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Peace Enforcement: A War By Any Other Name . . .

Core Course 2 Essay

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# Report Documentation Page

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Carl von Clausewitz in his classic work, On War, made the important point that ". . . every age had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions." (593) A distinctively different type of conflict looms as "our kind of war" in the post cold war era. This new kind of war would involve the introduction of United Nation's (UN) or international coalition military units to "force" belligerents to end an unresolved conflict. The term "peace enforcement" will be used herein as the name for conflict of this type. This essay will use portions of Clausewitz's classical theory of war to characterize this new kind of conflict. Specifically, his thoughts on political objectives, military aims, and strategy will be used to help define this new style of war.

To some, the use of military force to enforce peace may be unfamiliar, and others may not willingly characterize it as a form of war. Therefore, before moving directly to the theoretical, we will define peace enforcement and support the assertion that it can be considered a form of war in Clausewitzian theory.

**Peace Enforcement Defined.** Most people are familiar with United Nation's peacekeeping operations. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali in his report, "An Agenda for Peace," defines peacekeeping as, "the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well." (Parsons, 204) Yet even in this definition, the word "hitherto" hints of the possibility that UN forces could be used against the will of the involved parties. This possibility is embodied in the term--peace enforcement--which, for this essay, will be defined as the use of

international military forces to conclude ongoing regional hostilities without the consent of all belligerents.

**Is Peace Enforcement a Form of Warfare?** Clausewitz defines war as ". . . an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will." (69) If one substitutes belligerents for the term "our enemy" and the international community's for "our" in this quotation, it seems logical to presume that Clausewitz would consider peace enforcement a form of war within his own definition. The key point is that a political entity is willing to use military force to compel another entity to do something it does not wish to do.

Peace enforcement is not the first tier of efforts to bring an end to the tragic conflicts seen as part of the post cold war order. When diplomacy and economic methods have been unsuccessful, it appears that the final choice is between doing nothing and using military force to stop seemingly senseless human suffering. However, when military forces are deployed without the permission of all participants, violent conflict must be accepted as a possible outcome. Therefore, peace enforcement ultimately relies on violence to achieve its altruistic purpose.

#### **Clausewitzian Theory and the Undertaking of Peace Enforcement Operations.**

Some may find it surprising that Clausewitz's theory could be related to anything short of total war, and peace enforcement is anything but total war, at least for the international forces. However, despite misconceptions to the contrary, Clausewitz was really the first person to consider the primacy of political objectives in war. Further, he expressively discusses the fact that limited objectives must logically lead to limited war. (80-81) His thoughts on political objectives, military aims, and strategy have direct applicability to international leaders trying to decide if peace enforcement is the right tool

for any particular problem area. Clausewitz sums this idea up eloquently in the following quote, "No one starts a war--or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so--without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter its operational objective." (579)

**The Political Objective.** The political objectives for peace enforcement operations seem to encompass one or more of the following basic desires: first, to provide humanitarian assistance to lessen human suffering; second, to provide the opportunity for diplomatic and political resolution of disagreements; and third, to contain hostilities in a specified area.

Current UN activities show these political objectives at work. Somalia is an excellent example of the humanitarian assistance objective. In the UN mission mandate, ". . . the Council requested the Secretary-General to 'provide humanitarian and other assistance to the people of Somalia in rehabilitating their political institutions and economy and promoting political settlement and national reconciliation.'" ("30,000-strong" 14) Bosnia-Herzegovina is an example of an area where the UN is trying to devise a way to separate the different factions to provide opportunities for negotiation while, at the same time, providing humanitarian assistance to reduce suffering. Finally, UN deployments to Macedonia and coalition forces remaining around Iraq are examples of forces deployed to contain conflict in a specified area.

The political objectives of peace enforcement certainly make it different from war as it has been known in the past. The international force does not seek territorial acquisition, economic gain, or destruction of the enemy. This difference has significant implications. For as Clausewitz says, "The political object--the original motive for the war--will thus determine both

the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires." (81)

**The Military Aim.** While the development of peace enforcement political objectives are fairly straightforward, identification of a military aim that directly supports those objectives is problematic. In fact, it would seem this is a major difficulty for future peace enforcement operations. For example, one of the military aims selected to further the stated political objective in Somalia was to capture General Aidid. As planned, this action was to deter future attacks on UN forces and diminish clan-chief influence during the establishment of new political institutions. Was this a valid military objective?

Clausewitz cites three general aims for military forces: wear down the enemy to remove the means to carry on the struggle; make it appear that no matter what the enemy does there is little likelihood of victory; or make the enemy realize that while victory is possible, the effort will be so costly that it is no longer prudent to seek the same goal. (91) It is difficult to see how the hunt for Gen Aidid fits any of these three aims. In fact, the latest US moves of artificially setting a withdrawal date and ceasing all serious military operations seems to be contrary to Clausewitz's second and third aims.

It may not always be possible to find an achievable military aim that supports the political objective. Somalia seems to be a prime example of this situation. When the political objective was to provide humanitarian assistance, the military aim was obvious. It was a simple matter of controlling lines of communication and protecting assets which are traditional military functions. When the political objective changed to nation building, the military aim became much more difficult to identify. The UN has not met the

challenge of defining a military aim for the new political objective. Even with a valid military aim, policy makers must still pay attention to Clausewitz's level of effort guidance.

**Limits on Operations.** As we saw in an earlier quote, Clausewitz stated that the political objective determines the level of effort as well as the military aim. The military aim may be valid, but it may require more effort than is available given the motives behind the political objective. According to Clausewitz, the less intense the motives, the less appropriate resort to violence will seem. (92) This constraint can affect peace enforcement in two ways. On the ethical side, if the political object is to decrease suffering by concluding hostilities, the military aim cannot cause greater suffering than would have occurred without intervention. The cure cannot be worse than the disease. For example, one way to solve the problem in Somalia, might be to destroy Mogadishu, but this would not support the political objective.

The other affect can also be seen in Somalia. The American public was ready to support food relief efforts, but they are not willing to sacrifice American troops to accomplish nation building. If the public strongly supports the political object, more effort can reasonably be expended to achieve the military aim. Thus, level of effort considerations may alter or perhaps eliminate certain military aims.

Given the political objective, the military aim, and the level of effort desired; military planners can then develop an effective military strategy for use within an overall peace enforcement strategy.

**Military Strategy.** Clausewitz gives very clear guidance on the strategic implications of limited war. "Our discussion of the limited aim suggests that two kinds of limited war are possible: offensive war with a limited aim, and defensive war." (602) In Clausewitz's view, defensive warfare is the stronger

form of war, but it has a negative objective. This objective is to deny a goal that the other side seeks to attain. Offensive warfare has a positive objective, but it can only be attempted by the stronger side. (357-359) The adopted strategy must flow from the political objective, the military aim and the desired level of effort.

Defensive strategy seems to offer many advantages to those considering peace enforcement. First, the predominant political objectives tend to be negative in the sense that they do not envisage decisive victory or territorial gain as a desired outcome. Normally, the international community would be quite happy if the military situation was just stabilized. Further, a defensive strategy seems to require less force because it is the stronger form of war. The idea of creating safe areas for Bosnian Muslims is an example of this type of thinking.

However, a defensive strategy does have some serious disadvantages. By definition, it denies the initiative to peace enforcement troops. They must await the attack which exposes them to danger as seen in Somalia. Incidents such as the attacks on Pakistani and American patrols can be very damaging to international public opinion. As a result, very large and powerful patrols may be needed to deter attack.

A defensive strategy also implies that the international community is committed to a long term effort. Suppose the Bosnian safe areas mentioned earlier are successful in that they stop fighting and relieve suffering. Peace enforcement troops will have taken on the task previously fulfilled by the Yugoslavian government for 70 years. (Lawday 34) The fighting would be stopped, but the underlying cause has not been solved. Of course, one can hope that the UN can use other tools to solve this problem in the long term.



There are three main problems with adopting an offensive strategy for peace enforcement operations. First, there is the inherent difficulty of keeping the strategy subservient to the political objective. Returning to Bosnia for an example, international leaders might decide to adopt an offensive strategy to defeat decisively Serbian forces around Sarajevo as an alternative to the creation of safe areas. If the objective is a negotiated settlement among the three participants, a decisive defeat of the Serbs might make the now relatively stronger Croats and Bosnian Muslims less likely to compromise.

The second problem with the offensive is that enforcement troops become active participants in the existing struggle. When following a defensive strategy, the objective is to freeze the situation so the international community does not seem to be taking sides. Once offensive action is taken, the peace enforcement forces are no longer seen as being neutral. When it comes time to negotiate, who will be able to play the role of mediator? "The peacekeepers in Somalia faced a classic dilemma: Failing to retaliate for the ambush of the Pakistanis could have invited further attacks, but last week's strike threatens to draw the peacekeepers deeper into Somalia's clan warfare, . . ." (Trimble 46)

The third and final problem with an offensive strategy is the level of effort required to ensure its successful execution. Clausewitz correctly pointed out that this strategy could only be pursued by the strong. (358) Therefore, this option will require a larger, better equipped force. Also, international forces can expect more casualties which could have strong political repercussions. Offensive action will also require significantly increased logistical support, better coordination between multinational forces and robust command and control. The United Nations does not possess large

standing forces, inherent logistical capability, or well developed command and control resources. What is more, individual nations do not seem enthusiastic about paying for the UN to acquire them. Therefore, offensive peace enforcement operations will likely fall to regional or coalition alliances as seen in Desert Storm.

Whether the offense or defense is chosen, one observation can be made. Clausewitz said, "the best strategy is always to be very strong; first in general, and then at the decisive point." (204) The international community must make sure that forces are committed in such number and capability that the outcome of any operation is never in question. Any setback will have extremely serious consequences for the peace enforcement effort. Quoting Clausewitz again, "One country may support another's cause, but will never take it so seriously as it takes its own." (603) Thus, national support for international efforts will be extremely fickle unless a vital national interest is at stake. US public reaction to the recent loss in Somalia is a good example of this phenomenon.

**Conclusions.** Peace enforcement is significantly different than peacekeeping for two very important reasons. In peacekeeping, the belligerents have tentatively agreed to stop fighting, and what is more important, they have agreed to let international forces help maintain some kind of cease fire. Peace enforcement operations are, by definition, to be undertaken to stop fighting between people that do not see the need for peace. While peacekeeping forces may be faced with violence, peace enforcement relies on violence.

The fact that peace enforcement relies on violence means that a decision to place forces in these kinds of situations should be considered with the same gravity as a decision to go to war. Clausewitz's theory of war can help

with the decision, and just as importantly, help with the strategic planning once the decision is made.

The political objective must always be the focus. Is there a national interest, and how strong is that interest? Even with a valid political objective, the crucial problem is the identification of a military aim that really contributes toward that objective. Not only must a military aim exist, it must be achievable at a level of effort that matches the defining national interest. Leaders must resist the urge to deploy military forces into a peace enforcement environment just because nothing else seems possible and something has to be done.

Not only must there be an achievable, meaningful military aim, but an overall strategy needs to be developed. Normally, the military will be used to provide an opportunity to use other tools to fix the real problem. Military strategy is important, but it will not be sufficient alone.

In general, a defensive strategy has the most advantages for supporting normal peace enforcement political objectives. However, offensive strategies may be appropriate in some situations. In either case, international forces should be robust, and they will likely be committed for a long term effort. This means that peace enforcement operations will be significantly more expensive than peacekeeping.

Since peace enforcement operations are a form of warfare, it would seem that they might best be accomplished by regional organizations or ad hoc coalitions. There are two reasons for this. First, the UN does not have an appropriate standing force, the logistics, or the command and control to direct operations of this type. Second, it will be very difficult to maintain a sense of neutrality for peace enforcement operations. By all accounts, neutrality is very important to peacekeeping activities.

The concept of letting regional/ad hoc coalitions do peace enforcement and letting the UN concentrate on peacekeeping creates an interesting paradigm for looking at these situations. Assuming a coalition can work through the process of defining a political objective, military aim, and strategy for a particular problem area. The coalition could then undertake a peace enforcement operation to achieve an identifiable military objective. Successful completion of the specific military objective provides the coalition with a built-in exit strategy. Upon successful completion, the peace enforcement troops could be replaced by a UN peacekeeping force if the situation appears to be stabilized. Using this paradigm, the UN could emphasize peacekeeping efforts where it has had some success. Regional organizations would develop and fight the combat forces necessary for peace enforcement operations.

It is very tempting to get involved in peace enforcement situations because the conditions are so appalling. However, it will be very difficult to find an affordable, achievable military aim that will resolve the problem's root cause. If a valid aim can be identified, a decision to become involved in peace enforcement operations should be considered with the same gravity as a declaration of war.

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