

How to Deal with Spoilers: Dissent-Shirking, Obstruction, and Coping Strategies Within the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor

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The performance of UN peace operations is usually explained with macro-variables, such as international will, local hostility, or local capacity. This article explores an alternative explanation. Building on organizational theoretical literature, it argues obstructions from within account for deficits in the implementation of a mission's mandate. Empirically, the article focuses on the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). It shows how the mission struggled with bureaucratic spoilers. As Junk/Trettin outline, this represents a typical principal-agent-problem occurring in bureaucratic organizations. The article traces three empirical cases of spoiling: Dissent-shirking in the form of pathological underperformance, obstruction in the form of pathological overperformance, and obstruction in form of an "adhesive tendency" of international staff. Based on the experiences made in East Timor, the author concludes with recommendations on potential coping strategies that may prevent, contain, or reduce internal spoiling.

Introduction

There are at least three reasons for doing more research on "spoiling from within" international peace operations: The phenomenon is real; it is not well researched yet, let alone theorized; and it is a critical point for practical improvement and reform.

As an important instrument for conflict management, UN peace operations play a critical role for global peace and stability. Their success, however, depends on a variety of external factors, such as the level of hostility (e.g., Doyle and Sambanis 2006), an often neglected set of factors related to internal actors and processes. The article will provide empirical evidence that the UN peace operation in East Timor suffered notoriously from the "organizational pathology" of obstruction from within, defined as spoiling by individuals and groups of employees of the mission itself (Schöndorf 2011). It does so by analyzing the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET, 1999–2002). Time and again, internal spoiling threatened the successful implementation of the mission.

As the introduction to the special issue argues, the phenomenon of internal or bureaucratic spoiling in international organizational settings is still under-researched and the appropriate theoretical instruments still need to be explored or constructed. The field of peace operations research is dominated by macro-level approaches on the one side and idiosyncratic case studies on the other. There continues to be a lack of theory-guided analysis at the micro-level that accounts for performance variance.¹ Transferring organizational theory and administrative science from their original turf of public administrations and firms, their theoretical concepts yield suitable descriptive, explanatory, and prescriptive potential for the study of the success and failure of international organizations. In particular, the concept of principal-agent relations and its specifications (see Trettin and Junk in this issue) promises to be beneficial for empirical analysis.

1. For an overview, see Schöndorf 2011.

Peace operations are based on a division of labor and employ a variety of military, civilian, and police personnel with diverse cultural, professional, and personal backgrounds. In the words of a former senior mission officer, “People make it or they break it.”² As in any organizational entity, the goals, ambitions, and working methods of mission staff may not in every case correspond to the overall objectives of the operation and may prevent it from achieving these objectives. This article reconstructs how and why such actions occur.

Equally important as accounting for obstructing is tracing if and how these obstructions were coped with. A successful “coping strategy” prevents, reduces, or contains problems and defective action. The term “strategy,” however, does not have the technical meaning it has in theoretical game applications, but following Janis and Mann (1977), as well as Lazarus et al., George (1974), and Etzioni (1968), rather denotes “basic types of search and choice procedures” (Janis and Mann 1977:415). The last part of the article discusses if and how the leadership of the mission in East Timor could cope with internal spoilers, to what extent they proved successful, and what would be theoretically recommended coping strategies.

Of Principals and Agents: Organizational Theory and the Study of UN Peace Operations

A multidimensional peace operation is a complex organizational entity, with various units and subunits to perform a variety of tasks as set out in the mandate, ranging from restoration of security to the establishment of viable governmental and societal structures. Examples include the UN administration in Kosovo, the UN missions in Sudan, or the UN operation in East Timor, to name just a few. A basic principle of complex organizations is the division of work: one part or actor of the organization (the “agent”) performs services for the good of another part or actor within the organization (the “principal”). The principal is conceptualized as the one who orders actions, the agent the one executing them. The classic organizational-theoretical concept of the principal-agent problem holds that agents, such as the international field staff working in a mission, may behave dysfunctionally vis-à-vis the organization’s goals as they try to free ride.

The principal-agent approach to the analysis of organizational frictions was originally developed within the research tradition of microeconomic organization analysis. The theorem explains the success and failure of organizations in terms of problematic information asymmetries between those who are in charge of running the organization, i.e., the principals, and those who execute the principals’ orders, i.e., the agents (Eisenhardt 1989; Rauchhaus 2006). An agent may hide information on its actions and intentions, commit moral hazard, and he or she may be prone to adverse selection, and to the behavior of holding up the mechanisms of causal processes as proposed by the theorem consistent in the trajectories of opportunism, purposeful misinformation, or defective action. If the agent does not care (any longer) for the successful performance of the organization and instead acts strategically in his or her private interests, a critical mass of spoiling actions may result in organizational failure.

The following part elaborates on how spoiling behavior by the agents, i.e., the personnel of the mission, vis-à-vis principals, i.e., the mission leadership and the mandating and supervising UN Security Council and the Secretariat, influenced the performance of the mission—and if and how these obstructions were coped with in the case of UNTAET.

Empirical Observations on UNTAET

Since the end of the Cold War, UN peace operations have developed from traditional “buffer missions” by a handful of Blue Helmets to the assumption of a temporary government role by transitional administrations. The latter are the most “complex, costly, and risky” (United Nations 2000:para. 77) missions. Defined as “a transitional authority established by the Security

2. Interview with a senior staff member of Civil Affairs, UNTAET, New York, 18 September 2006.

Council to assist a country during a government regime change or passage to independence,” (United Nations 2008:99) transitional administrations pursue peacekeeping and peacebuilding tasks with a strong political component. While being noncoercive in nature, they usually have a robust mandate and engage in a multitude of cooperative relations to achieve their mandate. The creation of this most encompassing mission type represented the apogee within the UN “fallback system for peace” (Wesley 1997).³ One prominent example of this kind of mission was the UN administration in East Timor, UNTAET.

UNTAET has been one of the most comprehensive missions of the United Nations ever. The international administration was supposed to build a state from scratch. The goal was to prepare the longtime colonized and suppressed people of East Timor for independence and for running their newly created state. Governing the former Portuguese and, subsequently, Indonesian colony for an interim period of almost three years, the mission exercised executive and legislative authority and engaged heavily in institution-building. UNTAET has been widely hailed as one of the more successful stories of UN peacekeeping. However, the mission also had substantial flaws, some of them possibly contributing to the relapse into violent conflict in 2006 (OHCHR 2006). The most crucial shortcoming related to the lack of local ownership of the transition was that given the difficult local capacity situation in East Timor, training local Timorese and having them participate in the transitional structures would have been essential but was regularly obstructed by the mission. I have selected three narratives that illustrate this point.

The narratives are being reconstructed by applying the method of process tracing. Process tracing is a method that calls for the systematic collection and analysis of nonquantitative data on the basis of a preliminary analytical roster (cf. George et al. 2005). As the term suggests, the method is about the identification and theoretical interpretation of causal processes. I attempt a reconstruction and an analysis of the processes that connect the explanatory factors of different kinds of pathologies and link it to the dependent variable, i.e., performance. A mapping of virulent trajectories should allow me to explore the extent to which the observations coincide with prior, theoretically derived expectations about driving factors and mechanisms. The case of UNTAET has been selected for two reasons: First, there has been evidence that pertinent pathologies were becoming virulent within this mission. Second, UNTAET has by and large been rated a success story. However, time has shown that in terms of sustainable results, the performance of UNTAET has been mixed at best. It is plausible to assume this shortcoming is a consequence of the poor capacity-building performance of the mission, resulting from notorious spoiling by international staff. Looking at these actions of spoiling and how they were, in part at least, coped with is an important starting point for future structural reforms, policy improvements, and leadership considerations.

The Situation in East Timor

When UNTAET started in 1999, East Timor had the lowest GDP across Asia and was one of the poorest countries in the world. The country struggled with a hardly existing logistical, economic, financial, and administrative infrastructure (see also Garrison 2005:11), and a devastating situation in terms of human capacity. First of all, the East Timorese were a colonized society—traumatized with decades of oppression and incapacitation, loss of family members, rape, and exploitation. The formal educational qualification and skills of the East Timorese were low, as the Indonesians had systematically prohibited them from white- and blue-collar positions, and they had hardly invested anything into local education. There was a lack of skilled, trained people in nearly any (non-agricultural) profession. Timorese, 80 percent of whom were living the traditional life in the rural areas of the island, did not

3. Wesley, Michael (1997): *Casualties of the New World Order: The Causes of Failure of UN Missions to Civil Wars*, Basingstoke: Macmillan: 1–15. See also Barnett, Michael and Martha Finnemore (1999): “The Power, Politics, and Pathologies of International Organizations,” *International Organization* 53 (4): 699–732.

dispose over the required capacities to build and run a new state.⁴ There were no local East Timor capacities, at least from what would be required from a Western perspective, to run the civil service, the judiciary, the police, or the health system in the independent state-to-come.⁵ The same holds true for economic and commercial expertise, which are likewise important for quick economic reconstruction. Furthermore, East Timorese had no experience running a state, not to mention running a state democratically, from which the UN could have benefited. In addition, the refugee and IDP situation was devastating—about three quarters of the population were displaced. “This country did not have very many people available who were competent. Nothing you can do about that. It was not, in government terms, a viable territory at that time.”⁶ Making matters worse, institutional and corporate memory had been lost:

95 percent of the previous administrative structure had been wiped out. Not just the buildings which you didn’t have, you didn’t have any manual at all. The only manual people had, was the memory of the Indonesian structures. Memory! You didn’t even have papers! You didn’t even have an organigram, an organizational chart of how the Indonesians used to do it. They didn’t leave it and they didn’t hand us over anything. They destroyed all the documents. All of the basic administrative papers were burnt. (*Ibid.*)

UNTAET was to build a state from scratch. In fact, there was not much to build on. Making matters worse, the mission was given high time pressure to set up a viable administrative structure, as the secretary-general had set out a two-year time frame for implementing the very ambitious state-building objectives of the mandate. Thus, the scope conditions of the mission were mixed at best.

Process Tracing of Internal Spoiling

Given the situation on the ground, qualified and motivated international training personnel would have been essential in order to compensate for the many deficits. The money for this would, in principle, have been there. However, getting the right people to do the right things was the very Achilles heel of the mission. Much of its civilian personnel did not engage in training, capacity-building, and involving the East Timorese in managing the transition. Staff was adhering to their respective private interests, such as clinging to their jobs—and luscious salaries. This obviously ran counter to the overarching goal of the mission, which was to prepare the new state for its independence as quickly as possible—and to dispose itself. The resulting frictions between the mission leadership and large parts of its staff eventually turned virulent. UNTAET struggled with many defective employees who were there “just to collect a salary”⁷ or who misbehaved toward their local counterparts to protect themselves from being replaced. During the liquidation phase of the mission, international personnel actively stalled the process of hand-over to their local counterparts as they wanted to hold on to their positions as long as possible. On the other hand, a diametrically opposed phenomenon was also observable, namely overly motivated staff doing too much, and thus keeping local counterparts from owning the transition. In the following, three pathological spoiling patterns are described.

“Dead Wood”: A Pattern of Dissent-Shirking

While UNTAET was high in staff numbers—almost eight hundred international staff plus

4. This being said, the evaluation is relative to the standards applied: the international community strived to impose role-model Western institutions in East Timor. Interview with Dr. Tanja Hohe, former team member of UN Volunteers in East Timor, 30 September 2006

5. Cf. Garrison (2005) “Timor-Leste found itself a society [...] that lacked indigenous skills and training in all areas essential to democracy and development. It faced independence as a nation bereft of entrepreneurial, technical, medical, educational, and administrative skills and experience” (6).

6. Interview with a senior staff member of Civil Affairs, UNTAET, New York, 18 September 2006.

7. *Ibid.*

more than 7,600 uniformed personnel—not all of them brought adequate quality.⁸ In fact, as Head of Mission Sergio Vieira de Mello admitted, “The mission was effectively run by about 10 percent of the people.”⁹ That means that 90 percent of the staff can be considered as bureaucratic spoilers, “simply trying to collect their next salary and who had no contact with the locals at all.”¹⁰ As a consequence, there was not only an overload of work for these 10 percent, but it also meant an enormous waste of resources.

The “strategy” that soon developed at UNTAET headquarters to cope with this “dead wood,”¹¹ as a senior UNTAET official called these people, was to place them in far-away districts, removing them from headquarters positions. Since it is very difficult to fire people within the UN system, a continuous shuffling of—very well paid—personnel set in. “Staff was being moved around who no one wanted in the mission. [. . .] There was a game of musical chairs.”¹² The result was the staff situation in the districts, i.e., the offices in the rural areas of Timor, was even more unfavorable than at the central level. At the same time, it was the rural areas where the vast majority of Timorese lived and where good work was needed most.

The managerial challenge of dealing with this staff had a political dimension as well. Under considerations of sovereignty and resource obligations alike, member states did not want the UN to routinely engage in state-building and, particularly, in state-running missions. “They say that Kosovo and Timor and Eastern Slavonia were sort of exceptions, and that we should not develop a dedicated capacity in that area” (Schöndorf 2011:297–98). For the recruitment system at DPKO, this meant there was not a suitable roster that could identify human capacities to maintain post-conflict administrations. Specifically, the roster did not identify civilian and, especially, administrative skills; it did not select according to cultural or country knowledge; and it did not identify training capabilities. Staffing proceeds according to the necessities of the UN system, e.g., country quotas and their willingness to contribute, and only in second place according to functions. Trying to amend the recruitment process, DPKO made specific requests to member states that they send administration specialists. But UNTAET had trouble finding people with expertise, particularly in government. A senior DPKO official and then mission officer stated:

The task of setting up a government is not something we do all the time, and what you want here is people who have been in government and in the civil service. However, the good ones usually are needed at home. So you don’t always get the best ones when you ask governments anyway. Point one. Point two is that there is a difference between being, let’s say, a very good finance ministry director in the governments of the UK or Switzerland, and being able to set up a finance ministry out of the burnt building in Dili that you find yourself in. We needed expertise that can organize and work in a development and post-conflict context where infrastructure has really been destroyed. In fact, however, we had some very bad people who I think made decisions that set Timor back.¹³

States were reluctant to delegate their good people. “Except for the peacekeeping element, the UN does not have experience in running a country as such. Therefore, it is not surprising that the UNTAET personnel recruit did not fit the job qualification for public administration or economic reconstruction” (Saldanha 2003:161). The result was a hit or miss of people. Unfortunately, the system produced a lot of “dead wood,” i.e., staff that was neither qualified

8. In early 2002, the mission comprised 7,687 total uniformed personnel, including 6,281 troops, 1,288 civilian police, and 118 military observers; UNTAET also includes 737 international civilian personnel and 1,745 local civilian staff. United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (2002), UN Transitional Administration in East Timor, Facts and Figures, available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/etimor/UntaetF.htm>, accessed 3 March 2011.

9. Interview with a senior staff member of Civil Affairs, UNTAET, New York, 18 September 2006, remembering a remark by de Mello.

10. Telephone interview with a staff member of UNTAET, 9 October 2006.

11. Interview with a senior staff member of Civil Affairs, UNTAET, New York, 18 September 2006.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Interview with a senior staff member of UNTAET, New York, 23 November 2006.

nor motivated to do the job.¹⁴ Accordingly, there was a high degree of uncertainty in the mission's performance.

“Over-Performers”: Obstructing by Omitting Local Ownership

In UNTAET, there was staff also that over-performed—on the wrong thing. In order to have the mandate implemented—at least those parts they considered to be prevailing—international personnel started to massively “state-build” on their own. Omitting local ownership, they obstructed the long-term success of UNTAET.

For nearly two years, the mission was almost exclusively staffed by international personnel. And many of those staff would not invest time in training the East Timorese, for example in financial administration or judicial issues. Rather, they would do as much as they could themselves. This not only triggered frustration among local Timorese¹⁵ but also created a precarious situation where time was running out to build up the capacities needed for running the new democratic state.

Different reasons account for the tendency of UNTAET staff to “do it alone.” The first and most fundamental reason for their obstructing behavior was that UN staff was not used to local capacity-building. UNTAET was one of the first missions that had a capacity-building mandate. While today learning how to support and train local capacity is an integral part of UN training and education, in the late 1990s it was not. The second reason was the high time pressure that came with the comprehensive mandate. From day one, the transitional administration was under extreme time pressure to succeed. At the same time, it had the power, the resources, and the capacities to do the transition alone. Warranting visible results as quickly as possible, the rationale for the staff of the interim administration was to “get things done.” And doing it alone was the most controllable and quickest way to implement the mandate, especially when taking in to account the difficulties that came with hiring East Timorese. And, third, the proper hiring of locals was in fact very time-consuming, especially at the mid- and lower-levels, where it “took forever.”¹⁶

That sort of working levels were the hardest to deal with. I mean: where are you going to get them? I mean there is certainly that tier of people that were a part of the bureaucratic structures during the Indonesian time, right. So, some of those people were still around, many of them had fled, but some were still around, so we would try to find them because they had some basic skills. Everyone knew who they were, everyone knew where they were. It wasn't a secret. But there weren't so many of them either. So, we would also look to universities, people connected somehow to universities; you know, people who were just graduating or people we knew who graduated at least the last five or ten years, and people with at least some basic skills, some basic writing skills and communicating skills. But they were usually *very* basic. They weren't so specialized in all these different areas of government.¹⁷

Furthermore, language obstacles as well as the immense gap between the demands and the availability of local capacities contributed to the omission of ownership. “The fact that the UN official language was English was really devastating, because no Timorese could read or write English”;¹⁸ they speak Bahasa Indonesian, Tetum, or Portuguese. In addition, Asian culture and the Timorese experience under Indonesian rule took its toll. There was no attitude of asking, insisting, or taking initiative at the work place. “They were very quiet” and possibly

14. “Peacekeeping can't be another job, it needs people that are highly motivated, with a burning desire to do good.” interview with Dr. Christine Coleiro, UNITAR POCI, Washington, D.C., 1 December 2006.

15. “People who had been involved in an independence struggle do not like the idea that when they finish that struggle they do not get to take over control,” interview with a senior staff member of UNTAET, New York, 23 November 2006.

16. Telephone interview with a senior staff member of UNTAET, 9 October 2006.

17. *Ibid.* The remainder of this subchapter is part of the author's PhD thesis, cf. Schöndorf *Against the Odd*: 246–247.

18. Telephone interview with a program officer of the Donor Coordination Unit, UNTAET, 7 October 2006.

“intimidated by this work they’ve never done before.”¹⁹ Vice versa, “in the minds of a lot of the UN staff, there was never really a competent, capable Timorese counterpart with who to work to transfer those skills.”²⁰

The local ownership-omission only changed with a fundamental decision by SRSG Vieira de Mello to introduce a co-government approach.²¹ Against resistance from headquarters as well as from many of his staff who did not want to “serve under” East Timorese, he decided to radically redesign the transition approach. He installed a co-government where international ministers acted together with East Timorese cabinet members. “Vieira de Mello [. . .] came to see that he would need to bend the UN rules in order to save the mission. The most effective way for him to exercise power in East Timor would be to surrender it.”²² The speed and scope of re-adjustment was considered almost revolutionary by UN standards, and ties with the East Timorese improved. On the other hand, however, some staff on the ground heavily confronted the SRSG, as they were not willing to serve under the Timorese. The SRSG decided to talk to the uneasy international staff up front, letting them decide to stay or to leave. “He assembled the entire UN staff—some seven hundred people—ailing with the four new Timorese cabinet ministers, in the auditorium of the parliament building. He spoke from the dais and, pointing to the Timorese sitting in the front row, said, ‘These are your new bosses.’ When one UN official objected that there was no provision in the UN Security Council resolution for what UNTAET was doing, he was defiant. ‘I assume full responsibility,’ he said. ‘You either obey, or you can leave.’” (Power 2008: 329–30). At the end of the day, this decisive move against internal obstruction saved the mission from becoming a failure.

“Glued to Their Seats”: Between Obstruction and Sabotage

The final episode of UNTAET spoiling relates to obstruction by international staff during the liquidation phase of the mission. In a transitional administration, the goal that ideally everyone should work toward is handing jobs over to the locals and letting them take over. When the time of withdrawal approached, many internationals did not want to leave though, thus risking sabotaging the mission.

UNTAET’s exit plan included a table with milestones and timelines, as well as a detailed and rigid cutback matrix. That meant that each week, the team responsible for phasing out planning made “key decisions, and it came down to getting rid of people, like, ‘OK, by the end of September, we’re gonna have to get rid of five more UN staff’,”²³ and in October five more, etc. This team, the “axe men”²⁴ as they came to be called, decreased the mission size by about 10 percent within a period of six to seven months. At the same time, the very idea of downsizing, withdrawal, and post-mission planning was difficult to get through, as staff had to live up to their own challenging daily schedules. Some complained, “We have our daily s*** to do here and you’re talking about six months or even two years from now—we don’t have time for that.”²⁵ Besides, many staff would cling desperately to their jobs. When detailed withdrawal schedules with name lists were published,²⁶ many international personnel began to engage in heavy protests. A UNTAET staff member stated, “that was a nightmare. Our office

19. Telephone interview with a senior staff member of UNTAET, 9 October 2006.

20. *Ibid.*

21. The rest of this subchapter is taken from Schönendorf 2011.

22. *Ibid.* Also, he merged the Transitional Cabinet with UNTAET’s GPA pillar to form the East Timorese Transitional Administration. In an exceptional and unprecedented move, the Administration was even granted its own, unearmarked budget.

23. Interview with a UNTAET staff member, Washington, D.C., 10 September 2006.

24. “That’s why we were essentially there: we’re axe people, we were referred to as the axe men,” telephone interview with a staff member of the Post-UNTAET Planning Team, UNTAET, 15 October 2006.

25. *Ibid.*

26. “What we had to do was to collect names from line officers, and then they would say, ‘OK, in this first couple of points: these people should be cut, in the next couple of points: these people.’ So that slowly, we were drawing down. So, we would collect these names and then eventually pass it on to the administration.” *Ibid.*

was like a psychiatrist's office. How many people came crying into my office yelling, 'My family . . . I don't understand. . . .'²⁷ The reason behind this is that for many international staff, a UN field job is a very lucrative assignment, and they do not want to give this up any time soon. Eventually, the bleak outlook of withdrawal reportedly caused some international staff to obstruct the implementation of their duties, and they would stop training their Timorese counterparts. The purpose was to prolong the transitional process, and thus, their tenure. At the end of the day, however, they could not influence the mission's schedule at all.

At the end of the day, the only thing they *did* influence was the low performance on capacity-building, which they had not fostered. Given the very low level of education and training of the Timorese—whom the Indonesians had denied formal or even higher education—an emphasis on capacity-building would have been more important in Timor than anything else.

Conclusion

In the East Timor case, the effects of bureaucratic spoiling became particularly virulent, because they related to the most critical local factor, namely local capacities. The inability and/or unwillingness of many international staff to build up local capacity exacerbated this most critical deficit. On the one side, UNTAET struggled with international staff that did too much on their own instead of involving the Timorese. On the other side, the quality of much of its staff was low and the mission struggled with underperforming, and, at times, destructive staff behavior. There is good reason to assume that UNTAET is no exception in the landscape of peace operations, as the intense debates on local ownership and international civilian capacities indicate (Kühne et al. 2008). UNTAET's leadership could only deal successfully with the obstructions in parts. For instance, the strategy to cope with "dead wood" staff²⁸ was to place these personnel in far-away districts. International over-performance and foreclosure of local ownership was fenced in when the mission leadership determined to redesign UNTAET's transitional approach and decided on an international-local, co-government arrangement. This decision, however, came late.

At the UN, the management of peace operations has become more professionalized since 1999–2000. But the fundamental problem of finding the right people to do the right job is still a great issue for peace operations, as is the sound management of the mission (cf. De Coning 2010).

Approaching the practical problem from a theoretical angle, further recommendations on coping are being found. Literature suggestions for reducing, containing, or preventing the pathologies, resulting from agent opportunism, point to supervision and control. Thus using a hierarchical approach, extending the organizational information system, threats of sanctions, especially threats of losing one's reputation, the creation of positive incentives for agents, and generally for an organizational culture that emphasizes the commonness of goals and values (cf. Schöndorf 2001:40).

The narrower the span of control in a given entity, the more likely the principal discloses deviant agent behavior. Control may consist of the supervision of behavior and control of outputs. For both forms of control, the fundamental structure of the relationship between the principals and agents in consideration defines the opportunities for such control (cf. Hall 1972). A helpful supplement to a control structure is the extension of the information system—the more information the principal can receive via additional information channels, the less he or she is vulnerable to agent defection. Another strategy for coping with deviant agent behavior rests on setting incentives. Incentives may consist of threats of sanctions—the graver the sanction for deviant behavior, the higher the opportunity cost for an agent to hazard the required course. In addition, sanctioning an agent who has been caught has a preventative

27. Telephone interview with a staff member of the Post-UNTAET Planning Team, UNTAET, 15 October 2006.

28. Interview with a senior staff member of Civil Affairs, UNTAET, New York, 18 September 2006.

impact vis-à-vis other spoilers. Sanctions may also be positive in that agents are rewarded for complying and productive behavior, be it in monetary or nonmonetary terms.²⁹ As the classic writing of Chester Barnard holds: “An organization can secure the efforts necessary to its existence [. . .] either by the objective inducements it provides or by changing states of mind. [. . .] We shall call the process of offering objective incentives ‘the method of incentives;’ and the process of changing subjective attitudes ‘the method of persuasion.’” (1938:142).³⁰

The most obvious way to avoid agent defection is to prevent it by making the organization’s goals and wishes the goals and wishes of the agent. *Ceteris paribus*, an actor who identifies with the overall purpose of the entity he belongs to will not act against it.

The disadvantage of all of these potential coping strategies is that they are expensive and add to the complexity of the organization. The crucial elements that remain to be built up within the organization or the respective groups are trust and solidarity (cf. Kramer and Tylor 1995). Findings like these may be relevant for practitioners and decision-makers who design and lead such operations, and raising systematic awareness of commitment-related pitfalls can help in coping with them. Hence, theoretical concepts may contribute to a practical “toolbox” of how to cope with (often unavoidable) internal obstruction. On the other hand, further empirical research is needed in order to elaborate best-practices that may supplement and specify this toolbox.

In conclusion, there is preliminary, yet substantial evidence on the phenomenon of spoiling from within a peace operation. The processes traced for the UN mission in East Timor show that principal-agent-defection can have tremendous effects not only on mission performance but on the sustainability of transitional processes and institutions, and, eventually, on the sustainability of peace. Further comparative research can then ask more nuanced questions, for instance, what are the conditions that favor spoiling behavior? Answering this question will certainly involve an analysis of the organizational structures at UN headquarters and the decisions on UN peacekeeping reform taken by member states. Preliminary hypotheses on these conditions may point to the role of micromanagement and personnel recruitment systems. If principals will not allow, for instance, for a recruitment system capable of identifying and deploying qualified staff, one must not expect qualified mandate implementation either (cf. UN SG 2011). Furthermore, another critical future research question would be which factors enhance the ability to cope with such obstructions. The evidence from the East Timor case points to the importance of a proactive and decisive mission leadership. Future studies on peace operations are well advised to embrace interdisciplinary research and make use of the large body of management literature on leadership that offers helpful advice on how leaders could and should come to terms with obstruction from within.

There is good reason to assume that tackling the problems of internal spoiling must be a baseline in the improvement of peace operations. When a mission is living up to its mandate and duties, this will certainly enhance the effectiveness of the operation but also the legitimacy of the international presence and of the UN peacekeeping system as a whole.

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29. For a formal justification of the argument, see Laffont, Jean-Jacques and David Martimort (2002): *The Theory of Incentives. The Principal-Agent Model*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. The first to define a theory of incentives was the seminal *Functions of the Executive*. Chester I. Barnard. *The Functions of the Executive*, (New York: Wiley, 1938).

30. Barnard (1938) further elaborates, “The specific inducements that may be offered are of several classes, for example: a) material inducements; b) personal nonmaterial opportunities; c) desirable physical conditions; d) ideal benefactions. General incentives afforded are, for example: e) associational attractiveness; f) adaptation of conditions to habitual methods and attitudes; g) opportunity of enlarged participation; h) the condition of communion” (142).

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