

Security sector reform: Law Enforcement actions during ongoing UN Operations in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and a look at the complexities surrounding these actions.

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The Background

The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) is currently made up of over 800 military personnel from 14 different countries. The enduring operation is to restore law and order to the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. To understand what is happening in Cyprus that has required the presence of a multinational peacekeeping force for over the last fifty years, we find the first part of the answer in the history of the region.

During the Bronze Age, the island of Cyprus was settled and inhabited by the Mycenaean Greeks. In 333 BC, Alexander the Great then conquered and ruled the region. In 58 BC, it was absorbed into the Roman Republic. Then in 1571, the Ottoman Empire annexed the island, resulting in today's population base of Turkish Cypriots. Cyprus was then leased to the British Empire in the 19th Century, until finally achieving independence in 1960 through the Zurich and London Agreement. However, national independence was only the beginning of the island's problems.

Due to instability, UNFICYP was formed in 1964 to prevent intercommunal violence between the island's two main ethnic groups, the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. UNFICYP's goal was the restoration of peace in Cyprus, enabling effective communication between the Greeks and Turks, and maintaining law and order. However, tensions rose again in 1974, with the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, otherwise known as Operation Atilla. The Greeks called it an invasion but the Turks maintained it was done for humanitarian reasons to prevent the possibility of ethnic cleansing.

Today Cyprus is divided into the North and the South. The Northern region is occupied by the Turkish Cypriots and the South by the Greek Cypriots (with minor exceptions). Dividing the two halves is the United Nations Buffer Zone. The Buffer Zone is a demilitarised area cutting across 180 kilometres of the island like a belt, spanning in width from 3 metres to over 7 kilometres and all actively patrolled by UNFICYP.

Australian Major-General Cheryl Pearce, once the Commanding Officer of the 1st Military Police Battalion (1MP), has been the Force Commander of UNFICYP since 2018. More than one thousand people are currently deployed with UNFICYP. However, despite the peacekeeping efforts of the last half century, attempts to restore peace and security in Cyprus have not found a sustainable resolution.

The Problem

The Military Police deployed within the UN operation are firstly members of their own national army, adhering to their own standards and procedures with primacy. This is problematic as the UN has no official (singular) standard of policing. This means that in a multinational arena, like the

Republic of Cyprus, there are a multiplicity of standard operating procedures and therefore methods of policing. The policies and procedures a military police officer abides by depends on the conventions of their national army.

A contemporary example of this is the manning of the Force Military Police Unit (FMPU), with its personnel coming from Britain, Hungary, and Slovakia. This means that the FMPU must overcome the friction of having three different procedural variations while attempting to do their job in one HQ. This problem has been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. FMPU is characterised by small teams working in close environments with close communication. Enforcing and maintaining social distancing methods have made the already-difficult task of restoring law and order even harder. For example, of the twenty Military Police specialists currently involved in the operation, nine were quarantined, cutting the specialist contingent nearly in half (word removed). The pandemic has also reduced the amount of equipment available to MPs. With the Covid-19 crisis far from over UNFICYP will require on-going assessment of their peacekeeping efforts in the second half of 2020 to ensure manning and supplies are sustainable.

A further obstacle to restoring peace in Cyprus is the existence of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), as it calls itself, which is not an internationally recognised nation state. The only nation that recognises its sovereignty is Turkey. The rest of the world, including the United Nations, views it as part of the Republic of Cyprus. This has made UNFICYP's work in Northern Cyprus more challenging, particularly for investigations. How do you conduct an investigation for a non-recognised nation state, who do not and will not answer to the recognised state?

Four components make up UNFICYP: the Military (identified wearing blue helmets), the UN Police (blue berets), the Civil Affairs Branch and Administration. They operate on an island inhabited by culturally and ethnically-diverse groups that speak different languages and observe different religions and customs. Adding to this complexity, UNFICYP is made up of personnel from different nations who too speak different languages and hold differing faiths and beliefs central to their culture. MAJGEN Pearce stated, the issue of different languages and cultural diversity in Cyprus has been one of the most significant challenges and greatest rewards when overcome.

Context

This paper discusses the policing forces and police work currently carried out by UNFICYP in Cyprus, which is under-pinned by the Exchange of Letters – Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) 1964. The two police forces operating under the United Nations in Cyprus are the United Nations Police (UNPOL) and the Force Military Police Unit (FMPU). There are a number of differences between these forces and their operations. Firstly, UNPOL's area of responsibility (AOR) is the Buffer Zone whereas FMPU's AOR is the entire island of Cyprus. Secondly, UNPOL do not have executive powers or powers of investigation but FMPU do. FMPU is responsible island-wide for all police matters and activities involving UN personnel, property and facilities. FMPU are authorised to complete the six following actions: Detain in the buffer zone and within any UN premises, Arrest any military member of the force, Conduct the breath analysis test (BAT) procedure, Search military personnel, vehicles and baggage, Dispose of seized property, and be armed and assist in the movement of weapons, on and off mission.

On a smaller scale, the Force Protection Unit (FPU) is an FMPU platoon. FPU, which was created in 2018 is an amalgamation of FMPU (multinational) and Security Platoon (single nation) personnel. It is made up of 28 people: 25 MPs (from Britain, Hungary, and Slovakia), 2 UN staff (MAJ Stitson

(Britain) and CAPT Boa (Hungary), and 1 HQ Support Officer (MSGT Januska (Slovakia)). FPU is an island-wide force, mostly used for conducting patrols on public roads, public transport, bars, restaurants, and other public places. Included in FPU is a special investigations section.

So What?

Moving forward, members of 1 MP BN must be prepared to work in multinational environments. In the 21st century, decisions made at the tactical level on the ground can quickly jump to the political level on the world stage. This means the boots on the ground must be experts at their craft, effective decision makers, and capable of working in situations where the 'right thing to do' is not always clear.

Australian military police must be prepared and trained to operate in complex and ambiguous environments as seen in Cyprus today. This role goes beyond the requirements of civilian police, who are not trained to work in high threat environments. The question can then be asked, what is needed in order to succeed in such an environment? A thorough knowledge of the relevant legislation regardless of rank, unconscious competence of the basics of police craft, understanding of and sympathy with the cultural differences within the area of responsibility, and the ability to make decisions that could have ramifications at a national level. From UNFICYP's work in Cyprus, we know that Military Police can provide:

- Policing in environments outside the capability of civilian police, such as warzones
- Partnerships with the host nation police forces to develop security strategies
- Enabling support for communication between the parties in a conflict

The competence needed to succeed on deployment begins with training here in Australia. As the saying goes, "the more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in battle". Realistic and demanding training here at home is the key to preparing a military police force for success overseas.

Now what?

UNFICYP is a fascinating contemporary example of a multinational policing operation. The Covid-19 restrictions are proving to be an obstacle to realistic and demanding training. Regardless, Covid-19 is a testament to the fact that the international arena is unpredictable and as a military force, we must always be prepared for anything. UNFICYP peacekeeping in Cyprus has and is educating us on the challenges of international policing and thanks to the current restrictions we now have time to study it.

Further Reading

United Nations Missions 2020. Available at: <https://unficyp.unmissions.org/about> (Accessed 1 July 2020).

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United Nations Secretary-General 2020, *United Nations operation in Cyprus*, report of the United Nations Security Council. Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_23.pdf (Accessed 1 July 2020).