the Saar) between 1920 and 1935, and the Colombian town and district of Leticia (Leticia) from 1933 to 1934. It also appointed the president of the Upper Silesia Mixed Commission in 1922 and the chair of the Memel Harbor board in Lithuania in 1924. Immediately after the Second World War, Germany and Austria were administered by the Allies. With the creation of the United Nations, the new international organization was authorized in 1947 to exercise certain governmental powers in what would have become the Free Territory of Trieste, but the free territory plan was never realized.

The United Nations first exercised territorial administration in the 1960s, asserting various administrative prerogatives in the Congo between 1960 and 1964, and administering West Irian for seven months between 1962 and 1963. In 1967, the United Nations Council for what was then South West Africa (later Namibia) was established to administer the territory, but South Africa prevented the council from taking up this role. Over twenty years later, in 1991 the United Nations was authorized to perform administrative functions in Western Sahara and Cambodia; although these functions were exercised in Cambodia from 1991 to 1992, they are yet to be fully performed in Western Sahara. From 1994 to 1996, a different institution—the EUAM [the European Union Administration in Mostar]—administered the city of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Then, as part of the Dayton process, the territory of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Sirmium (Eastern Slavonia) in Croatia was placed under UN administration from 1996 to 1998. In some of the aforementioned missions, and in others as well, the mandates of international organizations have called for the performance of two particular administrative functions: controlling or conducting some form of territory-wide popular consultation and/or ‘community
building’ through the creation of local institutions. In addition to the authorized projects, other ITA projects were proposed but never agreed upon for Fiume in Dalmatia (in 1919), Memel (between 1921 and 1923), Alexandretta in Syria (in 1937), Jerusalem (since 1947) and Sarajevo (in 1994).

In addition to the plenary administration project in Kosovo, another mission, involving partial administration by the Office of the High Representative, has taken place in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the start of 1996.

Whether one is focusing on plenary administration or partial administration, international organizations generally or the United Nations in particular, the above history suggests that the complex international peace operations from 1988 onwards are, in terms of their complexity, nothing new. The first complex peace operations involving plenary international territorial administration were the Saar in 1920 (in the League era) and West Irian in 1962 – 63 (in the United Nations era). The first such missions involving partial administration were Danzig in 1920 (in the League era) and the Congo in 1960 – 64 (in the United Nations era). Insofar as the Kosovo and East Timor missions involve plenary administration exercised by the United Nations, they are not unprecedented but follow on from the West Irian and Eastern Slavonia missions. If the focus is broadened to international organizations generally, the precedents run back even further to the start of the League of Nations in 1920.

Some of the “generational” commentators focus on the “state building” aspect of “post conflict” peace operations. Exercising territorial prerogatives is one thing, but the use of such prerogatives with a “nation building” purpose is a relatively new phenomenon. As far as the “nation building” purpose is concerned, the United Nations mission in the Congo (ONUC) in the 1960s is widely regarded as the first United Nations operation to engage in “peace enforcement.” The equally pioneering “nation building” administrative activities of that same mission, exercising administration to enable the operation of certain government institutions, are rarely acknowledged. Yet once the full scope of ONUC’s operation is borne in mind, it becomes just as difficult to see a clear distinction between post-and pre-1998 operations on “state building” and "nation building.”

10. Wilde, supra note 2, at 586 (footnote omitted).
11. Id. at 584.
12. Id. at 583.
13. Id.
15. See RATNER, supra note 3, at 105-09.
grounds as it is on "enforcement" grounds. Certainly, the next operations of these types did not take place until the post-1998 era (Namibia in 1989 for "state building" and UNOSOM II in 1991 for "peace enforcement"). The point is that the enterprise that lay behind these later operations was not unprecedented.

"Nation building" is not, then, an exclusively post-1998 phenomenon. But a qualitative distinction can perhaps be made between UNMIK and UNTAET, on the one hand, and the "nation building" missions that came before them, on the other. Arguably, the degree to which these two missions have engaged in the reconstruction of infrastructure and governmental institutions is unprecedented at least if one discounts the Allied administration in Germany after the Second World War. A question remains, however, whether the scope of a "state building" mandate should be the primary indicator, in addition to the breadth of the administrative prerogatives exercised, by which complexity and distinctiveness are measured. For example, what of plenary administration concerned with territorial disposition? Is the United Nations administration in Eastern Slavonia, from 1996-98, which necessitated the eventual transfer of a population to authorities from whom local militias had hitherto sought independence, necessarily less complex than the two and a half-year East Timor mission, where, infrastructural problems notwithstanding, the eventual outcome for the territory was overwhelmingly supported? Similarly, what of administration missions aimed at facilitating a particularly controversial policy? Stepping back to the League-era, can it really be said that the three-year long mission in East Timor is more complex than the fifteen-year mission in the Saar? The League was involved in administering a territory bitterly contested between France and Germany, enabling a key component of Germany's much-resented reparations program to proceed, before organizing what was in effect a self-determination referendum and then implementing the result of that referendum.

To be fair, neither Agenda for Peace, nor Agenda for Peace Supplement, nor the Brahimi Report seem particularly interested in a progressivist presentation of the complexity of international peace operations, even though,

16. Like "state building," "peace enforcement" is often presented as a "new" phenomenon through the use of generational language, whether second or third.

17. Wilde, supra note 2, at 592 text accompanying n. 47. See also RAMSBOTHAM & WOODHOUSE, supra note 3 at xx (remarking that "[t]he most extensive peace-building effort in history took place in Europe and Asia in the post-World War II era when the US and its allies assisted nations in those continents devastated by a decade of war").

18. Wilde, supra note 2 at 589.

19. Id.

by virtue of their remit, they are able to discount the League-era projects that so obviously undermine such a presentation. In Agenda for Peace, the terms “new” and “second-generation peacekeeping are conspicuous by their absence.\(^{21}\) Only one, passing reference (in a table) is made to “classical” and “multifunctional” peacekeeping in Agenda for Peace Supplement.\(^{22}\) Similarly, Brahimi makes the odd reference to “newer generations” of peacekeeping without defining this term or drawing any conclusions from its use.\(^{23}\) Nonetheless, the language of “generations” has come to play a central role in academic discourse on peace operations since the early 1990s. So we have, on the one hand, a set of historical circumstances placing into question the notion that complex international peace operations are an exclusively late twentieth century phenomenon and, on the other hand, an established academic discourse predicated on this notion.

One of the few scholars writing in the “new” era to acknowledge the long-standing existence of complex international peace operations is Steven Ratner in The New UN Peacekeeping.\(^{24}\) However, as his title suggests, Ratner nonetheless adopts the language of “generations” and the “new/old” dichotomy in his study of such operations, perhaps because of the widespread currency such an approach now enjoys. One quarter of his book concerns operations, the League projects and ONUC, for example, that take place before the “new” era, in some cases seventy years before.\(^{25}\) Ratner must describe these projects as examples of the “new peacekeeping,” and in an effort to accommodate the obvious problem this raises with the new/old dichotomy, the presence of these projects in the “old” era is explained in terms of “earlier efforts” at the “new” paradigm.\(^{26}\) For example, the League administration in the Saar is “second generation peacekeeping before its time.”\(^{27}\) When there are so many earlier efforts, stretching back over such a long period, of a supposedly “new” phenomenon, one should surely ask whether or not the dichotomies of new/old and first generation/second generation are helpful. Why insist that 1989 is the “time” of complex peace operations, and not also 1919?

\(^{21}\) As are the terms “old” and “first generation” peacekeeping.

\(^{22}\) Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization, supra note 20.


\(^{24}\) RATNER, supra note 3.

\(^{25}\) Id. Part II.

\(^{26}\) Id. Ch. 4.

\(^{27}\) Id. at 91. The League mandate in Danzig is “a variation on a theme”, Id at 94. The various uses of international territorial administration in Leticia, Upper Silesia and Memel are described as “forgotten forays here and there”, id. at 95. On these missions, see e.g., Wilde, supra note 2, at 587-88 (Leticia) & nn. 17-28, 597-600 (Upper Silesia) & 600 (Memel) and sources cited therein.
Clearly some peace operations are more complex than others. Moreover, some projects have a "state building" purpose; others do not. The point is that the complexity of peace operations has waxed and waned since the start of the League. Similarly, the involvement of such operations in "nation building" has been present since at least the 1960s and much earlier if one includes the Allies in post-war Germany and Austria. The "time" of complexity and civilian involvement in international peace operations has been the entire twentieth century. To be sure, with the administration projects in Cambodia, Mostar, Eastern Slavonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, East Timor, and United Nations -run refugee camps, and the other complex peace missions without an administration component, the final decade of that century witnessed a marked upsurge in the use of peace operations that are both complex and engaged in a "nation building" enterprise. However, an upsurge in and intensification of an activity with a long-standing pedigree (with the possible exception of the ambitious scope of state building in Kosovo and East Timor) is not the same as the emergence of a "new" type of peace operation. The year 1988, then, marks a particular moment of renewal, not a qualitative (rather than quantitative) "turning point." Also, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the increase in peace operations since 1988 has covered both "complex" and relatively straightforward operations. Just as the "old" era contains several important examples of the "new peacekeeping," so the "new" era is replete with "old" style peacekeeping operations.

Adopting a progressivist narrative to denote changes in complexity may in any case be problematic because of the way it can serve as a legitimizing device. As "third" or "fourth" generation missions, the projects in East Timor and Kosovo are positioned as the culmination of a historical process. They represent progress in the development of peace operations from the "old" or "traditional" days. Not only does relative complexity mean "newness," then, suggesting a break from the past. The language of generations, with its evolutionary connotations of progressive improvement, has a normative import. By ascribing differences in complexity through the use of this language, therefore, peace operations are classified normatively simply according to the changes in their complexity. Thus, UNMIK and UNTAET merely by virtue of their comparatively complex nature are presented in terms that suggest relative legitimacy.

28. On these missions, see e.g., Wilde, supra note 2, at 584-85 and sources cited therein.

29. Most scholars accept that in the "new" era, "old" and "new" peacekeeping coexists. See e.g., RATNER, supra note 3 at 17 (stating "[t]oday we witness both the continuation of older first-generation missions as well as the establishment of new ones. Moreover, a given operation can evolve from one [first generation] to the other [second generation] over time...".).
Of course, the adoption of relative complexity as the benchmark of legitimacy seems absurd. The point is not that scholars who use the language of “generations” necessarily wish to make such a suggestion, but rather that the language used has this effect. Indeed, some commentators do seem to suggest that increased complexity is somehow inherently superior. John Sanderson, for example, although not using the generational language, focuses exclusively on the degree of powers exercised by the East Timor mission and proclaims this to be a “step forward of millenial proportions” in United Nations peace operations with the mission being of a “high-quality.” Furthermore, the progressivist nature of the “generations” language rationalizes international territorial administration, by constructing a chain of reasoning that presents this activity as the logical conclusion.

The language of “generations” and “old” versus “new” peace operations (or peacekeeping) should perhaps be substituted with a taxonomy that does not connote a linear process of historical evolution, for example “basic” versus “complex” or “multifunctional.” Otherwise, we risk misunderstanding the history of international peace operations, and ascribing normative value to certain operations on spurious grounds.