



NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

STRATEGIC FORUM

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Peace Operations

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Note:

Conclusions

About the Workshop

Background

The virtual collapse of the UN humanitarian assistance and peace operations in Bosnia, and the failure of a special mission dispatched to negotiate peace among contending clan groups in Somalia, have compelled the UN to face reality. The United Nations is at system overload as it attempts to shoulder its main post-Cold War challenge the maintenance of peace in an increasingly turbulent world. This is exacerbated by a growing reluctance of nations to provide "blue helmet" volunteers to serve in volatile situations where the prospect of casualties cannot be ignored. Indeed, despite the energetic leadership of Under Secretary-General Kofi R. Annan who directs the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the organization has increasing difficulty in acquiring properly trained and equipped forces in time to intervene in conflict situations and humanitarian crises.

Reserve UN Forces

Recognizing the serious nature of the problem, Boutros-Ghali presented a special report to the Security Council An Agenda for Peace (1992) that called for member states to place on reserve for UN use standby national forces. In a subsequent article published in Foreign Affairs, he acknowledged that peace operations were expanding beyond traditional UN boundaries to include disarming of warring factions and national stabilization measures in "failed states". Boutros-Ghali called for systemized standby arrangements "by which governments commit themselves to hold ready, at an agreed period of notice, specially trained units for peacekeeping service." He has requested that a registry of national forces be established including military and police personnel and equipment that governments would be prepared to make available at short notice. Through this approach, national commitments would serve as building blocks to be used to "construct peacekeeping operations in varying sizes and configurations."

Since the tendering of the Agenda report, the UN has suffered the twin sticker shocks of rising costs to maintain 70,000 peacekeepers in far flung field operations and disturbing casualty figures (one peacekeeper killed, on average, every two days in 1994). The organization remains unable to deploy units to meet crises in a timely fashion. And, contingents frequently encompass forces with vastly differing competencies, training, and equipment. The painful debacle of Rwanda in mid-1994 exposed these infirmities and has intensified the search by the UN leadership and key member states for alternative approaches. In the interim, the UN headquarters military staff has been substantially

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augmented, a manned operations center has been established and arrangements have been made for improved information flows.

The United Nations has a standby force agreement with almost 50 member states, including the United States, each having pledged to make military forces or equipment available for future peace operations. Most potential contributors, however, reserve the right to reject such calls by the Security Council and almost all did so during the Rwanda crisis. One diplomat has characterized the standby force approach as comparable to "a traveller's check with only one signature." Nevertheless, the secretary-general, in a report to the General Assembly and Security Council (January 3, 1995), urged consideration be given to a "strategic reserve" of battalion-sized forces national units to be placed at the disposal of the Council for future peace operations.

In addition to the unwillingness of the major powers to offer a blank check on the availability of their standby reserve forces, a number of other obstacles exist. Not the least of these is the absence of agreed military doctrine and political guidelines in operations-less-than-war (i.e., activities falling between traditional nonviolent peacekeeping and coercive enforcement measures). In addition, establishment of effective command and control within a diverse multinational force represents a major challenge. Short of a Desert Storm operation, effective unity of command is difficult to achieve even unity of purpose is not always obtainable. Finally, the secretary-general, in his 1995 report, acknowledges that, even with the availability of standby forces, common training standards and equipment interoperability in the field are difficulties yet to be overcome.

A Permanent Rapid Reaction Force?

Faced with obstacles confronting a reserve force, and fearful that recent UN failures will transform the organization into another League of Nations, several alternatives are being studied. The most ambitious has been to develop a standing rapid reaction force, under the auspices and direction of the Security Council and the UN Secretariat.

Sir Brian Urquhart, former UN Under Secretary and a key proponent of the idea, argues: "The United Nations will have to get a capacity of its own.... There is too much of a gap between Security Council decisions and action on the ground." The proposal is favored by a number of UN officials and private organizations in the United States as well as by some leading print media in this country and abroad.

The Netherlands is favorably disposed and its UN Representative, Nicholas Biegan, is conducting a feasibility study. Other delegations, notably the Australians and the Scandinavians, are also studying the issue. All are expected to present their recommendations in September 1995 before the General Assembly. While their efforts have not yet reached concrete form, the contemplated rapid reaction force would be of brigade size (3,000-6,000 men), with dedicated airlift, communications, and logistics support capabilities.

Canada is also developing a proposal and is using the Lester Pearson International Peacekeeping Training Center to work with an international group in preparing a plan. Its initial idea is for a 10,000-man combined force, half military and half civilian (humanitarian, police and justice, etc.).

Some nations, including the United States, have withheld support, preferring to work through enabling Security Council resolutions which are often implemented through regional organizations. The latter, however, raises the specter of cementing spheres of influence e.g., Russia in the "Near Abroad", France in Francophone Africa, and the United States in the Caribbean. (See Strategic Forum # 25, "Peace

Operations: Involving Regional Organizations".)

Permanent Force Factors to be Weighed

Territorial disputes, armed ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and the total collapse of governmental authority in some states are among the principal threats to international peace and stability. Hence, the notion of a permanent rapid reaction force or "fire brigade" at the service of the Security Council is attractive on initial examination.

However, a number of difficulties must be overcome before implementation. The proposal itself is not new. It is imbedded in Articles 43 through 46 of the Charter, and was intended originally to provide a pillar for "collective security" under UN auspices. At the core of "collective security" were to be the five permanent members of the Council each of which was expected to make forces, airfields and port facilities available "for the purpose of maintaining peace and security." It was understood that each could veto resolutions mandating their use. The Cold War laid to rest these plans and a Military Staff Committee of the "Permanent Five," intended to advise and assist the Council on military matters, fell into disuse.

The veto can still be used, the existence of a standing force notwithstanding, to frustrate Council resolutions or their effective implementation. Russia has recently adopted positions at odds with other members of the permanent five witness their veto of the resolution in December to cut off fuel supplies to the Bosnian Serbs. On the other hand, this also provides the United States with an essential assurance that the UN force could not be used without its approval. Without such a provision, Congress would certainly oppose it and would not allocate funds for such a force.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is potential assignment of rapid reaction forces to traditional peacekeeping missions and roles. Such activity, however, does not require heavily armed forces prepared to undertake "forcible entry" into unstable areas. Traditional peacekeeping, rather, entails the introduction of lightly armed observers or interposition forces, dispatched after a cease-fire has been effected and upon formal invitation of the parties to a dispute. Historically, such operations have evolved out of inter-state conflict. In recent years, however, conflicts have much more frequently reflected intra-state conflicts and the collapse of governing institutions, situations that fall outside the traditional peacekeeping frame of reference. This is apt to continue, an unfortunate reality of the post-Cold War world.

A rapid reaction force would also be available for humanitarian intervention in Rwanda-like crisis situations. The collapse of government authority, genocide and large refugee outpourings that threaten stability in neighboring areas would provide ample justification for UN involvement. However, the organization's traditional rules of engagement might need to be altered to permit robust military responses in threatening situations. In short, the UN, if engaged in nation building, might have to be prepared to expose its military to conflict, shredding any pretense at neutrality, and accepting the likelihood of extended involvement and uncertain casualties. In addition, such intervention would carry with it acceptance of a heavy obligation nation building that has frustrated the organization in the past.

Rejection of nation building responsibility would confine the force mandate to humanitarian assistance. The organization would not be in a position to enforce peace; nor could its units fully protect themselves or designated safehaven areas. At best, it could only help feed displaced populations and appeal for temporary cease-fires.

A further consideration concerning humanitarian intervention is the need to ensure that sufficient military backup is available should the force require reinforcement or replacement after extended field service. In Korea in 1950 and the Gulf in 1990-1991, the UN avoided this problem by authorizing formation of ad hoc coalitions under American auspices.

Rapid Reaction Force Configurations

Various force configurations are under discussion ranging from light, easily transported mobile forces to heavily armored units capable of local peace enforcement. Most discussions are in terms of a brigade-sized force, although the Australian government has suggested a much more substantial force reaching to division size (12,000- 14,000 men) with integral medical and other support elements. Cost estimates range from \$300 million to \$1 billion annually. The actual cost will be influenced by several factors:

- Force Composition Volunteers (e.g., the French Foreign Legion), integrated national units, or some combination thereof;
- Training and Language Requirements To assure effective integration, common language and combat standards would have to met;
- Command and Control Involving joint task force development, integrated communications systems, etc. An overriding consideration would be sources of funding to stand up the force, train and equip it, and sustain it for field operations.

Critics believe that creation of the force would also mean creation of a costly bureaucracy with limited assurance of enhanced operational efficiency.

Not to be ignored as well is the question of force basing. Extensive training and field exercises require basing at a single location, one in which effective communications and command and control systems could be implanted. Finally, geographic location in relation to likely crisis areas, in addition to ready access to logistic support facilities, would pose vexing difficulties as would transport needed for troop supply and rotation purposes.

The Follow-on Problem

Central to thinking in interested member states is the requirement for standby national units to relieve the deployed rapid reaction force to permit it to meet other field assignments. Here, too, several problems require addressal. Most regional groupings, such as the OAS and the OAU, have minimal military experience and capabilities in peace operations, as the Rwanda debacle clearly demonstrated. NATO, for its part, has not fared well under existing UN rules of engagement. Thus, basic premises of planning for follow-on requirements deserve close scrutiny. Member state and regional organization willingness to assume follow-on responsibilities are problematic at best when cost and casualty factors are considered.

The reluctance of member states to assume follow-on responsibilities would pose fresh challenges for the secretary-general and the Security Council.

For example:

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- Clear delineation of the "fire brigade's" mandate, period of insertion, and exit strategy would be required;
- Concomitantly, conditions to be met on the ground prior to insertion of follow-on forces would be subject to extensive negotiation;
- Timing of force insertion could be affected by such local conditions as sudden threats to "fire brigade" security or integrity of its operations (as occurred in Somalia).

In a serious threat environment, extraction of the UN "fire brigade" could prove daunting. The size of the force to be extracted, its geographic location, and the possibility of a negotiated cease-fire would have to be weighed. Perhaps, most critical, an extraction operation on a large scale would undermine confidence in the "fire brigade" and diminish its credibility as an effective deterrent force.

Recommendations

Proposals to organize a permanent peace operations force are likely to be debated later this year in the Security Council and the General Assembly. Obstacles to rapid approval will prove formidable. A more promising path to pursue by the U.S. would entail several steps to enhance the secretary-general's proposals for an effective standby force, including:

- (1) transfers of excess U.S. military equipment to UN stockpile centers located in several crisis regions;
- (2) enlargement of existing command and control training exercises including a greater number of representatives (civilian and military) from regional organizations;
- (3) initiation of discussions within the UN Secretariat on paths to be pursued in developing agreed doctrine on operations less than war; and
- (4) possible adoption by Third World regional organizations of combined joint task force concepts gleaned from NATO experience.

These initiatives could help to reassure UN officials and others that the United States intends to offer concrete support for the standby reserve forces strategy that has the endorsement of almost 50 other member states concerned with the need to enhance UN operations.

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