

# Protection of Civilians: Shared Goals, Different Visions?

4 October 2017  
Conference Report



**PAX**

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## Event introduction

Threats to civilians worldwide cannot be resolved by simplistic solutions. 'Comprehensive' approaches that make use of the insights and capacities of civilian populations can have a measurable, positive impact if and when Protection of Civilians actors would be inspired by and held to account by those civilians whose security is at stake.

This meeting brought together experts with experience in MINUSMA, MONUSCO and UNMISS, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands Ministry of Defence, Forsvarets Forsknings Institutt (FFI), the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) and PAX to discuss current challenges in protection of civilians (PoC) and to find pathways and opportunities to improving PoC in practice. Under the title "Protection of Civilians. Shared goals, different visions?", three main themes guided this day:

- I. International PoC policy developments and national implementation
- II. Integrated training and preparation for PoC missions
- III. Inroads to overcoming challenges to PoC implementation

The event was initiated by the Protection of Civilians department of PAX as part of its Strategic Partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Programme	
09:00 – 09:30	Arrival and coffee
09:30 – 09:45	Word of welcome
09:45 – 10:00	Introductions and setting the scene
10:00 – 10:20	Key challenges on PoC today
10:20 – 11:00	Panel discussion
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 – 12:45	Discussion on PoC Policy Development and Implementation
12:45 – 13:45	Lunch
13:45 – 15:00	Discussion on Integrated PoC training
15:00 – 15:30	Coffee break
15:30 – 16:45	Discussion on inroads to overcoming challenges to PoC
16:45 – 17:00	Conclusions of the day and brief projection of day 2
17:00 – 18:30	Reception
18:30 – 19:00	Move to restaurant
19:00 – 21:00	Dinner

# Introductory session

## WORD OF WELCOME

Protection of Civilians is not a straightforward concept, nor is its implementation without challenges. We witness repeated failures to adequately protect civilians in contexts such as Syria, South Sudan, and CAR. Classifications and definitions are needed to analyse and come up with means of addressing such challenges.

Increasingly, organized forces involved in PoC missions seem to apply human security<sup>1</sup> in their discourse and sometimes even in practice via training and in their analysis of conflicts. This should not be a discursive change alone, but should include opening up more space to learn from each other how human security can be applied. Collaboration between practitioners, academics, researchers, military, and civilians will only become more important in this regard.

## SETTING THE SCENE

The protection of civilians in armed conflict is a widely-shared objective, but effective ways to implement and coordinate protection are still a challenge. PAX takes a people-centred, human security approach to PoC through research, advocacy and training.

## KEY CHALLENGES IN POC TODAY

Two major challenges concerning PoC are ambiguous definitions and if and how training of staff relates to mission capacities and deficiencies.

A close look at current **definitions** of PoC reveals that definitions are not specific and do not help in demarcating the concept. Definitions are frequently self-referential and include the word 'protection'. Definitions are simultaneously used on a conceptual and operational level, and often times, supposedly conceptual definitions (that should explain the theoretical substance of the notion 'protection') are in fact operational (and specify the actions that are planned / needed to achieve the 'protection' concept). What remains is an ambiguous idea of the end-state that these actions aim to achieve and a distinct need for clear definitions of PoC. PoC is also used to refer to a physical space, such as PoC camps in South Sudan, or to an office or staff position, rather than to a set of actions or activities, which adds to the confusion.

The typical sequence of a **training** starts with an overview of international missions, an introduction to concepts, and (often confusing or ambiguous) definitions of PoC. It then continues with a specification of each mission component's (civilian, military, police) role in PoC and generally concludes with a scenario exercise in mixed groups. Defining the roles and responsibilities per mission component however underlines the differences between the components rather than integrating roles. Such a sectoral approach leads to compartmentalization in reality with several vital tasks falling between the cracks and each component primarily looking for their own demarcated task in the scenario, instead of searching for collaborative ways to solve PoC issues. **Scenario exercises** should be used to first deduct the protection issues at stake. Based on these issues, components could then talk about how to resolve them, and as a last point fill in who is capable and equipped to be part of these solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> PAX uses a narrow definition of human security, focusing on freedom from fear or safeguarding civilians from immediate physical threats.

## **FACILITATED DISCUSSION**

It is important to get clarity on the definition of PoC as the definition has consequences for analysis and action. However, the focus should not entirely be on theory and discussions on conceptual level should not stand in the way of achieving something tangible results in the field.

Decision-making in PoC is often biased towards political priorities of troop contributing countries (TCCs) rather than an analysis of the threats civilians face. Guidance on questions like “How to analyse a situation to come up with the best possible response?” and “What worked well and why?” is usually not available and there is a general lack of information on HOW missions succeeded or failed to protect civilians.

Participants addressed the topics of **accountability** and **commitment**. Commitment towards PoC is needed both in mission and in New York. There are few protocols that force commanders and troops have to commit to and even where there are PoC strategies in place, mission sections often do not base operational planning on it, and awareness of the strategies among personnel is low. Too much is left to personal capacity, commitment and motivation. In addition, there are hardly any negative consequences for inaction during crisis or actual rewards for positive actions leading to improved protection. Inspirational leadership and a proactive approach and posture are key to PoC but these issues are currently not sufficiently supported.

Participants also addressed the relevance of measuring the effects of PoC actions, highlighting the need to report on the quality or **impact** of actions, rather than on quantity of, for instance patrols. This entails asking questions like: “how did you do your patrol?”, “what impact did the patrol have?”, rather than counting how often a platoon went out on patrol

### **Key issues raised**

- ◆ Clear definitions on PoC are needed, on both a conceptual and operational level
- ◆ Instead of choosing a sectoral approach, training activities should search for collaborative ways to solve protection issues
- ◆ Decision-making on PoC should start with an analysis of the threats civilians face
- ◆ Missions would benefit from clear guidance and protocols on accountability and expected commitment to PoC

## PoC policy development and implementation

Several debates within the UN and NATO are relevant for the implementation of PoC. For example, the debate on the reform of the peace and security architecture with the Secretary General (SG) pushing proposals recommended in the Report of the High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) in 2015. Other debates revolve around the establishment of effective partnerships with actors such as the African Union, NATO, and other regional organizations), and mitigating harm to civilians which becomes more important when peacekeeping operations become more robust.

In decision making on **PoC on the UN level**, political concerns continue to play a major role. Questions as “will there be political support?”, “will there be financial support?”, and “are troops ready and capable to be deployed?” are still at the forefront. The UN might be able to learn from NATO through studying and applying some of the guidelines and training modules on PoC at NATO.

**NATO PoC** conceptualisation reflects the lessons learned from failures to consistently protect civilians in Afghanistan, Libya and in the Balkans. Strong points of the recently developed NATO PoC policy include the attention for civilian harm caused by others, attention for implementation of the policy on all levels and the convergence with UN PoC policies. There are also concerns. The broadening of the PoC concept - to include protection of civilians from other’s actions as well as indirect harm - may cause ambiguity; accountability is a concern and implementation of the policy may be at risk due to understaffing and possible lack of political will among key member states.

Decision-making should be grounded in situational awareness and based on information from the field. However, information and intelligence from the field is often not shared within and between military, police and civilian counterparts which deteriorates effective decision-making.

**Accountability** is needed on every level: up to the highest levels of command. There needs to be political space to act on accountability in constructive way as addressing shortcomings in mission can be very sensitive. Clear directives are required that highlight what response is expected from what actor on the strategic, operational, and tactical level. This should also be related to **measuring performance** at these levels. The focus is still too much on output- how many rounds are fired, how many leaflets are spread-, while it should be on impact. Measurement should be effect-based and go beyond “ticking the box” exercises.

A big challenge lies also in **civilian casualties during military operations**. Populations will look for other actors in their context to provide security (such as armed groups and/or insurgents) if they are bombed by coalition forces who are at risk of “winning the war but losing the peace”. The inability to protect civilians (from one’s own actions or from other actors’ actions) can affect the objective of the operation. Participants also pointed to the responsibility of the force commander to oppose actions that harm civilians and undermine the overarching PoC objective of the mission.

### Key issues raised

- ◆ Measuring effective PoC should focus on impact and quality rather than quantitative indicators
- ◆ The inability of a mission to protect civilians from its own but also from other’s actions can undermine its legitimacy and posture

## Integrated PoC training

It is important that we take integration in PoC seriously and go beyond just talking about it. Ideally, the starting point for training is the local context -the facts on the ground-, and decisions on the *goal, approach* and *means* follow thereafter. An integrated approach does not work if additional components are invited only halfway through the exercise. **Joint planning and analysis**, joint training, and joint monitoring and evaluation are all required. Such an approach should also be taken in training and there should be time to exchange experience and perceptions. Moreover, accountability measures should be developed and receive attention in training.

Despite the inclusion of PoC in mandates, in many operations civilians do not become more secure. Addressing the implementation gap in missions with a PoC mandate is imperative for the posture and ultimately success of any PoC mission. FFI conducted research on threat analysis and assessment as different threats require different responses. A **threat assessment** should include why, how and with what means perpetrators attack civilians. Information needs to be included on contextual issues such as the terrain and the timing of the rainy season as this may affect expectations of when threats are most imminent. Vital also is the realization that threats may change over time and that different parties have different perceptions of the threats.

Threat based analysis seems relatively easy to integrate into military planning and intelligence and may also lend itself for civilian and police planning. Starting off with threat analysis helps to identify the roles of the military, police and civilians in PoC missions. Questions such as “What is threatening human security in the context of peacekeeping operations?” “What is most effective in this context?” and “What is the right response?” should be central to decision making.

Participants mentioned quality differences between training provided to military and to civilian components. A lot of training is web-based and quality and depth can lack for both civilian, police and military training. There is overlap in training and training is frequently provided in the same locations with the same people attending. Ultimately, troops not being trained and held accountable to similar standards deteriorates the effectiveness of the mission.

### Key issues raised

- ◆ An integrated approach must entail all phases of a mission, from planning to evaluation
- ◆ Threat assessment of human security should inform the response of the PoC mission
- ◆ The quality of many current trainings provided could be enhanced by integrating all sectors that need to work together in mission

## Inroads to overcoming challenges to PoC

The Netherlands will serve on the UN Security Council for one year, starting in January 2018 and presiding over the Council in March. In November 2017, the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial takes place in Vancouver, Canada. In this session, suggestions for activities and priorities for the Dutch government in relation to the 2018 UNSC were put forward to improve PoC operationalisation.

Participants agreed on the importance of practical protocols. Leadership, accountability, an integrated approach to training, and capacities and capabilities are the most prominent issues on which practical protocols could be developed.

Regarding training, the importance of basic training as well as **in-mission training** in the conflict context was noted. The option of developing a mobile trainers pool was mentioned to train troops on mission specific requirements while serving in a mission.

Risk aversion in missions is contagious. In theatre, **leadership** meetings and training would help leaders to keep each other to account, stimulate information sharing and enable the sharing of PoC best practices. Leadership coaching and commitment is vital to effective PoC. The selection of key leaders was discussed as well as the importance of selecting good leaders over political expedience. Key leaders have a responsibility to make sure the mission is equipped to meet its objectives in theatre, not just sticking to a minimal interpretation of the mandate. UNPOL was mentioned as having the potential to bridge the gap in capacities between civilian and military PoC actors. **Mission support** should buy into the idea of key leadership and accountability as substantive decisions now sometimes stall due to administrative procedures.

In relation to capacities and capabilities, participants mentioned the need to support new initiatives for sharing of conflict and protection data. Reporting on PoC could be improved by allowing more attention to **impact**, rather than to quantities of PoC related activities.

Other opportunities noted were sharing **lessons learned** on good PoC practice (what worked/did not work well when and why) and strategically communicating such showcases of PoC. The threat of budget cuts can also create opportunities to increase the effectiveness of current missions if and when managed with vision and a substantial understanding of operational efficiencies.

Additionally, participants identified a number of opportunities for UN member states:

- ◆ Member states could develop their own doctrine on PoC
- ◆ Member states could host joint trainings and exercises to improve mission preparation
- ◆ Member states could publicly support the Secretary General on PoC reform issues he is pushing
- ◆ Member states could work towards concrete commitments and implementation of the Kigali Principles

The mentioned suggestions would be helped when they make use of a **politically opportune time**, for example coinciding with critical PoC debates or publications.