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**United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations  
in the Gulf of Fonseca by  
Argentine Navy Units**

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Argentine Navy**

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IN  
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BY  
ARGENTINE NAVY UNITS

by

JUAN CARLOS NEVES

Commander

ARGENTINE NAVY

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The contents of this essay reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the U.S. Naval War College or the Argentine Navy.

Commander Neves is the Argentine Navy Research Fellow assigned to the Strategy & Campaign Department of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies at the U.S. Naval War College. His previous experience includes duty as Commanding Officer of Fast Patrol Boat ARA INTREPIDA, several tours in surface ships including an aircraft carrier, cruisers, destroyers and corvettes; he has also served as a Staff Officer in the Fleet. He saw active duty in the Malvinas War aboard DD ARA SEGUI. His shore assignments include Argentine Naval War College and Post Graduate course, Brazilian Naval War College and United States Naval Command College. Furthermore, he holds a Master's Degree in International Relations from Belgrano University, Buenos Aires.

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**ABSTRACT OF**

**UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN THE GULF OF FONSECA**

**BY**

**ARGENTINE NAVY UNITS**

In November 1989 the United Nations Security Council decided to send a Group of Military Observers for on-site verification of the 1987 Guatemala Agreement reached by the governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. To perform this peacekeeping operation in Central America, military observers carried out patrols with land vehicles, helicopters and fast patrol boats. All the units, including the fast patrol boats, operated under the United Nations (U.N.) flag.

This was the first time that navy units acted under the U.N. flag in peace-keeping operations. Of special interest are: 1) the circumstances involved in the U.N.'s request and Argentina's provision of the ships; 2) the specific problems generated by operating under the U.N. flag; and 3) the advantages and disadvantages of employing naval units in peace-keeping operations.

In January 1992, the U.N. Group of Military Observers, including the fast patrol boats and their crews, successfully completed its mission when a general peace agreement was reached. Naval units proved to be useful for performing observational tasks in a maritime environment with a minimum of interference in a state's sovereignty. However, specific cautions and limits should be considered before ordering their future use, including the risks and costs derived from the use of unarmed ships, logistic and training requirements, the flexibility of U.N. rules and the U.N.'s capability to pay the peace-keeping operations costs.

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**UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS IN THE GULF OF FONSECA  
BY ARGENTINE NAVAL UNITS**

**CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION**

This paper deals with peace-keeping operations, now one of the most important activities of the UNITED NATIONS (U.N.). Peace-keeping operations are not new; however, while only 13 such operations were conducted by the U.N. between 1945 and 1987, the same number were carried out between 1988 and January 1992. Accordingly, of the \$8.3 billion that have been spent by the U.N. on peace-keeping operations through January 1992, about \$3 billion have been committed in the last 12 month period alone.<sup>1</sup>

The growing development of these activities by the U.N. is a direct consequence of the more influential role performed by the international organization following the end of the Cold War and the subsequent lack of hostility among the five powers with veto-rights on the U.N. Security Council. In fact, since the creation of the U.N. in 1945, 279 decisions of the Security Council have been vetoed, but since 31 May 1990 no vetoes have been recorded,<sup>2</sup> and the U.N. has been allowed to develop a broad spectrum of operations in defense of peace and stability.

While there are other important U.N. procedures different from peace-keeping operations designed to seek international peace --such as preventive diplomacy, peace-making operations and post-conflict peace-building actions-- this paper will focus only on peace-keeping operations. These are defined as "the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well. Peace-keeping is a technique that expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace."<sup>3</sup> Although the concept of peace-

keeping is still in the evolutionary stage, it is important to point out some of the definite characteristics of such operations that will help us to understand the kind of actions developed for the Gulf of Fonseca.

First, peace-keeping operations require the consent of all the involved parties. They are significantly different from enforcement measures allowed under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter and these differences have obvious implications in the operational arena. Second, peace-keeping operations are executed with a full respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of a U.N. member state.<sup>4</sup> Finally, it is necessary to keep in mind that, while peace-keeping operations are provisory actions carried out by the U.N. for the purpose of attempting to stop or prevent a conflict, final settlements are reached through political agreements amongst parties involved amid the favorable climate created by such operations.

In the procedural field, peace-keeping operations also have other features that commend them. They are always executed under the control of the U.N. Security Council through the office of the Secretary-General, and generally are not under the command of countries from the immediate operational area, nor are they generally under the independent national command of the country to whom the participating forces belong.<sup>5</sup> Forces employed in peace-keeping operations are required by the U.N. to be from a member state(s), which provide them on a voluntary basis. Once forces are committed, they act under the U.N. flag. Peace-keeping operations present an unavoidable degree of risk. Over 800 personnel from 43 countries have died in peace-keeping operations serving under the flag of the U.N. through January 1992.<sup>6</sup> This is an important point to keep in mind when unarmed forces are deployed into conflict areas. Finally, these operations are costly to the U.N. in financial terms. In addition to the support provided by the host countries, the cost of peace-keeping operations (including translation services, personnel allowances, logistic peace-keeping, etc.) is borne by the U.N. and represents a real constraint for the start-up and maintenance of such operations.



Until 1990, peace-keeping operations had been carried out by only land and aviation assets. The U.N. has acquired much experience and background in the deployment of these kinds of forces. This said, the unique geography of Central America presented new challenges to U.N. peace-keeping operations and required the deployment of naval forces.

Chapter II deals with the process by which tridimensional (land, sea, and air) peace-keeping operations in Central America were developed.

Chapter III presents the process by which naval forces were obtained for the operation and the agreements, established between the U.N. and Argentina (the providing party), which were intended to solve particular problems created by the deployment of naval ships in peace-keeping operations.

Chapter IV analyzes the operational and organizational aspects of the naval operation executed in the Gulf of Fonseca and the relationship between the Argentine Force under U.N. control and the regional parties. Furthermore, a brief consideration of the outcomes at the end of the operation are discussed.

In the final chapter the advantages, disadvantages and the implications for future employment of naval units in peace-keeping operations are considered.

Due to restrictions imposed by U.N. classification rules, information known to military observers by reason of their specific work will not be discussed in this study.



## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PEACE-KEEPING OPERATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

In the early eighties Central America was a typical Cold War scenario where the leftist and rightist governments and guerrilla groups fought for power and control in most countries of the area with the direct or indirect support of both superpowers. Furthermore, old border disputes and mistrust amongst the regional actors added other factors of instability to an already difficult situation.

By way of a brief summary of the main issues in Central America at the time, it is possible to identify the leftist revolutionary governments in Cuba and Nicaragua, which were supported by the Soviet Union (USSR), as being actively involved in supplying the means for other insurrectional\* groups in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. In El Salvador, the guerrilla forces of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) had reached a level of power capable of seriously challenging the control exercised by the constitutional government. On the other hand, an insurrectional group known as the "Nicaraguan Resistance Fighters (Contras)" fought the leftist Nicaraguan government, acting from Honduran territory with the declared support of the United States. The United States, while supporting the governments of El Salvador and Honduras, harassed the Nicaraguan revolutionary government in many different ways.

Completing the scenario, the three primary regional actors (Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador) all share maritime frontage on the Gulf of Fonseca. This oceanic space, enclosed by the three countries, was an area of dispute for fishery resources, islands and maritime boundaries which seriously affected the relationship amongst the three small regional navies. In the Cold War context, the Gulf of Fonseca served as a supply line of communication over which the leftist Nicaraguan Sandinista forces provisioned the Salvadoran FMLN guerrillas. The word that best describes the regional

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\* The word "insurrectionalist" is used rather than "insurgent" following U.N. usage.

situation at the time is "volatile"-- volatile because of the multiple factors capable of provoking an explosion of violence and instability.

A small map of the region provides us with an idea of its geographic features.

FIGURE 1  
CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE GULF OF FONSECA



In January 1983, the foreign ministers of four Latin American countries with interest in the area (Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela) met on the Panamanian island of Contadora to look for a solution to the worsening Central American situation. These countries signed in July 1983 the "Declaration of Cancún About Central American Peace" and organized themselves as the "Contadora Group" in a combined effort to advocate peace and development in the region. In August 1985 four South American countries, Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay, organized themselves as the "Support Group to Contadora" in an attempt to demonstrate increasing concern and interest generated in the whole of the Western Hemisphere by the Central American conflict. At the time, the risk of an open war amongst the Central American countries or a direct foreign intervention in the region were the roots of this concern.

In August 1987, assisted by the measure of good will generated by the Contadora Group and by the Support Group, and pushed by the unaffordability of the crisis, the presidents of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica met in Guatemala City and took a transcendent step by signing an agreement known as "Esquipulas II." Esquipulas II established a framework for a definitive solution to the Central American conflict based on the principles of dialogue between opposing parties, amnesty, reconciliation and democratization. Furthermore, and directly related to the subject of this research, Point Five of the agreement urged all parties to dedicate themselves to the common commitment of cessation of aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements operating in the region, and, in Point Six, established the commitment of all five signatories not to allow the use of their territory to perform actions intended to perturb another Central American government.<sup>7</sup> It is obvious that the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran Presidents did not have uppermost in their minds the same insurrectional movements; neither were they referring to the same territories when signing on to these articles (while one was thinking of Nicaraguan resistance acting from Honduras, the other had in mind the FMLN supported from Nicaragua). They did,

however, share the same need to stop the hostilities in their respective countries and were ready to begin taking the necessary steps to carry out their commitment. As proof of this intention, Point Ten of the Esquipulas II agreement called for the creation of an international commission of verification and follow-up on the commitments agreed to; this point served as the seed that led to future peace-keeping operations.<sup>8</sup>

Despite all the good will, intentions and agreements, the situation in the region continued to be volatile throughout the remainder of 1987 and into 1988. But with the increasing thaw in the Cold War, the superpowers concomitantly displayed a decreasing interest in supporting the insurrectional movements in Central America. In turn, this facilitated an increasing U.N. involvement in the region and offered an opportunity for progress in the peace process.

In November 1988 the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the five Esquipulas II signatories addressed a letter to the U.N. Secretary-General asking for an impartial way to conduct on-site verification of points five and six of the agreement referring to the cessation of aid to insurrectionist movements and non-use of the territory of one state to attack others. The response to this request, dated January 1989, presented the parties with a variety of peace-keeping operations options, outlining the principles and practices of each. Moreover, the U.N. reply pointed out the difficulties for observers which were presented by terrain; it also stressed the necessity that all parties involved, even irregular forces and insurrectionist groups, must accept U.N. conditions prior to the commencement of such operations.<sup>9</sup>

It took about six months and many meetings by all concerned to remove the obstacles to full acceptance of the international peace-keeping operation. Meanwhile, the problem of Central America proved to be unmanageable without external help. Finally in August 1989 the Tela Declaration, signed in Honduras by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, formalized the requirement for an international peace-keeping force to be dispatched to Honduran territory.<sup>10</sup> The Tela Declaration also presented a joint plan for the voluntary demobilization, repatriation or

relocation of members of the Nicaraguan Resistance in Nicaragua or third countries, and appealed to FMLN to halt its military activities in order to put an end to hostilities in El Salvador.

The agreement allowed the U.N. Security Council to adopt Resolution 644/89 on 7 November 1989 creating the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) in accordance with provisions outlined in the Report of the Secretary-General S/20895, dated 11 October 1989. The basic ONUCA features enumerated in Report S/20895 concerned the mandate, required capacities, and specifics about the organization and command of the U.N. force.

The Security Council's mandate was for conducting on-site verification of:

- a. The cessation of aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements
- b. The non-use of the territory of one state for attacks on other states<sup>11</sup>

The required capacities for ONUCA's forces were:

- a. Monitor on a regular basis areas reported to harbor bases and camps of irregular forces and insurrectionist movements
- b. Monitor on a regular basis, land sea and air borders
- c. Investigate immediately any complaint received from one of the five Governments of alleged violations of the undertakings relating to the cessation of assistance and non-use of territory<sup>12</sup>

The Secretary-General's report also pointed out that the usual combination of static observation posts and patrols by foot, vehicle and aircraft used in other U.N. peace-keeping operations were not considered appropriate in the Central American region due to characteristics of the terrain. The report then proposed the establishment of mobile teams of military observers having at their disposal helicopters, vehicles and seagoing vessels as necessary to accomplish their mission. This was the first mention of the need for naval platforms. The report then went on to point out that the mobile teams would carry out regular patrols ". . . by vehicle, by helicopter and,

in the Gulf of Fonseca and certain other coastal areas and rivers, by patrol boats and light speedboats. . ."13

The initial ONUCA organization was outlined as follows:

- a. A headquarters located in Tegucigalpa, Honduras
- b. A liaison office in each of the capitals of the five Central American countries
- c. Thirty-three Verification Centers, each manned by a mobile team of military observers
- d. A naval unit, consisting of about eight vessels, based at La Union, El Salvador
- e. An air-wing, consisting of 1 fixed-wing aircraft and 12 helicopters

The personnel required for the operation were:

- f. 260 military observers
- g. About 115 personnel as air-crew and support for fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters
- h. About 50 personnel as crew and support for the naval unit
- i. Up to 14 medical personnel
- j. About 104 international staff of the U.N.
- k. About 82 locally recruited civilians

Thus, ONUCA would involve about 625 personnel and an interesting combination of terrestrial, aerial and naval assets.<sup>14</sup>

As for command arrangements the report established that ONUCA ". . . should be under the command of the United Nations, vested in the Secretary-General, under the authority of the Security Council."<sup>15</sup>

Other important features presented in the report were:

- a. The military observers of ONUCA would not be armed. This basic requirement forced the U.N. to look for cooperation from the irregular forces and insurrectionist movements. These contacts would be informal and in no way would imply recognition of any such group. However, it was clear that



ONUCA's ability to carry out its mandate depended, to a large extent, on such cooperation. In exceptional cases an armed escort would be requested from the regional governments to protect ONUCA personnel during the exercise of their functions.

- b. All the means of transport required to carry out ONUCA's mandate, including fast patrol boats, would have distinctive United Nations colors and markings.
- c. The deployment of ONUCA would be executed in four phases over a period of six months. The naval vessels would be incorporated during the second phase, which would be no later than four weeks (D+28) after the adoption of the resolution.

The characteristics of ONUCA, its environment, mandate and diversity of assets involved meant that this would be an ambitious, complex peace-keeping operation. When the U.N. military staff advised the use of naval units in the Gulf of Fonseca, it recommended the best technical solution for the accomplishment of ONUCA's mission in a key area within the region. But with the use of ships under U.N. command, the first time in a peace-keeping operation in the history of the organization, there arose unexpected complications that had never before been experienced.

In April 1990, the Secretary-General issued Report S/21274 concerning ONUCA activity for the first six months of the mandate and recommended to the Security Council to extend ONUCA's mandate for an additional period of six months.<sup>16</sup> The U.N. Security Council subsequently approved mandate extension in Resolution 654/90.

The best piece of news during this timeframe occurred on 25 February 1990 when the national election in Nicaragua facilitated the beginning of the process of voluntary demobilization of the members of the Nicaraguan Resistance. ONUCA's mandate was enlarged twice with regard to its original mission, once by Resolution 650/90 in order to monitor the demobilization process and a second time by Resolution 653/90 to monitor the cease-fire and the separation of forces. The deployment of the military observers and the aviation element had been accomplished according to the four-phase plan.

Not all the news was good, however. First, the FMLN continued its military activity despite the promise of talks between the Government of El Salvador and the insurrectionist movement; second, difficulties arose in obtaining the fast patrol boats necessary to complete ONUCA's mission responsibilities. In words of the U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar: ". . . it proved unexpectedly difficult to find a Member State able to supply the four fast patrol boats, together with their crews, required for patrolling the Gulf of Fonseca."<sup>17</sup> However, the Secretary-General found a future solution to the problem in the assistance rendered by Argentina during the second ONUCA mandate period.

The next chapter will discuss the process by which Argentina agreed to provide the ships to fulfill the ONUCA mandate, and the solutions found to deal with the particular problems that surfaced during the naval portion of the peace-keeping operation.

**CHAPTER III**  
**THE PROCESS OF INCORPORATING NAVAL UNITS**  
**IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS**

As of February 1990, three months after U.N. Security Council Resolution 644/89 had created the Observer Group in Central America, the U.N. had still been unable to obtain the fast patrol boats considered indispensable for patrolling the Gulf of Fonseca, a critical aspect of the peace-keeping operation.

It was during this time that the U.N. Under Secretary-General established informal contact with the U.N. Argentine Mission in New York requesting Argentina provide four navy fast patrol boats to be used as the naval element of the U.N. Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA). This specific request was generated because the countries which had originally agreed to provide the patrol craft were unable to accomplish their commitment.

In less than two weeks, the Argentine government accepted the requirement and offered the ONUCA mission four DABUR Class Fast Patrol Boats (FPB), built in Israel, having the following characteristics:

Type: Coastal Patrol Craft  
Builder: Israel Aircraft Industries, 1978  
Displacement: 35 tons full load  
Dimensions: Length -- 19.8 meters (65 ft)  
                  Beam -- 5.5 meters (18 ft)  
                  Draft -- 1.8 meters (5.8 ft)  
Main engines: 2 General Motor V12-71T diesels  
Maximum speed: 22 Knots  
Crew: 9  
Weapons: 2-20mm and 2-12.7mm  
Homeport: Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego

The quick Argentine response was the result of a confluence of favorable political and military factors. First, the Argentine government had enthusiastically embraced the idea of a New World Order based on the decisive role of the United Nations in resolving international conflicts. Thus the U.N. request offered Argentina an opportunity to begin to change a traditional policy of non-involvement in foreign

conflicts and to show a clear Argentine commitment to the New World Order ideal. Secondly, Argentina had been always interested in the Central American conflict and had participated as a member of the "Support Group to Contadora" since 1985. Argentina's presence in Central America was consistent with its previous efforts to work toward peaceful and regional solutions to conflicts in the Western Hemisphere. Thirdly, in a time of budgetary constraint, the Argentine Navy considered its participation as a good opportunity to improve its training, readiness and crew experience without incurring additional cost in the Navy budget since the operation would be paid by the U.N.. Furthermore, the operation was useful for demonstrating once again the broad field of action that a navy provides in the support of national policies in the international arena. Finally, it is necessary to point out that, thanks to the 1984 treaty mediated by Pope John Paul II between Argentina and Chile in the Beagle Channel, the situation in Southern Argentina (where the Fast Patrol Boats had been usually employed) was stable enough to allow for the redeployment of the ships without risks.

These first satisfactory contacts between the U.N. and Argentina, which were the expression of common political objectives, were followed by a long period of discussion and agreements as practical problems requiring resolution surfaced. Some of these problems arose when U.N. regulations, usually employed for managing land-based and aviation assets, were applied to ships. Other problems were the result of specific issues derived from the deployment of naval units in an alien environment far from their support bases. Finally, lack of previous experience in using ships in peace-keeping operations created new situations that required original solutions and flexible responses from the parties.

During March 1990 two Argentine Navy officers\*\* with broad experience in the Argentine Fast Patrol Boat Division travelled to the ONUCA mission area to study the environmental and operational conditions the naval units would face. The results of this

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\*\* Captain Osvaldo Linero, former Squadron Commander of Fast Patrol Boats Division in Ushuaia, Argentina, and Lieutenant Jorge Sciuano, former DABUR Class Fast Patrol Boat Commanding Officer.

trip and the subsequent extensive exchange of correspondence between the U.N. and Argentine representatives led to agreements that are discussed below. The presentation is not chronological but by subject matter in order to ensure obtain a better understanding of each issue.

### ● Command and Chain of Command

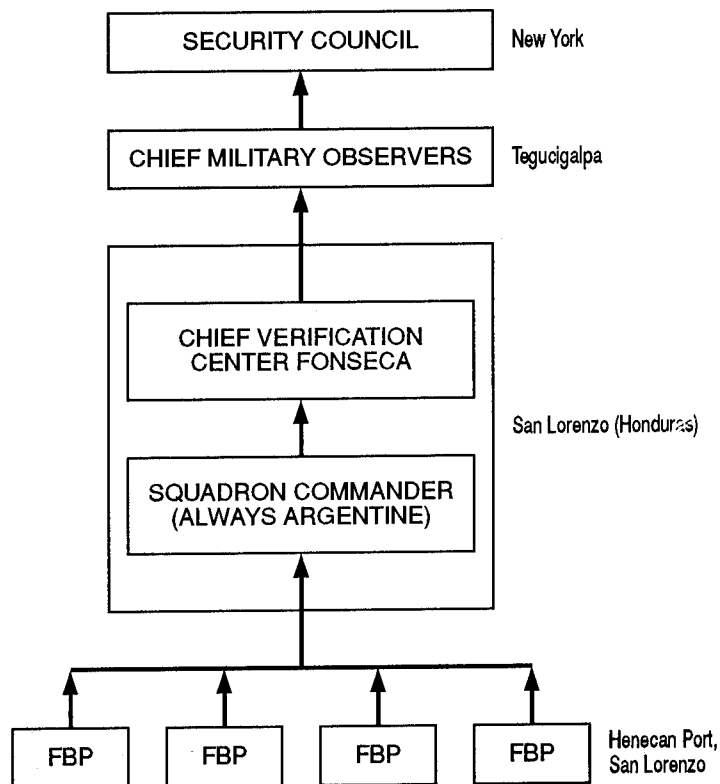
Among the first matters discussed were Command responsibilities and Chain of Command. It was clear from the beginning that the naval group would be under U.N. command and authority in accordance with Security Council Resolution 644/89. This decision was implemented in the following way:

- a. Each FPB had its Argentine crew and an Argentine Commanding Officer who had full responsibility for their own navigational and operational safety. Moreover, Commanding Officers would assist U.N. Military Observers in their observational tasks.
- b. The four FPBs were under the command of a Squadron Commander appointed by the Argentine Navy. This Commander had full command responsibility for the FPBs including the Squadron's readiness as well as organizational and administrative matters.
- c. The Squadron Commander would report directly to the U.N.-appointed Chief of the Verification Center San Lorenzo (later renamed as Verification Center Fonseca). This Officer was responsible to ONUCA Headquarters for all activities of the Verification Center, including the operations of FPBs and actions of U.N. Military Observers (UNMOS). The Center was located close to Puerto Henecán, Honduras, the Squadron's base of operations, and the UNMOS had the routine task of observation and the additional duty of Verification Center staff.
- d. The Chief of the Verification Center came under the direct authority of the U.N.-appointed Chief Military Observers of ONUCA, whose headquarters was

located in Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa. This officer was the highest authority in the field and reported to the U.N. Security Council through the Secretary-General.

A simple diagram helps to illustrate the operational chain of command:

FIGURE 2  
CHAIN OF COMMAND



In 1991 the U.N. requested a senior Argentine Navy officer to be appointed as Chief of the Verification Center Fonseca and in November 1991 another Argentine Navy Commander was included in the headquarters staff. These appointments were a recognition of the professional capabilities and outstanding job performed by the Argentine Navy officers during the peace-keeping operations, but these additions did not change the operational chain of command which remained as shown above until ONUCA's dissolution.

To complete the picture, it is necessary to mention that the Squadron Commander came under the authority of the Argentine Chief of Naval Operations for deployment and recall of ships and personnel. Additionally, the Squadron Commander addressed all logistic requirements and regular reports through the Argentine Naval Attaché in Washington, DC.

#### ● Symbols, Color and Markings

Another matter of attention and discussion was the way the national flag and the U.N. flag should be displayed by a ship operating under U.N. authority. From the Argentine point of view the use of both flags (national and U.N.) was an acceptable solution. However, the "United Nations Flags Code and Regulations" establishes some specific rules that cannot be ignored. According to the code: "On no account may any flag displayed with the United Nations Flag be displayed on a higher level than the United Nations Flag and on no account may any flag so displayed with the United Nations Flag be larger than the United Nations Flag."<sup>18</sup>

Hence, U.N. legal advisors insisted that U.N. flag should be the same size or larger than the ships's ensign and should fly at all times from the top of the mainmast. Furthermore, they advised that, should the flag be flown during hours of darkness, it should be illuminated so as to be clearly visible. The final settlement was that the FPBs would fly the U.N. flag as required and would display the Argentine national ensign on the flagstaff at the stern of the vessels.

Another issue with a more difficult practical solution, was that of vessel color and markings. The United Nations required that any ship operating under its authority should be painted white. Moreover, the words "UNITED NATIONS" should be painted on both sides of the ship in black or dark blue letters and the sign "U.N." should be displayed on front and rear surfaces of the hull and superstructure. All lettering should be as large as possible but in proportion with the area wherein located. Finally, United Nations logos should be provided for installation in visible parts of the ships. In the case of the Argentine FPBs, implementation of these requirements was not very complicated due to the vessels' small size. However, it did cost the U.N. about \$20,000 US dollars to paint the ships to U.N. specifications and a similar amount to return them to their original colors at the end of the operation. The ships were painted before arriving in the mission area.

The issue of color and markings of ships operating under U.N. control could become a major problem depending on the size of the vessel. To paint and stencil a larger ship such as a destroyer or frigate according to U.N. rules could be expensive and time consuming. Moreover, modern ships use different kinds of paint with specific technical requirements that may not be available in the color white.

Now it follows that, should it become desirable to employ a capital surface warfare ship such as a cruiser or an aircraft carrier in the service of the U.N., the cost of painting could become quite expensive, and could entail significant delays in the execution of an operation. It is appropriate then to suggest that the U.N. should consider accepting more flexible rules regarding the partial painting of large ships, such as painting only the hull and/or designated superstructure areas. In any case, the issue of identification markings requires reexamination should the U.N. expect to use large ships in future peace-keeping operations.



## ● Weapons and Rules of Engagement

This matter involved the most sensitive issues of all the preliminary agreements.

The ONUCA mandate of the Security Council was for an unarmed peace-keeping operation, and consequently one of the first and most clear requirements of the U.N. was to dismantle all the weapons aboard the FPBs.

Sending unarmed surface combatant to operate close to the coast in a conflict area is not a satisfactory option for any navy even though such vessels are identified as U.N. units. However, the U.N. absolutely insisted on this point recalling that the mission imposed was one of patrolling, observing and reporting, a mission that did not require weapons; that the FPBs did not have the right of stopping or inspecting ship traffic; and that the Security Council mandate could not be altered under any circumstance. An Argentine proposal to maintain aboard some dismantled weapons for the purpose of self defense was also refused. In the end, all weapons, the two 20mm and two 12.7mm guns, were off-loaded.

At this point, it is necessary to reflect on the implications this kind of requirement has on the use of larger ships for peace-keeping operations, which generally do not require the use of force, as opposed to peace-enforcement operations. Once again, it was the FPBs' small size that made it possible to dismantle the weapon systems without major practical difficulties. However, the same requirement when applied to a destroyer or frigate could be almost unaffordable. Dismantling a large gun with or without its armored mount is costly, complex and time-consuming. Sophisticated antisurface and anti-aircraft missile launchers cannot be easily removed, and require accurate and expensive alignment when reinstalled. Finally, it would be difficult for U.N. member states to reach political decision to send large, expensive ships manned with numerous personnel into risky areas without any weapons systems.

In the future, it may be that unarmed peace-keeping operations such as these could be carried out only by small combatant ships or by cargo/transport ships should the U.N. not become more flexible on this issue. One solution could be that ships

under U.N. control would be allowed to maintain their weapon configuration but with strict rules of engagement that restrict their use to those circumstances specifically authorized by U.N. Headquarters. Another solution could be to operate ships with their weapons in place but without embarking ammunition. In any case, it is an issue that must be carefully analyzed should the U.N. desire the full utilization of a ships' capabilities be available in peace-keeping operations.

For the Gulf of Fonseca operations two important measures were adopted which were designed to avert risks to the unarmed FPBs and increase their margin of safety.

First, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report of 27 April 1990, ONUCA maintained informal contacts with the principal irregular forces and insurrectionist movements in the region in order to seek their cooperation in facilitating the implementation of ONUCA's mandate, and to ensure that no threat be presented to the security of ONUCA's personnel. In spite of reservations expressed by the insurrectionists concerning ONUCA's original mandate, the Nicaraguan resistance was already engaged in the process of demobilization and the FMLN had assured the Chief Military Observer that all its personnel had received orders not to undertake any hostile action against ONUCA verification centers or patrols. Moreover, the FMLN suggested certain steps be taken to reduce the risk of accidental confrontations with ONUCA and according to the U.N. report, these measures were implemented.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, the original location planned for the stationing of the FPBs in El Salvador was changed to a new one at San Lorenzo, Honduras<sup>20</sup>, without any official explanation concerning the reasons for such a change. It is easy to infer that one reason might have been the unstable situation and continuation of hostilities in El Salvador which limited ONUCA's ability to patrol in that country and forced ONUCA to maintain only a verification center in the capital. Another reason might have been the "suggestions" made by the FMLN that the FPBs might be threatened should they be based in El Salvador. In any case, the new location was adopted and it offered a safer environment for the ships.

The fact that the FPBs were to operate unarmed forced an early definition of the

Rules of Engagement (ROE) which were agreed to in the final settlement between Argentina and the U.N.. It was agreed that the FPBs and their crews operate unarmed, and that, should an FPB be attacked during a patrol, the crew would act in the following way:

1. It would take a evasive action and would withdraw from the attack scene.
2. It would report the incident to ONUCA Headquarters and would ask for the immediate assistance of the naval authorities of the coastal state with jurisdiction over the waters where the FPB was operating.<sup>21</sup>

This ROE did not follow the classic way navies traditionally operate. It did not even consider the undeniable right of self-defense. However, the ROE was consistent with the mission and the policy of maintaining unarmed ships in the mission area. Clearly, peace-keeping operations require highly disciplined naval crews able to change their ways of conducting operations; although trained to react aggressively when faced with combat situations, they need to adopt a more passive attitude as a qualified, impartial observer. This said, the degree of risk derived by operating under these conditions is one of the main factors to be analyzed during the planning of peace-keeping operations.

### ● Logistic Support

The U.N. required the Argentine government to maintain their ships in the mission area so as to be capable of operating, on the average, 150 hours per month per FPB. To satisfy this requirement, the Argentine Navy deployed a mobile maintenance team composed of one officer and two enlisted men, and a container (CONEX) box with the necessary tools and spare parts.

The Argentine Navy has always encouraged and trained its crews to carry out on-board maintenance. This policy proved valuable in this environment because each crew had the necessary skills to actively interact with the small mobile maintenance team to execute maintenance actions.

The Argentine Squadron Commander was directly responsible for FPB readiness in the field. He could address to the Argentine Naval Attaché in Washington, DC, those special spare parts requirements that could not be satisfied in the local area. Moreover, he had the support of Argentine Navy technical departments for solving unusual problems as they arose.

It is necessary to mention that the usual difficulties of maintenance were increased by the features of the mission area. One negative factor was the distance between the sources of logistical support and the FPBs. Another problem was the environmental conditions which affected equipment and required additional efforts by the maintenance personnel. The high temperatures produced unexpected failures in batteries' electrolytes and gyrocompass' fluid. The intense use of the FPBs in these conditions decreased the time between failures and increased the rate of maintenance work. The human factor was the key in overcoming these difficulties. Both the Argentine maintenance team and the crews were highly committed to their mission and considered it a matter of personnel and national pride to maintain the FPBs operational in accordance with the U.N. requirements. As usual, human motivation makes the difference between success and failure.

The host country, Honduras, provided space inside the boundaries of the commercial port of San Lorenzo for the construction of naval group installations, allocated the FPBs pier space and allowed the vessels to be maintained in drydocking facilities in the port of Amapala and later at the Amapala Naval Base. The rapid bottom growth of barnacles required frequent use of these facilities.

As part of the agreement reached between the U.N. and Argentina, ONUCA built the following installations for the naval group:

- Commandant's office
- Operations office
- Office and Mess/Recreational Facilities
- Operations Support Group Workshop

- Guard-house for two men
- Kitchen
- Sanitary installations
- Warehouse for two container (CONEX) boxes stocked with spare parts, tools, lubricants and oils

Furthermore, ONUCA also installed a pierside 220 volt electric system with 100 kw/h capacity; a water pipeline and in-line purification system and a 5000 gallon fuel tank to service the FPBs. The U.N. was responsible for providing all fuel.

Argentine personnel were housed in two local hotels in Choluteca, a city located about 30 kilometers from the port. Ground transportation was provided by ONUCA vehicles.

As always, a critical issue in combined operations that involves different countries is communications, due basically to the differences in communications equipment. In this case, ONUCA provided in place UHF-FM, VHF-FM and walkie-talkie communications equipment to all operational units and shore facilities involved. This arrangement was very effective in linking helicopters, FPBs and the Verification Centers.

Finally, the transportation of the FPBs from Argentine to the Gulf of Fonseca and back was funded by cargo ships chartered by the U.N.. The return trip was a chartered Argentine Navy cargo ship.

The burden of logistical efforts was jointly shared by ONUCA and the Argentine Navy until the ships arrived in the operations area. Thereafter ONUCA provided funding support which reimbursed the Argentine Navy logistics system.

In the end, all logistical arrangements proved satisfactory in ensuring FPB readiness throughout the 18 month deployment. The key points that ensured success were: to assign all maintenance responsibilities to national teams; to standardize communication equipment; and to maintain fluid coordination amongst all parties.

## ● Personnel

Due to funding concerns the U.N. required the number of each FPB crew be reduced from the normal manning of nine personnel, suggesting that the personnel usually dedicated to weapons be assigned elsewhere. The Argentine Navy agreed to man each FPB with a crew of six: two officers (one lieutenant and one lieutenant junior grade/ensign) and four enlisted men. The total number to man the four FPBs was 24. Additionally, the Argentine task force was augmented by a Squadron Commander (Lieutenant Commander), a mobile maintenance team (*Grupo de Apoyo Operativo* in Argentine Navy terms) composed of one officer and two enlisted men, and a navy physician. The entire FPB squadron comprised 29 members of the Argentine Navy.

The U.N. normally requires personnel be assigned a one year tour, but due to Argentine Navy regulations, all task force personnel were rotated home after six months. This conveniently matched the original six-month ONUCA mandate and subsequent six-month extensions. In an attempt to decrease the time needed to adapt to the operational arena, some personnel who formed part of the first deployment group were sent again as part of the third rotation group.

All navy personnel enjoyed the same privileges and immunities as did the ONUCA observers.<sup>22</sup> These privileges and immunities are enumerated in Article 105 of the United Nations Charter and Article VI of the Convention on Privileges and Immunities (concerning experts on mission, which applies to observers) and were acceded to by all five governments in the mission area.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

Argentine Navy personnel were allowed use of their national uniform with the following modifications:

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\*\*\* The main privileges and immunities quoted in Article VI are : (a) "Immunities from personal arrest or detention and from seizure of their personal baggage;" (b) "In respect of words spoken or written and acts done by them in the course of the performance of their mission, immunity from legal process of every kind. . .;" (c) "Inviolability for all papers and documents;" (d) "For the purpose of their communication with the UN, the right to use codes and to receive papers or correspondence by courier or in sealed bags." Subparagraphs (e) and (f) deal with privileges concerning personal baggage and currency exchange.

- a. A shoulder patch provided by the U.N. was attached on one shoulder of the uniform
- b. A national identifying symbol (in this case a small Argentine flag) was attached on the other shoulder
- c. U.N. berets, U.N. cap badges, scarves and field caps provided by the U.N. were to be used

Although the observer selection criteria is the prerogative of the government providing, the U.N. usually establishes clear requirements with regard to rank, professional background (as concerning combat or combat troop-training experience), physical condition, and medical examinations for the observers. In this case, the naval group members were not considered as observers (although they enjoyed the same privileges and immunities), but as ship's crew with a specific patrolling mission, and therefore the Argentine government was only obliged to satisfy U.N. regulations concerning medical fitness and documentation.

Finally, it is interesting to consider training. Although the FPBs usual subantarctic operating area of Southern Argentina presents very different environmental conditions from that of the subtropical Gulf of Fonseca, both regions demand the same professional skills required for sailing in restricted waters, close to the land and using poorly charted waterways. From the naval point of view, the highly trained Argentine ship's crew did not require any kind of special training. The U.N.- provided guidebook for ONUCA military observers outlining rights and duties, and a background briefing on the general area was studied by the crews, as well as were the details related to the mission and the specific agreements reached between the U.N. and the Argentine government. Area in-processing and familiarization required a very short time. The fact that the crew members were not classified as military observers simplified the indoctrination task.

In my personal opinion, the major issue for the average trained navy crewman involved in peace-keeping operations is not the professional requirements, but the

necessary change of attitude from that of a combatant to that of a peacekeeper. The classic proactive attitude encouraged as the correct naval demeanor needs to be transformed into a more firm but less aggressive behavior of impartial members of an international group. The mental change of gears from that of an active participant to that of witness/observer requires much effort; such effort is needed to catch the spirit of a peace-keeping mission, to think of oneself as a U.N. representative rather than as a member of a national military force, and to act within narrowly defined and restrictive rules. All of these changes of attitude may take more time than is normally required for other formal training activities.

#### ● Financial Arrangements

The U.N. assumes the responsibility for paying the financial costs for any of its sponsored peace-keeping operations. However, each operation presents anew peculiar features that need to be discussed and agreed to.

The costs for the naval operation in the Gulf of Fonseca began with the predeployment ship preparations. The U.N. paid for the painting the ships in accordance with U.N. rules, the dismantling of the weapons systems, and the environmental modifications which enabled the ships to operate in a tropical environment. The U.N. then paid for the transportation to the deployment area of the four FPBs via chartered cargo ship and for the transportation of the crews by air.

In the mission operations area, the U.N. paid for the construction of land-based support facilities, communications equipment and ground transportation.

As the Argentine government was responsible for assuring FPBs' readiness in the mission area, the Argentine Navy was required to provide an accurate running total for U.N. reimbursement. In this case the cost included FPB preventive/corrective maintenance, spare parts, depreciation and operation.



The U.N. insured the FPBs against damage to third parties and collision. Additionally, it provided the fuel oil necessary for operations.

With respect to personnel costs, a problem arose over a discrepancy in the per diem allowance allocated by the U.N. and that set by Argentine regulation for governmental officers performing duties in Central America. The discrepant gap in pay could not be resolved, and the difference paid by the Argentine government was the major national cost incurred.

Finally the U.N. paid crew rotation transportation costs, and at the end of the mission paid to return the FPBs by cargo ship to Argentina, as well as the costs involved with returning the vessels to their standard national colors and configuration.

It is easy to infer that ship deployments are a very costly operation for the U.N.. The financial aspects of peace-keeping operation are currently a major problem for the international organization. In words of the Secretary-General: "A chasm has developed between the tasks entrusted to this Organization and the financial means provided to it"<sup>23</sup>. Clearly, to deploy a group of large ships for a long period of time will be a very expensive operation for the U.N.. In the Gulf of Fonseca, the small size of the naval vessels, low number of crew members, and simple technology of the units involved favored the feasibility of the operation. In actions that involve larger ships, over longer periods of time, funding may be the most crucial issue to be resolved. In some cases a Member State might be able to afford the financial burden of its own fleet operations dedicated to a U.N. peace-keeping mission. But this financial self-sufficiency that is available only to a few rich countries, may be seen for other U.N. Member States as affecting the indispensable independence of the mission's operation and jeopardize the U.N. image. In fact, if the U.N. cannot afford its planned missions, all the peace-keeping operations will be dependent on the Member States with financial capability to pay for the operations' costs. These considerations only serve to complicate the financial problems of mounting peace-keeping operations.

## ● Formal Process

While the above agreements were being developed, the Argentine government and the U.N. exchanged the necessary formal communications. On 6 April 1990 the U.N. Secretary-General addressed a letter to the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the U.N. which presented the formal requirement for the FPBs according to the previous negotiations. The interesting factor to be considered here is the national Argentine decision-making process that facilitated the deployment of national naval forces under the U.N. flag. According to the Argentine Constitution, the National Congress is the branch invested with the power required to approve the deployment of military forces outside the country's borders. However, since the U.N. Security Council had made a formal representation to Argentina, and since accepting such a requirement is viewed as constituting a formal commitment on the part of any signatory to the U.N. Charter, the Executive Branch of the Government of Argentina assumed it was allowed to make the decision by itself. Furthermore, the constitutional congressional power with respect to military forces deployment, is usually interpreted as referring to the use of such forces in combat actions. Hence, this power may not necessarily be applied when forces are engaged in unarmed peace-keeping operations. In any case, the political decision was taken by the Executive on the advice of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, and was not challenged.

The formal response of the Argentine Government was dated 6 June 1990. By this time most of the operational arrangements and agreement between the parties had been reached. On 18 July 1990 a note outlining the main points of the different agreements, and also including the ROE, was presented by the Argentine U.N. Representative and, per normal diplomatic protocol, this note and the Secretary-General's response with no modifications was accepted as the final document of agreement.

Meanwhile, on 27 June 1990, the Argentine FPBs arrived in the mission area to start the first peace-keeping operation involving naval units under U.N. control and flag.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**OPERATIONAL ACTIONS CARRIED OUT BY NAVAL UNITS**  
**IN THE GULF OF FONSECA**

When the four Argentine FPBs named Armada de la Republica Argentina ARA BARADERO, ARA BARRANQUERAS, ARA CLORINDA and ARA CONCEPCION DEL URUGUAY arrived in Honduras in late June 1990, the situation in Central America was still far from quiet.

The Nicaraguan resistance had been demobilized with the assistance of ONUCA forces but the internal relationships inside Nicaragua between the newly elected democratic President Violeta Chamorro and the Sandinista forces was very strained. In El Salvador, despite talks between the government and the FMLN, intense military actions continued to be mounted by both parties and ONUCA activities were restricted. At the time, ONUCA was carrying out its second six-month mandate (Security Council Resolution 654/90) with observers coming from Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and Venezuela (254 personnel); with an aviation group from Canada (130 personnel); and with the newly arrived naval group from Argentine (29 personnel). The total military force was 413 personnel.

On 29 June 1990, two days after arrival, the FPBs hoisted the U.N. flag for the first time in a ceremony officiated by the Chief of Military Observers (CMO), Spanish General Agustín Quesada Gomez; the FPBs then conducted their first navigational cruise of the area. Two days later, on 1 July, three of the ships departed on their first operational patrol in the Gulf of Fonseca and ventured as far as the open Pacific Ocean.

● **Operational Organization**

It was not easy to translate into naval mission tasking the Security Council mandate that called for on-site verification of the cessation of aid to irregular forces and

insurrectionist movements operating in the region, and the non-use of the territory of one state for the purposes of attacking others. It was possible, however, to agree that the FPBs would patrol the Gulf of Fonseca with observers aboard, monitor the area in order to verify the cessation of maritime aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements, investigate charges of breach of commitments imposed by Esquipulas II, and overall, establish a U.N. presence to act as a possible deterrent to improper activities.

To accomplish the assigned missions, the Squadron Commander, working with the Verification Center's Operations Officer and Information Officer, designed several patrol patterns so that the FPBs could effectively cover the area. Each patrol required the presence of at least one embarked observer. The observer's routine task, supported by the crew, was to identify and relay ashore all contacts in order to develop a complete database with which to determine the area's maritime traffic patterns; this was then analyzed and evaluated for suspicious behavior.

During the first fifteen days the crews were in the area, their main concern was with area familiarization to verify the doubtful accuracy of their navigation charts and channel buoyage. This completed, daily patrols were carried out in the Gulf of Fonseca and on rivers discharging into it. Where shallow water prevented FPB operations, the FPBs anchored and deployed two crew members and one observer in small rubber motor boats. Operations were executed without restriction in Honduran and Nicaraguan waters, but FPB commanders were ordered to remain outside of three nautical miles of the Salvadoran coast because of possible risks emanating from that shoreline. The Salvadoran restriction was lifted in September 1990. In this same month the FPB crews were familiar enough with the area to begin night patrols. It is also during this period that patrols were conducted combining Alouette and Bell Jet Ranger helicopters carrying one observer and one Argentine Navy officer. These new capabilities broadened the area coverage which increased the effectiveness of the deterrent presence desired by the U.N..

In his report to the U.N. Security Council dated 26 October 1990, the Secretary-General stated that the San Lorenzo based navy group had performed 1180 patrol hours since the beginning of its operation and described its activities.<sup>24</sup> In this same report the Secretary-General, after providing a broad appraisal of the situation in Central America and the effectiveness of the peace-keeping operation, asked the Security Council for a new six-month extension to the ONUCA mandate. The Secretary-General proposed to reduce the number of observer personnel by about 40% to 158, the number of helicopters by 50% from 12 to 6, and the rank of the Chief of Military Observers while maintaining the whole naval group.<sup>25</sup> This proposal was fully accepted by the Security Council. It is possible to infer from the 26 October report that in fulfilling the U.N.'s main objective (which was to establish a visible and deterrent presence to prevent violations of the Esquipulas II agreement<sup>26</sup>), the naval group had become the most important and effective instrument at this stage of the peace-keeping operations.

#### ● Relations With the Parties

The presence of naval units was by far the least intrusive in the area when compared to ground-based or even aviation forces. In fact, no complaints arose against FPB activities, and on many occasions the Verification Center was obliged to refuse requests for FPB intervention in local fishing disputes and other activities that lay outside the purview of the ONUCA mandate.

However, the relationship between the Argentine Naval Group under U.N. control and some of the parties to the Esquipulas II agreement were not, from the beginning, always easy. It was necessary to overcome the mistrust of some countries and to exhibit a permanent attitude of impartiality with respect to all parties. Major confidence building and coordination measures were:

- a. In coordination with the Squadron Commander, the Verification Center's Operations Officer was responsible for preparing a weekly FPB Patrol Plan. This Plan was presented in advance to the three countries with territorial

waters in the Gulf of Fonseca (El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua).

- b. Visits to naval bases in the three countries were scheduled on a monthly basis. Usually, these visits were conducted twice monthly at the Amapala Naval Base in Honduras and the La Union Naval Base in El Salvador, and once monthly at the Corinto Naval Base in Nicaragua due to its long distance from San Lorenzo. These visits were very useful for exchanging information, discussing common concerns, and improving general relationships. A common language (Spanish) was spoken by the three regional navies and the Argentine crews; this clearly facilitated communication among the parties.
- c. All parties were advised that one FPB with observers would be always on duty ready to investigate claims and incidents. Luckily, after some months of operations, situations requiring investigation were not frequent.

During the 18 months of operations in the Gulf of Fonseca, the naval group achieved the full acceptance and understanding of its presence and mission. Relations with the parties, even with those who at first were most reluctant to accept a U.N. presence, became excellent; in informal comments the conflicting parties acknowledged the stabilizing effect of the FPBs on the area. Perhaps this was one of the more important successes of the entire peace-keeping operation.

### ● Internal Relations

It is always a challenge to mount military operations where multinational forces act under a unified international staff, particularly if there are involved naval operations in an alien environment. In such situations, it is almost self-evident that emphasis needs to be placed on human relations and the understandable concerns that arise over rights, duties, responsibilities, and safety of the national personnel and equipment employed. Because of this, and despite the fact that command and staff relationships had been negotiated and agreed to prior to FPBs' arrival in the Gulf of Fonseca, some arrangements needed to be readjusted after the start of operations.

In the beginning, all staff and planning responsibilities rested with the assigned U.N. Observers because they were officially assigned as part of the Verification Center staff. However, it soon became apparent that the active participation of the Squadron Commander in all the planning processes was not only desirable but was essential. There also developed a close coöperation between the FPBs' Commanding Officers and the Verification Center's staff members that was highly beneficial for both parties.

One of the key ingredients of relationships in an international environment is mutual trust. This trust arises amongst military members of an *ad hoc* organization only as a natural consequence of reciprocal recognition of their professional capabilities and it is an essential requirement for good relationships and efficient team work. For this reason, it is important to emphasize here that, when a country is required to be involved in U.N. peace-keeping operations, it should assign the most highly trained and qualified personnel so as to promote this trust.

In the Verification Center Fonseca, the international staff soon recognized the professional competence and FPB operational expertise of the newly arrived Argentine crews, which allowed for quick integration and effective team work. As a result of the mutual trust engendered, a new set of internal organizational guidelines for the Verification Center was formulated and adopted as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

In December 1990, the U.N. requested a senior Argentine naval officer be assigned as Chief of Verification Center Fonseca (CVCF) when the then Canadian Chief completed his tour of duty. This Argentine senior officer had charge of the International Group of Observers and operational control of all maritime patrols carried out by the FPBs and helicopters. Because the Verification Center Fonseca had direct contact with officials from three different countries, CVCF reported directly to the Chief of Military Observers in Tegucigalpa. This chain of command was satisfactory and effective for the fulfillment of the mission\*\*\*\*.

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\*\*\*\* See "Chain of Command" diagram on page 16.

## ● Wrap Up Operations

Throughout 1991 naval operations were carried out in the Gulf of Fonseca with growing success and were recognized by the U.N. and the regional governments as being an important contribution to the peace process in Central America.

The FPBs were very capable vessels and the rate of their daily and nightly patrols increased to a level of more than 400 patrol hours in some months. The first Chief of Military Observers and his relief visited the VCF and participated in special patrols. Even the U.N. Under Secretary-General visited the area in January 1991 and sailed on the FPBs and rubber motor boats. All this activity served to reinforce the idea that the U.N. naval presence was an essential element that contributed greatly to the difficult task of creating an appropriately favorable environment for political reconciliation throughout the region. The six-month ONUCA's mandate was extended two more times during the course of 1991.<sup>27</sup>

In September 1991, the U.N. requested the Argentine government provide a medical group composed of four navy physicians and four nurses. In October, the U.N. requested an additional senior naval officer for ONUCA's staff in Tegucigalpa.

Meanwhile, peace talks between the FMLN and the government of El Salvador had experienced dramatic progress. After the total demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance and the settling of Honduran and Salvadoran border problems through arbitration, the internal fight in El Salvador remained as the last big conflict in the area. The growing isolation of the FMLN after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the loss of interest on the part of some regional neighbors who provided the FMLN support, and the increasing difficulties posed to weapons traffic on the ground and at sea were important factors in forcing the insurrectionists to the negotiation table. The New York Agreement, signed by representatives of the government of El Salvador and the FMLN under U.N. auspices, was the first step of the peace process in this Central American country.



As a direct consequence of the New York Agreement, the U.N. Security Council in Resolution 730/92 decided to terminate the ONUCA mandate. The FPBs made their last patrols on 16 January 1992. The next day the Argentine government and the U.N. began the preparations to redeploy the boats and crews. On 1 March 1992 the FPBs were loaded on board the Argentine Navy cargo ship ARA CANAL BEAGLE to return to their homeport in Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego. The Argentine medical team remained in the area and worked with the United Nations Observer Group in El Salvador (ONUSAL), a new *ad hoc* U.N. organization created to monitor the continuing Salvadoran peace process.

### ● Results and Consequences of the Naval Operations

The Argentine naval group operated in the Gulf of Fonseca under the U.N. flag from 29 June 1990 through 17 January 1992.

In January 1991, at the height of the operations, the FPBs recorded more than 2100 patrol hours conducted in over 290 separate patrols, making about 1300 contacts and taking more than 300 ship photographs. During the course of the entire deployment, the FPBs recorded more than 72,000 nautical miles sailed in 6479 patrol hours, which means a daily average of 12 hours. Additionally, a monthly average of 17 patrol hours were conducted in the rubber motor boats.

All this statistical information is useful to understand the great effort performed by the FPBs and their crews, but should one want to analyze the results of the peace-keeping operation in the terms of mission accomplishment, one needs to consider other aspects. First, from January 1991 different intelligence sources concurred that the arms smuggling operations over maritime routes into El Salvador were being abandoned. An evaluation completed in August 1991 reported that no more than 20 percent of the already reduced arms traffick transversed sea routes. It might be difficult to believe that the reduction was the direct consequence of the U.N. naval presence, especially when considering that FPB patrols were not allowed to stop nor inspect seaborne traffic.

However, the permanent presence and systematic analysis of ship movements in the Gulf furnished the U.N. observers with a deep knowledge about the usual activities in the area which allowed them to detect and deter improper behavior. A typical example of this deterrent effect was that, when suspicious vessels were approached by a U.N. FPB, some were found throwing their loads overboard.

A second indicator of success in terms of mission accomplishment was the decrease in tension amongst the region's different national navies. Local sources reported that the U.N. presence at sea was a key factor in avoiding maritime boundary and fishing disputes that lead to naval confrontations of unpredictable consequences. Finally, as it has been mentioned already, the most remarkable success was the full acceptance of the FPBs presence by the individual regional navies, fishermen and local populations, in recognition of the worth of the naval mission and the prudence and impartiality with which it was executed.

It is possible, however, to identify some operational problems and difficulties that existed, particularly at the beginning of the operation:

- a. Initial mistrust from some countries
- b. Requests to intervene in matters outside the mandate
- c. Problems resulting from the internal organization of a multinational task force
- d. Adaptation to unusual mission functions in an unknown environment

Furthermore, the ONUCA naval mission was not risk free. The FPB had to patrol close to contested areas where vicious fighting persisted, and in both day and night had to navigate poorly charted waters. On 23 June 1991 a terrorist attack utilizing an RPG-7 grenade was directed against the ONUCA headquarters in Tegucigalpa. Luckily, no incident or other type of aggression was ever directed against the FPBs, their crews or the Verification Center Fonseca during the course of the entire operation.

In the end, a consideration of all pros and cons indicates that the naval peace-keeping operation was positive because it served as an important catalyst that moved along the Central American peace process and opened a broad new area of opportunities for the future employment of naval units in like operations.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The experience of employing naval units in a peace-keeping operation in Central America was absolutely successful. The U.N. naval group was able to accomplish its mission with a minimum of interference in the sovereign territorial rights of the countries involved, and able to maintain maximum surveillance capability in its area of responsibility. The basic task of verifying the commitment by the participating parties to the region's pacification was effectively accomplished. It is clear that the U.N. naval presence was a stabilizing factor in the conflict.

Looking at the different options that can be taken in peace-keeping operations, ships might be very useful as instruments to achieve peace in conflicts that involve maritime boundaries or fishing disputes. The relative long period of time that a ship can stay on station allows it to monitor and/or control neutralized areas between two opposing naval forces. Ships or ship's boats may also be effectively employed in riverine areas to verify a ceasefire or other such commitments that require observers situated aboard a waterborne platform or the putting ashore of observers in an area where rival claims are contested. In general, as the naval operations in the Gulf of Fonseca amply proved, the use of ships broadens the spectrum of instrumentalities that can be used toward peace-keeping in any conflict environment that includes a maritime component.

On the other hand, there exist considerations that should be more completely analyzed in the light of this first experience in the Gulf of Fonseca naval operations. First, should a U.N. member state want to participate in and/or support a peace-keeping operation involving ships, it must make resign itself to the political decision of giving up national control of its units, and accept the risk of putting the lives and safety its national crews in foreign hands. This is a difficult but essential decision.

This said, it was beneficial that an Argentine national acted as Squadron Commander ashore and that the ships' Commanding Officers received their orders

through him in the language, terms and with the authority of a fellow countryman, while acting under U.N. control. It is important to note that peace-keeping operations do not require the same degree of multi-nationality to ensure legitimacy as do operations which enforce a decision through the use of force. Therefore, the fact that the naval units are of one single nationality may actually facilitate the operation. This conclusion does not apply to observers who must be of different nationalities.

Second, a U.N. member state sending ships to a peace-keeping operations should be capable of providing the appropriate logistic support. Due to the diverse logistic specificity that each ship class and each different navy requires, it is almost unthinkable to ask the U.N. to act as logistic supplier. The agreement executed between the U.N. and the Argentine government, through which the former provided the financial means and the latter guaranteed a satisfactory degree of unit readiness, can be considered as a satisfactory solution and may serve as a good model for future operations.

Another interesting issue to be considered is the training or reorientation of combat personnel. Basically, the daily tasks performed by the FPB crews was not very different from that which were usually performed as their routine tasks. While it is necessary that crews be well trained and qualified to operate in the environment of the designated mission area, crews will experience few problems derived from the nature of peace-keeping operation itself. The main training effort should be directed at the commanding officer and at staff levels. These officials need to know all the peculiar aspects of the conflict, the restrictions imposed by the U.N. Security Council mandate, and need to be mentally prepared to assume a different role than they are accustomed to. This statement is valid either if the officers are observers or if they are providing the platforms to carry U.N. observers as in the case of the Gulf of Fonseca.

Another point worth commenting on is U.N. regulations. The United Nations rules need to be flexible should it, at some future date, decide to use larger naval combatants in peace-keeping operations and should it want to keep operational costs down. It would be very difficult and very costly to disarm large naval combatants; the

U.N. should seek other ways to monitor the use of force, or it should think about using non-naval ships. U.N. colors and marking requirements may also need to be simplified to avoid unnecessary costs and delays in the event that the use of large naval combatants is desirable or necessary.

In these present times, when the international security environment permits and encourages U.N. peace-keeping operations, one of the main emerging problems is the financial cost of such operations. This problem has been clearly stated by the U.N. Secretary-General, and it was an issue during the Gulf of Fonseca operations when delays and difficulties were encountered by the U.N. in accomplishing its financial commitments. This problem needs to be carefully considered before committing the use of large and expensive ships in peace-keeping operations. It is clear that the financial capability of the U.N. should be bolstered to allow the organization to ask for ships of its member states and to fund their use, without having to depend on rich or self-sufficient states. This is a way to promote the U.N. image of impartiality, independent decision-making and real power.

The final conclusion is that peace-keeping operations in the Gulf of Fonseca carried out by Argentine Navy units under U.N. flag demonstrated the capability and flexibility that the use of naval ships adds to a peace-keeping mission, while also demonstrating the problems inherent in such operations. The experience thus gained by the United Nations in peace-keeping operations utilizing naval units in the Gulf of Fonseca will undoubtedly lead to a broader spectrum of opportunities wherein navies can be employed as agents of peace.





## NOTES

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